

Oxford  
History of  
**Art**

# The Art of Art History



Donald Preziosi

NEW EDITION

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# The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology

NEW EDITION

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## Oxford History of Art

Donald Preziosi is Emeritus Professor of Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles, and former Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. He was educated in art history, classics, and linguistics at Harvard, and has taught at Yale, SUNY, MIT, UCLA, and Oxford. He has lectured and conducted seminars on the history of art history and museology in the North America, Europe, and

Australia. Among his books are *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*; and *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (the 2001 Oxford Slade Lectures). He is co-author with Louise Hitchcock of the Oxford University Press volume *Aegean Art and Architecture*, and co-author and co-editor with Claire Farago of *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*.

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#### **The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology**

Donald Preziosi (ed.)

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Oxford History of Art

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The Art of Art  
History: A Critical  
Anthology

NEW EDITION

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Edited by Donald Preziosi

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# Introduction

*The Art of Art History* is a collection of resources for constructing a critical history of art history. It is not organized as a conventional 'history of art history' in its own right, nor is it a historical novel with a beginning, middle, and end. It is rather more of an assemblage, or a cabinet of provocative things to think with, each of which has multiple connections to others, both within this anthology and elsewhere. It is also an 'anthology' in the older sense of the word—an accounting of things which in their variety and allure might resemble a garden of flowers; a collection of texts that, in some cases, have been appreciated as fine works of art in their own right.

The volume is made up of essays and excerpts from books written on a number of interrelated themes over the past four centuries. Each of these in its own time (and differently at other times) has either sparked, engaged with, or been used by other writers for their own engagements with a wide variety of intensive and in many cases ongoing debates. The arguments of some directly address those of essays juxtaposed with them. There are several alternate perspectives on the same issue or artwork. All of them deal with the nature and fate of the phenomenon of 'art' in modern times, with differing articulations of artistic 'histories', with different visions on the social roles of art history and criticism, and with the enterprises of modernity more broadly.

The collected texts are treated not as isolated monuments, however persistently influential some of them have been—in some cases seeming to have lives of their own. Nor are they arranged to simulate a single mainstream evolutionary path. They are not assembled here disingenuously to 'speak for themselves', as if they were paintings hung on the bare walls of a modernist art gallery. There are few blank walls in *The Art of Art History*. Its walls are covered with writing, signposts, an occasional bit of graffiti, and punctuated by openings onto other spaces, with invitations and provocations guiding the visitor towards more specimens, different resources, and other possible worlds.

All of the texts in this collection were originally produced within often highly charged environments of controversy and debate in various places around the world over the past two hundred years, having themselves often sparked such controversies. They are deployed here within a series of discussions, commentaries, and critiques whose aim is to foster an understanding of important aspects of their critical and historical situations, and to allow the reader to engage with them in a dialogic and interrogative manner. The texts, in short, are embedded in a dense series of overwritings or palimpsests. The

collection may thus be walked through from a variety of directions, and along several intersecting paths, and issues or themes elicited through and around one text will often re-emerge elsewhere in a similar or transformed manner. The accompanying commentaries both link and mark differences between texts, and serve as catalysts and workpoints for discussion. They also indicate alternative paths through this thicket of texts and overwritings.

## Organization

In format, *The Art of Art History* is organized around groups of major debates and themes that have characterized the literature of the discipline since the eighteenth century's articulation of the 'aesthetic' as a distinct object of study connected with the production of knowledge about human nature and cognition. The volume attends to the diverse ways in which art history may be seen as constituting a *social and epistemological technology* which has been essential to the conception, fabrication, and maintenance of (originally European, subsequently all) modern nation-states, and of the individual and collective identities that are staged as the supports and justifications for these political entities.

The readings deal with many familiar subjects of art, aesthetics, history, style, meaning, protocols of explanation, perception, identity, gender, and ethnicity. The selections are organized according to these themes, and the texts included follow a roughly chronological order from the late eighteenth to late twentieth centuries. Included in each chapter is a bibliography of related readings recommended for further study. In each section, the texts presented as well as those recommended are pertinent to an understanding of the history of art history *and* to the complementary development of museums and museological practice. Their aim is to foreground some of the fundamental issues that lie deeper than recent academic debates over competing theories and methodologies.

As already noted, the selections and the trajectory of readings are not meant to chart an imaginary singular narrative history of art history. It will become clear that any such narrative is not a little problematical given the diversity of the field, its disparate missions and motivations, as well as the often contrary social, political, or ideological uses to which such singular genealogies and narrative stories have been put in the past and at present. *The Art of Art History* has an explicitly different aim: to provide the reader with what in the writer's experience have proven to be productive and useful resources and points of departure in the continuing debates about the state—and possible fate—of the art of art history, in both senses of the phrase.

Two framing essays by the editor are included. The first, 'Art History: Making the Visible Legible', is intended as a general overview of the subject—and the objectives—of art history, and may be imagined as a belvedere, providing an overview or synopsis of the issues taken up in the collection. A second, the Epilogue 'The Art of Art History', is a hindsight meditation on the preceding texts and discussions, including the first essay itself: a palimpsest on the whole, and a crossroads leading to other journeys and other worlds.

Both essays might function as *anamorphic* patches in the overall collection, like the odd shape in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), the slantwise focus upon which reveals otherwise hidden perspectives on, and different readings of, a larger assemblage [1]. In this case, the two texts 'read' the overall



**1 Hans Holbein the Younger**  
The Ambassadors, 1533.

collection *otherwise*. Relative to each other, and seen in the same frame, the first and last essays comprise the alternating co-present faces or fronts of an ‘optical illusion’; an oscillating and enigmatic double image—a simulation (as it may become clear) of the *artifice* that historically set art history in play, and of the tensions that have kept it in motion.

### The new edition

Since its first appearance in 1998, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* has remained one of the most widely used English-language introductions to the historiography of the academic discipline of art history. Its extensive international distribution and use was a catalyst for what has since become a veritable industry of art historical and visual studies readers, anthologies, and guides published and widely marketed in many countries, many aimed at specialized readerships. This second edition introduces some strategic changes both to the original collection of texts as well as to the editor-



ial introductions and critical commentaries. It consequently rethinks the methods and goals of the entire project, engaging with ongoing disciplinary and extra-disciplinary changes and turns our attention to issues and problems both new and newly rethought. It continues the book's original concern with promoting active engagement with understanding the artifice, political and social mediatedness, and the historical and regional specificities of the institutions and professions of art history and visual culture studies.

As with the first edition, this is not a 'history of art history' nor a historiography of 'visual culture studies'; rather, it is a critical interrogation of the artifice itself of those histories. It maintains its original pragmatic commitment to affording and encouraging critique rather than promoting hagiography or celebrating one or another sectarian academic consensus, thereby necessarily working against the grain of disciplinary commodification. Rather than articulating a singular historiography, *The Art of Art History* continues to afford multiple opportunities for understanding what has made disciplinary beliefs about the humanly made and appropriated visual environment and its modes of analysis possible or persuasive. Its basic aim is to foster the critical study of the production of art historical knowledge from different and not necessarily compatible perspectives.

As with the first edition, the book juxtaposes diverse and divergent perspectives on similar and common critical issues, foregrounding the fabricat- edness of what the academic discipline has both naturalized and marginalized in the course of its historical evolution. It continues to be concerned with the exposure from within of what is frequently concealed in institutional and professional practice: an ambivalence and amnesia about what has produced and maintained institutional beliefs about art and artistry in the first place. It offers some of the means to give body to the ghosts in the machinery of disciplinary theories, methods, dogmas, and doctrines.

Working as a historian, critic, or museologist of artistry in the contemporary world demands increasingly explicit attention to the ethical dimension of one's practice and its inescapable political and economic resonances, along with an acknowledgement that one's intellectual and professional labour implicates and fosters enterprises devoted to the fabrication, maintenance, and political transformation of social life. The close but often easily masked connection between ethics and aesthetics in disciplinary education, both within and outside the professional boundaries of art history, art criticism, art practice, and museology, has itself come under increasing scrutiny, as some of the texts in this second edition attest.

All of the aforementioned marks a situation rather different from the period of 'disciplinary crisis' of a generation ago, the latter characterized by premature and perfunctory announcements of an 'end' of art history and by coincident attempts to assimilate art history into warmed-over versions of post-war visual anthropology or formalist semiology. There is today a newly re-emergent acknowledgement of art history's debt to earlier discursive practices which the nineteenth century institutionalization of art history suppressed or rendered illegible—namely, the fundamentally *religious* nature of European (and many other) artistic practices, and the markedly different pre-modern and early modern distinctions amongst what came to be professionally compartmentalized in Europe in the post-Enlightenment era as



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Yoshio Taniguchi: Museum of Modern Art, New York: Rockefeller Annex.

art, religion, science, and philosophy. There is a growing awareness reflected in the readings below of what art history as a ‘coy science’ had repressed or rendered invisible. In the first edition of *The Art of Art History* and elsewhere, I discussed the discipline’s uneasy and ambivalent relation to religion as art history’s largely covert ‘secular theologism’, arguing that the discipline as such is defined precisely *as* this ambivalence in its epistemological investments. The field’s coy scientism has long been coeval with its coy spiritualism, a point explicitly addressed in the new Coda to this volume.

This second edition furthers the critical explication of that ambivalence, emblemized in the earlier edition by attention to the anamorphism of Holbein’s *Ambassadors*. As that cover image [1] was an emblem of the first edition’s attentiveness to the manufacture of disciplinary artifice, the image here [2] is a hauntingly poignant reminder—continuing the first edition’s attentiveness to artifice—of the sacral centrality of art in the contemporary world. The secular theologism of the discipline of art history is rarely so powerfully epitomized as it is here, in the cut-away façade of Yoshio Taniguchi’s Rockefeller annex to New York’s Museum of Modern Art, seen from the late modernist sculpture garden behind the museum’s original building. Virtually a re-enactment of the European medieval cathedral’s stained glass window, with resonances of high-end multistorey shop windows, Taniguchi’s MOMA façade offers a tableau illuminating the sacred hierarchies of modern aesthetic

fetishism, idolatry, and hagiography. Seen here in its actual urban context, the building stages a dialogic interaction with all that is hidden and presumed to reside in all the buildings around it. And all that is obscured in that wider view—the street-level world of commerce and commodification, hidden by the museum's own walls—is here hidden in full view in the museum itself. The fundamental entailment of what are distinguished in modernity as art and religion is discussed in some detail in the framing commentaries of this new edition of *The Art of Art History*.

The very *fact* of art (however defined) has long been seen as a fundamental challenge to our most cherished beliefs about the nature of reality; indeed to our very *being* as human. Despite the largely modernity-specific reification and fetishization of fine art, the world created by artistry is not some marginal 'second (aesthetic) world' alongside the everyday world in which we live; the world of art or artifice *is* that very world. If what we may still wish to term 'art history' is to have not only academic but broader critical relevance and social force at the present time, it will be in its capacity to reckon with the challenge and promise of art in all that it does, in all the ways it does so in human societies around the world now and the past. To do anything less today would be to ignore the brilliantly rich diversity of art's histories, the poignancy of art's ironies and paradoxes, and the inherent strength of art's *promise* to being: a promise that exists and changes in our dialogic interactions and recreations of the world we weave around ourselves, with art.

Oxford, 2008

# Art History: Making the Visible Legible

Art history is one of a network of interrelated institutions and professions whose overall function has been to fabricate a historical past that could be placed under systematic observation for use in the present. As with its allied fields—art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, art practice, connoisseurship, the art market, museology, tourism, commodity fashion systems, and the heritage industry—the art historical discipline incorporated an amalgam of analytic methods, theoretical perspectives, rhetorical or discursive protocols, and epistemological technologies, of diverse ages and origins.

Although the formal incorporation of art history into university curricula began in Germany in the 1840s,<sup>1</sup> by the end of the nineteenth century the greatest number of academic programmes, professorships, students, and advanced degrees conferred were in the United States rather than in Europe, a situation even more marked a century later. There were differing circumstances and justifications for its academic institutionalization in Europe and its former colonies, and the early profession was variously allied with or patterned after the methods of philosophy, philology, literature, archaeology, various physical sciences, connoisseurship, or art criticism.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, wherever art history was professionalized, it took the problem of *causality* as its general area of concern, construing its objects of study—individual works of art, however defined—as *evidential* in nature. It was routinely guided by the hypothesis that an artwork is reflective, emblematic, or generally *representative* of its original time, place, and circumstances of production. Art objects of all kinds came to have the status of historical documents in the dual sense that (1) each was presumed to provide significant, often unique and, on occasion, profoundly revealing evidence for the character of an age, nation, person, or people; and that (2) their appearance was the resultant *product* of a historical milieu, however narrowly or broadly framed.

The latter sense has regularly included the various social, cultural, political, economic, philosophical, or religious forces arguably in play at a particular time and place. Characteristically, disciplinary practice was devoted to reconstructing the elusive ‘realities’ of such ambient forces—from the intentions that might be ascribed to an individual maker, to more general historical forces or circumstances. In short, the principal aim of all art historical study has been to make artworks more fully *legible* in and to the present.

Since the institutional beginnings of art history there has been only loose and transitory consensus about the efficacy of various paradigms or analytic

methods for rendering artworks adequately legible, the key issue being the quantity and quality of historical or background information sufficient to a convincing interpretation of a given object. As criteria of explanatory adequacy have changed over time, and the purposes to which any such understandings might be put in the present have varied widely over the past two centuries, there has been considerable disagreement regarding the extent to which an art object can be taken, legitimately, as indicative or symptomatic of its historical milieu.

For some, art historical interpretation was complete and sufficient with the explication of a work's relationship to an evolving stylistic system manifested either by an individual artist (a particular corpus of work or *œuvre*) or by a broader aesthetic school or movement. For others, interpretation involved the articulation of interrelationships between stylistic development and the unfolding of an artist's biography, or (as in the case of the sixteenth-century artist and historian Giorgio Vasari) a regional and national style culminating in the synthetic work of a great artist (like Michelangelo) in the present.<sup>3</sup> For some, explication approached adequacy only with the articulation of an object's larger historical 'contexts', foregrounding the work's documentary or representational status and its circumstances of production and reception.<sup>4</sup>

There has also been no abiding consensus about the limits or boundaries of art history's object-domain. For some, that domain was properly the corpus of traditional luxury items comprising the 'fine arts' of painting and sculpture, and the architecture of ruling classes or hegemonic institutions. Such a domain of attention was normally justified by reference either to shared criteria of demonstrable skill in execution or to what was documented (or postulated) as self-conscious aesthetic intent. Characteristically, this excluded the greater mass of images, objects, and buildings produced by human societies. For others, the purview of disciplinary attention ideally incorporated the latter, the conventional fine arts occasionally forming a distinguishable subset or idealized *canon* of historical artefacts. The situation is further compounded by the modern museological attention given to virtually any item of material culture, conflating current exhibitionary value (its originality or poignancy within the formal logic of an unfolding system of stylistic or intellectual fashion) with social, cultural, or historical importance.

The fuller network of associated discourses and professions of which art history is an integral and co-constructed facet has only begun to be examined by art historians and others, often under the discursive umbrella of cultural history or visual culture studies. Critical historiographic accounts of the discipline of art history are continually beset by (1) unresolved questions about the field's proper purview or object-domain of study; (2) the fragmentation and dispersion of professional attention to art historical objects across different fields of study with conflicting aims and theoretical assumptions; and (3) markedly different criteria of adequacy in paradigms of explanation and interpretation within each profession or institution.

Existing histories of art history have either been biographical and genealogical accounts of influential professionals, narrative accounts charting the evolution of theories of art (either in a vacuum or as unproblematic reflections of some broader spirit of an age, people, or place), or accounts of the development of various interpretative methodologies. Nevertheless, the fol-



lowing observations may be applicable to a broad spectrum of this network of practices.

In addition to a shared concern with questions of causality and evidence, the most fundamental principle underlying all these interrelated fields has been the assumption that changes in artistic *form* signal changes in individual or collective *mentality* or *intention*. Most commonly, the artefact or object is taken as a specific inflection of some personal or shared perspective on certain ideas, themes, or values—whether the object is construed as reflective or constructive (or both) of such ideas.

A corollary of this set of assumptions is that changes in form (and attitude) are themselves indicative of a *trajectory* of development; an *evolution* or overall direction in mentality which might be materially charted in stylistic changes over time and space. Such a figure (or ‘shape’) in time has often been interpreted as evidence for a shape *of* time itself; a ‘spiritual’ teleology or evolution. For some, artistic phenomena have been construed as providing key documentary evidence for such spiritual or social evolutions.

The most pervasive theory of the art object in art history as well as in conventional aesthetic philosophies was its conception as a *medium* of communication or expression. The object was construed within this communicational or linguistic paradigm as a ‘vehicle’ by means of which the intentions, values, attitudes, ideas, political or other messages, or the emotional state(s) of the maker—or by extension the maker’s social and historical contexts—were conveyed, by design or chance, to targeted (or circumstantial) beholders.

This was linked to the widespread presumption in art history and elsewhere that formal changes exist *in order to* effect changes in an audience’s understanding of what was formerly conveyed before the in(ter)vention of the new object. For some art historians, artworks were seen as catalysts for social and cultural change; for others they were the products of such changes. In either case, the analytical object was commonly sited within a predicative or propositional framework so as to be pertinent to a particular family of questions, the most basic of which was: in what way is this object a representation, expression, reflection, or embodiment of its particular time and place—that is, a trace or effect of the peculiar mentality of the person, people, or society that produced it?

In the history of art history, there were elaborated a variety of criteria for classifying objects of study according to their ability to convey such information. For some, the presumptive semantic ‘carrying capacity’ of certain kinds of objects was a function of traditional hierarchical distinctions between ‘fine’ and ‘applied’ arts, although notions regarding the semantic densities of all kinds of objects have varied widely among historians over time.

Common to these hypotheses was a facet of art historical practice shared with its allied discourses and institutions—namely, a fundamental concern with siting its objects of study within a discursive field, rhetorical framework, or analytic stage such that the work’s specifiable relationship to pertinent aspects of its original environment may be construed *causally* in some sense. Art history was closely allied with (indeed has been ancillary to) museology in this fixing-in-place of individual objects within the ideal horizons of a (potentially universal) history of artistic form—with the assignment, in short, of a locus or ‘address’ to the work within a finely calibrated system of chronological or geographic relationships of causality or influence.

From the sequential juxtaposition of objects in museum space to the formatting of photo or slide collections (material or virtual) to the curricular composition of university departments, disciplinary practice has been characteristically motivated by a desire to construe the significance of works as a function of their *relative position* in an unfolding historical or genealogical scheme of development, evolution, progress, or accountable change. Such schemata have framed objects within broad sectors of social and intellectual history, and within the evolving careers of single artists, in essentially similar ways. In this regard, the given object is a marker of difference, in a massive differential and relational system, from other objects—a situation clearly reflected in the very language of description, evaluation, and criticism of art.

Crucial to the articulation of art history as a systematic or even ‘scientific’ historical discipline in the nineteenth century was the construction of a centralized *data mass* to which the work of generations of scholars have contributed. This consisted of a universally extendable archive (potentially coterminous, by the late twentieth century, with the material culture of all human societies) within which every possible object of study might find its unique and proper place relative to all others. Every item might thereby be sited (and cited) as referencing or indexing another or others. A principal motivation for this massive labour over the past two centuries has been the assembly of material evidence for the construction of historical narratives of social, cultural, or cognitive development.

Grounded upon the associations of similarity or contiguity (or metaphor and metonymy) among its incorporated specimens or examples, this disciplinary archive became a critical artefact in its own right; itself a systematic, panoptic *instrument* for the calibrating and accounting for variation in continuity, and for continuity in variation and difference. Such an epistemological technology was clearly central to, and a paradigmatic instance of, the social and political formation of the modern nation-state and its various legitimizing paradigms of ethnic uniqueness and autochthony, or evolutionary progress or decline in ethics, aesthetics, hegemony, or technology.

Art history shared with its allied fields, and especially with museums, the fabrication of elaborate typological orders of ‘specimens’ of artistic activity linked by multiple chains of causality and influence over time and space and across the kaleidoscope of cultures (which could thereby be interlinked in evolutionary and diffusionist ways). This immense labour on the part of generations of historians, critics, and connoisseurs was in the service of assigning to objects a distinct place and moment in the historical ‘evolution’ of what thereby became validated as the pan-human phenomenon of *art* as a natural and legitimate subject in its own right; as cultural matter of deep significance because of what it arguably *revealed* about individuals, nations, or races.

From the beginning, the principal concern of historians and critics of the visual arts was the linkage of objects to patterns of causality assumed to exist between objects and makers, objects and objects, and between all of them and their various contemporary contexts. Underlying this was a family of organic metaphors linked to certain common theories of race in the early modern period: in particular, the presumption of a certain demonstrable kin-

ship, sameness, or homogeneity among objects produced or appearing at a given time and in a particular place. It was claimed that the products of an individual, studio, nation, ethnic group, class, gender, or race could—if read carefully and deeply enough—be shown to share certain common, consistent, and unique properties or principles of formation. Corresponding to this was a temporal notion of the art historical ‘period’ marked by similar homogeneities of style, thematic preoccupation, or technical approach to formal construction or composition.

Art history and museology traditionally fabricated histories of form as surrogates for or parallels to histories of persons or peoples: narrative stagings which served (on the model of forensic laboratory science) to illustrate, demonstrate, and delineate significant aspects of the character, level of civilization, or degree of social or cognitive advancement or decline of an individual or nation. Art objects were of documentary importance in so far as they might have evidential value relative to the past’s causal relations to the present, and thus the relationship of ourselves to others. The academic discourse of art history thereby served as a powerful modern *concordance* for systematically linking together aesthetics, ethics, and social history, providing essential validating instruments for the modern heritage industry and associated modes of the public consumption of objects and images.

From its beginnings, and in concert with its allied professions, art history worked to make the past synoptically visible so that it might function in and upon the present; so that the present might be seen as the demonstrable *product* of a particular past; and so that the past so staged might be framed as an *object of historical desire*: figured as that from which a modern citizen might desire descent.

The broad amalgam of complementary fields in which the modern discipline of art history is positioned never achieved fixed or uniform institutional integration. Nevertheless, in the long run its looseness, and the opportunistic adaptability of its component institutions and professions, proved particularly effective in naturalizing and validating the very *idea* of art as a ‘universal’ human phenomenon. Thus framed as an *object* of study, the art of art history simultaneously became a powerful *instrument* for imagining and scripting the social, cognitive, and ethical histories of all peoples.

As a keystone enterprise in making the visible legible, art history made of its legibilities a uniquely powerful medium for fabricating, sustaining, and transforming the identity and history of individuals and nations.

The principal product of art history has thus been modernity itself.



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# Art as History

## Introduction

Do works of art provide us with knowledge that is significantly different from that offered elsewhere?

The modern discipline of art history is founded upon a series of assumptions regarding the meaning or significance of objects of human manufacture. Of these, two principal hypotheses have informed the field from its beginnings, constituting its conceptual core. The *first* is that not all objects are equal in the amount of information they might reveal about their sources or maker, some conveying more information about their sources than others. The *second* is that all such objects are time-factored: that is, they contain legible marks of the artefact's historical genealogy, either of a formal or thematic nature. A corollary of this is that any such marks exist within the genealogical time-frame of a particular people or culture. The first assumption lies behind varying justifications for delimiting art history's field of enquiry, while the second links that defined subject-domain to particular visions of individual and collective history and development.

The history of art historical practice may be understood as the development of many variations, transformations, and consequences of these fundamental assumptions. Linking all forms of practice over the past several centuries has been a virtually universal agreement that its objects of study—works of 'art'—are uniquely privileged in the degree to which they are able to communicate, symbolize, express, or embody certain deep or fundamental truths about their makers or sources, whether that be a single person or an entire culture or people.

The two individuals whom later art historians commonly regarded as the intellectual founders of the discipline—the Arezzo-born artist-historiographer of Renaissance Florence, Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), and the Prussian antiquarian-aesthete and resident of Rome, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68)—were motivated in their writing by a need to resolve dilemmas which had arisen in their time as a result of following out the consequences of contemporary perspectives on the aforementioned assumptions about works of 'art'. In each case, the problems they addressed were in no small measure the product of their own positions on the nature of historical causality and on what objects of art could actually mean, and how they might signify.

These two extraordinary figures, however, occupied very different positions in relation to their historical contexts. Vasari worked to establish what was to become the dominant art historical and critical tradition in which the

heritage of Florentine art was seen as paradigmatic of a revived antique glory. The progressive evolution of Florentine art was depicted as recapitulating the artistic processes that led to the glories of antique art because, as he saw it, Florentine and ancient artists were grappling with similar *artistic problems* concerning representation and the imitation of nature. The paradigm of artistic progress was articulated through metaphors of biological growth, the art of his time corresponding to a period of full maturity.

Up to the present, I have discoursed upon the origin of sculpture and painting... because I wish to be of service to the artists of our own day, by showing them how a small beginning leads to the highest elevation, and how from so noble a situation it is possible to fall to the utterest ruin, and consequently, how these arts resemble nature as shown in our human bodies; and have their birth, growth, age and death, and I hope by this means they will be enabled more easily to recognise the progress of the renaissance of the arts, and the perfection to which they have attained in our own time.<sup>1</sup>

Winckelmann was working exactly two centuries later, when the history of art that Vasari argued had reached its plateau of perfection in Michelangelo and his generation seemed to some to have been buried beneath two centuries of uncreative imitation and 'baroque' excess. One of Winckelmann's pragmatic motivations for re-establishing the *history* of art on a sound historical footing was the transformation and elevation of contemporary *art*. Rather than imitating the glories of the art of Michelangelo and Raphael, Winckelmann's contemporaries were exhorted to reach back to a 'true antiquity'—that of classical Greece—to thoroughly rebuild and transform the art of modern times; to create a *new* (or Neo-) classicism appropriate to the modern world.

At the same time, Winckelmann was working in reaction to two centuries of post-Vasarian imitators whose writings he characterized (not without some hyperbole) as 'mere narrative[s] of the chronology and alterations of art'; fragmented imitations of Vasarian art history applied to increasingly diverse and alien contexts. He envisioned and attempted to delineate a 'systematic' history of art in his remarkable 1764 book *The History of the Art of Antiquity*.<sup>2</sup> Like Vasari, he was concerned with articulating what he perceived to be the *historicity* of artworks: the idea that an object bore within its very form certain identifiable traces of its temporal position in a unilinear and developmental historical *system* (his word)—a coherent evolutionary sequence of artistic styles modelled (as all histories of art had been for some time) upon an organic metaphor of birth, maturity, and decline. His work was a progenitor of what came to be formalized in mid-nineteenth-century Europe as the academic discipline of art history. It instituted categories and paradigms which today remain deeply embedded in the structural framework and the pragmatic working assumptions of both classical archaeology (which also took Winckelmann as its chief progenitor) and modern art historical practice.

Winckelmann's *History* grappled with two principal problems. First, he aimed to highlight the specific, concrete historical *causes*—the climatic, biological, political, and social conditions—responsible for the appearance and evolution of a given artistic style. Understanding such conditions would be a way of comprehending the nature of style as such. Secondly, his work sought to articulate a viable analytic, explanatory position or role for the historian of art as a viewer of works. He was concerned here with elucidating the relations between the historian as subject and the historian's object of study in such a

way as to be productive of knowledge about the individual object, and about the nature of art itself more universally (art as uniquely revelatory about individuals and peoples). He was equally concerned with understanding what the encounter between subject and object might reveal about the nature of the viewing subject.

In point of fact, Winckelmann invented a new *version* of artistic history that was already present (both in general scope and in some of its particulars) in the work of Vasari two centuries earlier. The importance of Winckelmann's revolutionary contributions to the development of the modern discipline of art history cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the Vasarian tradition within which he was working, and against whose corruptions (as he saw it) he was working. Nevertheless, his writings were at the same time the principal catalyst of what may reasonably be understood as a revolution in art historical thinking which made possible the professional discipline as we know it today.

The differences in Vasari's and Winckelmann's projects and motivations are notable. Vasari's 1550 work (and its much-enlarged 1568 edition) *The Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors from Cimabue to Our Times* was written from the perspective of a practising artist actively engaged in the artistic and political life of his time. He was deeply concerned with understanding the history of art both internally and externally: as an account of the technical progress made by individual artists in successive generations towards an ideal representation of nature, and as documentary evidence of the superiority of Florentine art as itself emblematic of more general contrasts between the Florentine city-state and other cities and peoples. But much of this process was past for Vasari; it was already, in his view, at its apex and fulfilment, as embodied most closely in the work of his own artistic mentor, Michelangelo.

More broadly, his writing constituted a systematic attempt to account for the apparent contradictions in the *relativity* of artistic reputation—the fact that artists could be considered *justly* great at a particular time and place even though their accomplishments might be seen by later generations, and with equal justification, as less great or as artistically incomplete. His solution to the problem of reconciling sharply divergent historical perceptions was to reduce all such differences to episodes of a single, progressive, linear narrative wherein the accomplishments of any artist responded to and built upon what by hindsight could be seen as the foundations laid down by predecessors involved with a similar *mission*—in this case, with the commonly shared problem of representing nature. In Vasari's words:

As the men of the age were not accustomed to see any excellence or greater perfection than the things thus produced, they greatly admired them, and considered them to be the type of perfection, barbarous as they were. Yet some rising spirits, aided by some quality in the air of certain places, so far purged themselves of this crude style that in 1250 Heaven took compassion on the fine minds that the Tuscan soil was producing every day, and directed them to the original forms.<sup>3</sup>

Vasari's history of art, then, was above all a *history of precedents* in the progressive approximation to a norm or ideal manifested in its fulfilment by the work of his own time. That present moment of artistic perfection was articulated as the implicit goal of all previous practice *and* as the norm or standard

with which to assess all such practice. It was framed, very specifically, as the conclusion of an upward movement from the Gothic barbarisms of what subsequently came to be characterized as the 'Middle' Ages and the contemporary reconstitution (or Renaissance) of the artistic ideals of a once-lost Graeco-Roman antiquity being doubly reborn in uncovered Roman ruins and in the (Florentine) art inspired both by those ruins and by contemporary readings of various ancient texts on art by Cicero and Pliny. For Vasari, what had been lost was now regained by artists following the *example* of ancient works' imitation of nature's inner truths.

Winckelmann had generally similar motivations in composing his systematic history of art. The art of ancient Greece (which he and his generation knew only indirectly in what we now know to be mostly later Roman copies) represented for him an ideal perfection of style that in certain respects was lost for ever in its full particularities—that is, in its specific expressions of a(n equally idealized) social, political, and erotic world—but which none the less might find echoes in other times and places. It might even serve as an inspiration for a new classicism to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the past. It is important to note that Vasari's *history of artistic precedent* was grounded in an understanding of a still-living tradition of artistic practice in which he himself was a very active participant; Winckelmann's *history of art* was founded upon the articulation of patterns of growth and change revealed to antiquarian eyes and taste in fragmentary relics and copies of the art of a culture dead for two millennia. Vasari was part of the (Renaissance) tradition he elucidated, while Winckelmann was alienated from his own (Baroque) times.

For both Vasari and Winckelmann, there existed unresolvable tensions and contradictions in their attempts to deal with the relativities of historical thinking as such. For Vasari, this entailed the seemingly simultaneous completeness *and* incompleteness of a given work of art at a particular historical moment. In other words, a work may be incomplete in its approximation to an ideal norm of representation, yet complete or true in terms of its mission within a specific historical milieu. This was in large part an artefact of the vision of history as a linked series of solutions to what was characterized by hindsight as a common problem (in this case the imitation of nature). The difficulty was that the norm or ideal was itself historical and already incorporated into the momentum of history, changing over time and with each redefinition of artistic 'problems' of representation. The norm, in short, was *both* historical *and* outside history; both part of the historical process and its goal or fulfilment.

Vasari's most famous work—his *Lives*—was but an initial synthesis in a broader and ongoing project of monumentalizing and institutionalizing his aesthetic doctrines, and documenting the canonical examples of the rise to full realization of these doctrines. The encyclopaedic nature of his life's work itself became more pronounced with the second, more fully illustrated 1568 edition of the *Lives* (which also included new portrait images of the artists discussed), and with a series of related works such as an album of drawings of the artists studied, his *Libro del disegno*.<sup>4</sup> In 1563, Vasari was instrumental in founding the first artists' Academy in Florence, which, under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, and with Michelangelo as its head, became the paradigm of artistic academies throughout Europe and its colonial extensions for

several centuries. As a virtual temple-museum of Vasari's aesthetic doctrines, the Academy combined the functions of an archive or *libreria* for the study of the designs, models, and plans of the artists of the *Lives* and *Libro*, a hall of exhibition, and a collection of portraits of members and old master artists. The Florentine Academy was the *cumulative* expression of (and monument to) Vasari's own professional engagement with modelling the history of artistic practice in a comprehensive and systematic fashion.

Winckelmann's notion of historical change was also based upon the idea of artistic history as a linked series of solutions to common artistic problems. The scale and ambition of his work, however, was broader than that of Vasari in a number of respects.

For one thing, he attempted to depict an entire national artistic tradition—that of ancient Greece—from its birth through to its historical decline and demise. He sought to fully account historically (as well as formally or technically) for how and why that tradition developed the way it did when and where it did. Winckelmann's interest in the visual arts also extended beyond what was then customary in that he envisioned the history of a people's art as providing a deeper and more lucid understanding of a people and its general historical development than any other history, or any merely political account. Art, in other words, was made to bear the burden of being an emblem of the *totality* of a people's culture: its quintessential expression. To understand a people's art was thus to understand that people in the deepest possible way.

Winckelmann's systematic history also extended and refined the general organic model common to histories of all kinds during his time in that it postulated a sequence of more clearly delineated steps or periods in the development of ancient art. These stages—still today implicitly canonical in most art historical practice—went from an early stylized ('archaic') origin to a phase characterized by an ideal mastery of naturalistic representation (coinciding with the period of Athenian democracy from the early fifth to the late fourth century BC) to a time of long decline, characterized by excessive decoration and the stale imitation of earlier precedents (the 'Hellenistic' period). In this regard, Winckelmann not only transformed the idea of the history of art into a notion that art is the emblem of the spirit of an entire culture, but he also argued that it achieves an ideal moment—what later came to be referred to as 'classical'—in which the *essential* qualities of a people are most fully and truly revealed: in this case, with the nude male *kouros* statue. In his eyes, the history of Greek art not only mirrored the rise, maturity, and decline of the free Greek city-state, but it was also its allegory; its classical moments constituted the epitome of all that culture had striven towards. His historical paradigm also permitted a patent analogy between the time of ancient 'decline'—the 'Hellenistic' period—and the later Baroque period in which he himself lived.

His genealogical system of Greek art was elaborated as an allegory of *all* artistic history at all times: the norm or standard against which the art of any people might be measured. This allowed him to compose the history of antiquity as a grand transcultural narrative with a mainstream and marginal side-tracks. He could thus evaluate Etruscan or Egyptian art as stunted in growth or side-tracked before a full 'classical' maturity could be achieved. It also enabled him *not* to see Roman art at all—except as a late, 'derivative'

phase of the art of Greece. Such views ran contrary to the reigning sentiment of the time, in which the vision of ancient Rome dominated the historical imagination (and whose monumental grandeur, decorum, and *gravitas* were being praised in the engravings of Winckelmann's contemporary, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, as being not at all 'dependent' upon Greek influence). The motivations for Winckelmann's unorthodox preferences remain obscure, although it seems likely that they were tied to contemporary political attitudes in which what was seen as one latter-day manifestation of Roman imperial art and architecture—the Baroque style—was inferentially linked to large and in some cases despotic states and institutions to which his own views on personal freedom were antipathetic.

While Winckelmann was instrumental in furthering excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum in southern Italy, within a generation the empirical supports for his theory of the history of art began to dissolve as a result of an exponential increase in knowledge due to discovery and excavation not only in Italy, but in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, which Winckelmann never saw. Nevertheless, the paradigmatic structure or conceptual system of Winckelmann's art history remained largely in place—both in its particulars and as one or another version of organicist metaphors for historical change—in the subsequent development of the modern discipline in the nineteenth century, both as its implicit ideal and as a historiographic straitjacket of unresolvable dilemmas.

Central to his notion of the ideal ('classical') moment of Greek art was a fantasy of a free, desiring self, both reflecting and reflected in Athenian approximations of democratic self-rule. Such a moment in art would paradoxically also be styleless; having to be a pure unadorned mirror or expression of individual free agency. Herein lay one of the contradictions of Winckelmann's systematic history. In trying to comprehend the Greek ideal in a more fully historical manner he effectively *relativized* it, thereby making it a rather problematic model for the contemporary practice which he simultaneously wished to inspire. In his work, then, there is an oscillation between two senses of the ideal in art: as that which was the organic, historical expression of one particular society and culture—Greece (i.e. Athens) in the ('classical') fifth century BC, after the 'Archaic' age and before the 'Hellenistic' period, *and* as that which transcended style *per se*: as a (n) ahistorical quality of 'the best' in all free artistic expression.

Despite many refinements and transformations, a not inconsiderable amount of the conceptual structure of Winckelmann's art history has remained in play through most of the two hundred years since his death. Many of the deeper (and less visible) assumptions about art and its history common to our own contemporary practices echo and refract the questions, problems, and theses that Winckelmann so eloquently articulated in the eighteenth century in his own transformation and reinvention of the Vasarian tradition. Many of these remain unresolved, and may in fact be unresolvable in the terms habitually used to grapple with them.

Although Winckelmann's *History* provided the master blueprint for much of the stage machinery with which the discipline of art history was to operate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is an important sense in which his work differs significantly from its progeny. This has to do with the



*second* of the major problems that his work sought to address: his conception of the relationship between the historian as subject and the historian's object of study. It is here that we may begin to appreciate not only what may have been at stake for him in the late eighteenth century, but also, and equally importantly, how art history may have changed, during its nineteenth-century professionalization and academic institutionalization, in articulating the relationships between viewing subjects and the objects of their attention.

As Whitney Davis demonstrates quite lucidly in the second reading in this chapter, for Winckelmann, such a relationship was not simple and straightforward, and not at all an unproblematic or directly revelatory confrontation of a viewer and an object. His particular involvement in attempting to articulate this position—or these positions, since they are multiple and shifting—brought to the surface (a surface more visible after Freud) a set of dilemmas which remains central to the problem of what it means to conceive of being a 'historian' of art, and what it means to conceive of something called art history, in the most general sense.

If Vasari saw himself as a witness who was part of an unfolding tradition that successfully reconstituted the achievements of ancient art, Winckelmann saw himself as a witness to something that had *doubly* departed—both the ancient tradition, and its Renaissance or rebirth, now itself over and gone: the latter demise being part of his own history. In what position would the art historian find him- or herself with respect to all these losses? Particularly if it were the case that the process of restoring the object of the historian's desire in the fullness of its *own* history is to result in its alienation from the historian's own place and time: its irrevocable *loss*. The art historical act of investigating the nature of the interesting or desirable object, the attempt to understand and to come ever closer to it, would inevitably result in a recognition of its real *otherness*; its being of and for another (lost) time: its speaking to others in terms they would have always already understood more fully than the contemporary historian. At the same time, this loss would seem to undercut the possibility of restoring or reviving those ideals as a model for artistic practice in the present.

In no small measure, as Davis's essay suggests, these dilemmas and contradictions underlay Winckelmann's attempt to reconcile his own homoerotic fetishization of the beauty represented doubly by the youthful Greek male nude statue, and by the (present) living objects of his own personal desires, with his scholarly historical investigations in which the former objects were staged as the (departed) classical epitome of the totality of Greek culture. The problem of the position of the historian-observer is cast in his writings in such a way as to foreground the ambiguities and ambivalences both of gender-relations and, more generally, of distinctions between 'subjects' and 'objects' *per se*. Such ambiguities are those upon the repression of which modern society depends for its boundaries, laws, and social organization.<sup>5</sup>

In the systematic project of understanding the circumstances that made Greek art possible, the *History* historicized the Greek ideal, relativizing its accomplishments, and placing it irrevocably beyond his own grasp. What is in the historian's possession are copies (even if they be 'originals') which serve as catalysts for an unquenchable desire for the elusive realities of the beauty they represent. The pursuit of such a desire is unending; the dead objects can



never be brought to life; the beauty possessed (either in objects of art or in living subjects) always leaves something more to be desired.

There is another aspect of this problem which is pertinent to our understanding of the subsequent evolution of art history. It is important to appreciate that Winckelmann lived before the great nineteenth-century efflorescence of European public museums and the massive civic staging of works of art composed in museological space as continuous narrative histories or genealogies of individuals, regions, nations, and peoples. Within such new, intensely art-saturated environments, many of the complexities and ambiguities of viewing and understanding historical objects to which Winckelmann was sensitive came to be buried beneath the stage machinery of more dichotomous subject-object relations, which institutionalized art objects by the thousands as commodities to be vicariously consumed or unproblematically 'read' (in novelistic fashion) as relics not only of their makers but of national patrimony.

None the less, the underlying structure or system of many such stagings was (and still is) Winckelmannian in origin, if not in ostensible motivation. The nature of subject-object relations formatted by the nineteenth-century civic museum was integral to the larger enterprise of the modern nation-state and the fashioning of disciplined populations, an enterprise into which the nineteenth-century discipline of art history was integrated, albeit at times uneasily and ambivalently, as both handmaid and guiding light.

As many of the texts later in this book will reveal, the dilemmas and paradoxes that were central to the European project of constructing histories of art in the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries are no less powerful or poignant at the end of the twentieth century—and for reasons which, as we shall see, may be complementary to those with which Vasari and Winckelmann contended.

The readings making up this chapter include selections from Winckelmann's 1755 book *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*,<sup>6</sup> and two contemporary texts: a 1994 essay on Winckelmann by Whitney Davis, and an excerpt from Michael Baxandall's 1985 book *Patterns of Intention*. The first includes sections dealing with beauty and the notion of 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur'—for Winckelmann, the quintessential quality of Greek art. The next two readings are important elucidations of the essential problems of art historical practice. The Baxandall selection is one of the most lucid discussions in recent literature on art historical description and explanation, and in its broad implications addresses fundamental problems faced by Winckelmann himself.

The essay by Davis, a provocative discussion both of Winckelmann's position in the history of the discipline and of the problems facing art historical practice in the most general sense, is one of the most interesting analyses on both subjects to have appeared in recent years; it is also a good illustration of the ways in which contemporary research on questions of gender-construction and of subject-object relations may usefully elucidate aspects of the life and work of a historical figure. (For a penetrating view of the subject of death and 'loss' for the historian more generally, see also Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*.)<sup>7</sup>

The bibliography of work pertaining to Winckelmann is extensive, and only a few pertinent titles are given here; additional references may be found in the cited works, as well as in the notes to the Davis essay below. The most comprehensive and insightful studies of Winckelmann may be found in the writings of Alex Potts, whose volume *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London, 1994) is the most important study of Winckelmann's work to date, and an excellent source of references to the Winckelmann literature in various languages.

In addition to the primary and secondary works on Winckelmann and Vasari listed in the Notes, the following texts are recommended: Svetlana Alpers, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitude in Vasari's *Lives*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23 (1960), 190–215; Hans Belting, 'Vasari and his Legacy: The History of Art as a Process?', in Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago, 1987), 67–94; Ernst Gombrich, 'The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences', in id., *Norm and Form: The Stylistic Categories of Art History and their Origins in the Renaissance* (London, 1978), 1–10; and Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven and London, 1981).

# Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects

## Preface to the Third Part

Truly great was the advancement conferred on the arts of architecture, painting, and sculpture by those excellent masters of whom we have written hitherto, in the Second Part of these Lives, for to the achievements of the early masters they added rule, order, proportion, draughtsmanship, and manner; not, indeed, in complete perfection, but with so near an approach to the truth that the masters of the third age, of whom we are henceforward to speak, were enabled, by means of their light, to aspire still higher and attain to that supreme perfection which we see in the most highly prized and most celebrated of our modern works. But to the end that the nature of the improvement brought about by the aforesaid craftsmen may be even more clearly understood, it will certainly not be out of place to explain in a few words the five additions that I have named, and to give a succinct account of the origin of that true excellence which, having surpassed the age of the ancients, makes the modern so glorious.

Rule, then, in architecture, was the process of taking measurements from antiquities and studying the ground-plans of ancient edifices for the construction of modern buildings. Order was the separating of one style from another, so that each body should receive its proper members, with no more interchanging between Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Tuscan. Proportion was the universal law applying both to architecture and to sculpture, that all bodies should be made correct and true, with the members in proper harmony; and so, also, in painting. Draughtsmanship was the imitation of the most beautiful parts of nature in all figures, whether in sculpture or in painting; and for this it is necessary to have a hand and a brain able to reproduce with absolute accuracy and precision, on a level surface—whether by drawing on paper, or on panel, or on some other level surface—everything that the eye sees; and the same is true of relief in sculpture. Manner then attained to the greatest beauty from the practice which arose of constantly copying the most beautiful objects, and joining together these most beautiful things, hands, heads, bodies, and legs, so as to make a figure of the greatest possible beauty. This practice was carried out in every work for all figures, and for that reason it is called the beautiful manner.

These things had not been done by Giotto or by the other early craftsmen, although they had discovered the rudiments of all these difficulties, and had touched them on the surface; as in their drawing, which was sounder and more true to nature than it had been before, and likewise in harmony of colouring and in the grouping of figures in scenes, and in many other respects

of which enough has been said. Now although the masters of the second age improved our arts greatly with regard to all the qualities mentioned above, yet these were not made by them so perfect as to succeed in attaining to complete perfection, for there was wanting in their rule a certain freedom which, without being of the rule, might be directed by the rule and might be able to exist without causing confusion or spoiling the order; which order had need of an invention abundant in every respect, and of a certain beauty maintained in every least detail, so as to reveal all that order with more adornment. In proportion there was wanting a certain correctness of judgment, by means of which their figures, without having been measured, might have, in due relation to their dimensions, a grace exceeding measurement. In their drawing there was not the perfection of finish, because, although they made an arm round and a leg straight, the muscles in these were not revealed with that sweet and facile grace which hovers midway between the seen and the unseen, as is the case with the flesh of living figures; nay, they were crude and excoriated, which made them displeasing to the eye and gave hardness to the manner. This last was wanting in the delicacy that comes from making all figures light and graceful, particularly those of women and children, with the limbs true to nature, as in the case of men, but veiled with a plumpness and fleshiness that should not be awkward, as they are in nature, but refined by draughtsmanship and judgment. They also lacked our abundance of beautiful costumes, our great number and variety of bizarre fancies, loveliness of colouring, wide knowledge of buildings, and distance and variety in landscapes. And although many of them, such as Andrea Verrocchio and Antonio del Pollaiuolo, and many others more modern, began to seek to make their figures with more study, so as to reveal in them better draughtsmanship, with a degree of imitation more correct and truer to nature, nevertheless the whole was not yet there, even though they had one very certain assurance—namely, that they were advancing towards the good, and their figures were thus approved according to the standard of the works of the ancients, as was seen when Andrea Verrocchio restored in marble the legs and arms of the Marsyas in the house of the Medici in Florence. But they lacked a certain finish and finality of perfection in the feet, hands, hair, and beards, although the limbs as a whole are in accordance with the antique and have a certain correct harmony in the proportions. Now if they had had that minuteness of finish which is the perfection and bloom of art, they would also have had a resolute boldness in their works; and from this there would have followed delicacy, refinement, and supreme grace, which are the qualities produced by the perfection of art in beautiful figures, whether in relief or in painting; but these qualities they did not have, although they give proof of diligent striving. That finish, and that certain something that they lacked, they could not achieve so readily, seeing that study, when it is used in that way to obtain finish, gives dryness to the manner.

After them, indeed, their successors were enabled to attain to it through seeing excavated out of the earth certain antiquities cited by Pliny as amongst the most famous, such as the Laocoon, the Hercules, the Great Torso of the Belvedere, and likewise the Venus, the Cleopatra, the Apollo, and an endless number of others, which, both with their sweetness and their severity, with their fleshy roundness copied from the greatest beauties of nature,

and with certain attitudes which involve no distortion of the whole figure but only a movement of certain parts, and are revealed with a most perfect grace, brought about the disappearance of a certain dryness, hardness, and sharpness of manner, which had been left to our art by the excessive study of Piero della Francesca, Lazzaro Vasari, Alesso Baldovinetti, Andrea dal Castagno, Pesello, Ercole Ferrarese, Giovanni Bellini, Cosimo Rosselli, the Abbot of S. Clemente, Domenico del Ghirlandajo, Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna, Filippo, and Luca Signorelli. These masters sought with great efforts to do the impossible in art by means of labour, particularly in foreshortenings and in things unpleasant to the eye, which were as painful to see as they were difficult for them to execute. And although their works were for the most part well drawn and free from errors, yet there was wanting a certain resolute spirit which was never seen in them, and that sweet harmony of colouring which the Bolognese Francia and Pietro Perugino first began to show in their works; at the sight of which people ran like madmen to this new and more lifelike beauty, for it seemed to them quite certain that nothing better could ever be done. But their error was afterwards clearly proved by the works of Leonardo da Vinci, who, giving a beginning to that third manner which we propose to call the modern—besides the force and boldness of his drawing, and the extreme subtlety wherewith he counterfeited all the minutenesses of nature exactly as they are—with good rule, better order, right proportion, perfect drawing, and divine grace, abounding in resources and having a most profound knowledge of art, may be truly said to have endowed his figures with motion and breath.

There followed after him, although at some distance, Giorgione da Castelfranco, who obtained a beautiful gradation of colour in his pictures, and gave a sublime movement to his works by means of a certain darkness of shadow, very well conceived; and not inferior to him in giving force, relief, sweetness, and grace to his pictures, with his colouring, was Fra Bartolommeo di San Marco. But more than all did the most gracious Raffaello da Urbino, who, studying the labours of the old masters and those of the modern, took the best from them, and, having gathered it together, enriched the art of painting with that complete perfection which was shown in ancient times by the figures of Apelles and Zeuxis; nay, even more, if we may make bold to say it, as might be proved if we could compare their works with his. Wherefore nature was left vanquished by his colours; and his invention was facile and peculiar to himself, as may be perceived by all who see his painted stories, which are as vivid as writings, for in them he showed us places and buildings true to reality, and the features and costumes both of our own people and of strangers, according to his pleasure; not to mention his gift of imparting grace to the heads of young men, old men, and women, reserving modesty for the modest, wantonness for the wanton, and for children now mischief in their eyes, now playfulness in their attitudes; and the folds of his draperies, also, are neither too simple nor too intricate, but of such a kind that they appear real.

In the same manner, but sweeter in colouring and not so bold, there followed Andrea del Sarto, who may be called a rare painter, for his works are free from errors. Nor is it possible to describe the charming vivacity seen in the works of Antonio da Correggio, who painted hair in detail, not in the precise manner used by the masters before him, which was constrained, sharp,

and dry, but soft and feathery, with each single hair visible, such was his facility in making them; and they seemed like gold and more beautiful than real hair, which is surpassed by that which he painted.

The same did Francesco Mazzuoli of Parma, who excelled him in many respects in grace, adornment, and beauty of manner, as may be seen in many of his pictures, which smile on whoever beholds them; and even as there is a perfect illusion of sight in the eyes, so there is perceived the beating of the pulse, according as it best pleased his brush. But whosoever shall consider the mural paintings of Polidoro and Maturino, will see figures in attitudes that seem beyond the bounds of possibility, and he will wonder with amazement how it can be possible, not to describe with the tongue, which is easy, but to express with the brush the tremendous conceptions which they put into execution with such mastery and dexterity, in representing the deeds of the Romans exactly as they were.

And how many there are who, having given life to their figures with their colours, are now dead, such as Il Rosso, Fra Sebastiano, Giulio Romano, and Perino del Vaga! For of the living, who are known to all through their own efforts, there is no need to speak here. But what most concerns the whole world of art is that they have now brought it to such perfection, and made it so easy for him who possesses draughtsmanship, invention, and colouring, that, whereas those early masters took six years to paint one panel, our modern masters can paint six in one year, as I can testify with the greatest confidence both from seeing and from doing; and our pictures are clearly much more highly finished and perfect than those executed in former times by masters of account.

But he who bears the palm from both the living and the dead, transcending and eclipsing all others, is the divine Michelagnolo Buonarroti, who holds the sovereignty not merely of one of these arts, but of all three together. This master surpasses and excels not only all those moderns who have almost vanquished nature, but even those most famous ancients who without a doubt did so gloriously surpass her; and in his own self he triumphs over moderns, ancients, and nature, who could scarcely conceive anything so strange and so difficult that he would not be able, by the force of his most divine intellect and by means of his industry, draughtsmanship, art, judgment, and grace, to excel it by a great measure; and that not only in painting and in the use of colour, under which title are comprised all forms, and all bodies upright or not upright, palpable or impalpable, visible or invisible, but also in the highest perfection of bodies in the round, with the point of his chisel. And from a plant so beautiful and so fruitful, through his labours, there have already spread branches so many and so noble, that, besides having filled the world in such unwonted profusion with the most luscious fruits, they have also given the final form to these three most noble arts. And so great and so marvellous is his perfection, that it may be safely and surely said that his statues are in all their parts much more beautiful than the ancient; for if we compare the heads, hands, arms, and feet shaped by the one with those of the others, we see in his a greater depth and solidity, a grace more completely graceful, and a much more absolute perfection, accomplished with a manner so facile in the overcoming of difficulties, that it is not possible ever to see anything better. And the same may be believed of his pictures, which, if we chanced to have

some by the most famous Greeks and Romans, so that we might compare them face to face, would prove to be as much higher in value and more noble as his sculptures are clearly superior to all those of the ancients.

But if we admire so greatly those most famous masters who, spurred by such extraordinary rewards and by such good-fortune, gave life to their works, how much more should we not celebrate and exalt to the heavens those rare intellects who, not only without reward, but in miserable poverty, bring forth fruits so precious? We must believe and declare, then, that if, in this our age, there were a due meed of remuneration, there would be without a doubt works greater and much better than were ever wrought by the ancients. But the fact that they have to grapple more with famine than with fame, keeps our hapless intellects submerged, and, to the shame and disgrace of those who could raise them up but give no thought to it, prevents them from becoming known.

And let this be enough to have said on this subject; for it is now time to re-turn to the Lives, and to treat in detail of all those who have executed famous works in this third manner, the creator of which was Leonardo da Vinci, with whom we will now begin.



# Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture

## I. Natural Beauty

Good taste, which is becoming more prevalent throughout the world, had its origins under the skies of Greece. Every invention of foreign nations which was brought to Greece was, as it were, only a first seed that assumed new form and character here. We are told<sup>1</sup> that Minerva chose this land, with its mild seasons, above all others for the Greeks in the knowledge that it would be productive of genius.

The taste which the Greeks exhibited in their works of art was unique and has seldom been taken far from its source without loss. Under more distant skies it found tardy recognition and without a doubt was completely unknown in the northern zones during a time when painting and sculpture, of which the Greeks are the greatest teachers, found few admirers. This was a time when the most valuable works of Correggio were used to cover the windows of the royal stables in Stockholm.<sup>2</sup>

One has to admit that the reign of the great August<sup>3</sup> was the happy period during which the arts were introduced into Saxony as a foreign element. Under his successor, the German Titus, they became firmly established in this country, and with their help good taste is now becoming common.

An eternal monument to the greatness of this monarch is that he furthered good taste by collecting and publicly displaying the greatest treasures from Italy and the very best paintings that other countries have produced. His eagerness to perpetuate the arts did not diminish until authentic works of Greek masters and indeed those of the highest quality were available for artists to imitate. The purest sources of art have been opened, and fortunate is the person who discovers and partakes of them. This search means going to Athens; and Dresden will from now on be an Athens for artists.

The only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients. What someone once said of Homer—that to understand him well means to admire him—is also true for the art works of the ancients, especially the Greeks. One must become as familiar with them as with a friend in order to find their statue of Laocoon<sup>4</sup> just as inimitable as Homer. In such close acquaintance one learns to judge as Nicomachus judged Zeuxis' Helena: 'Behold her with my eyes', he said to an ignorant person who found fault with this work of art, 'and she will appear a goddess to you.'



With such eyes did Michelangelo, Raphael, and Poussin see the works of the ancients. They partook of good taste at its source, and Raphael did this in the very land where it had begun. We know that he sent young artists to Greece in order to sketch for him the relics of antiquity.

The relationship between an ancient Roman statue and a Greek original will generally be similar to that seen in Virgil's imitation of Homer's *Nausicaa*, in which he compares Dido and her followers to Diana in the midst of her *Oreads*.<sup>5</sup>

Laocoon was for the artist of old Rome just what he is for us—the demonstration of Polyclitus' rules, the perfect rules of art.<sup>6</sup>

I need not remind the reader that certain negligences can be discovered in even the most famous works of Greek artists. Examples are the dolphin which was added to the *Medicean Venus*<sup>7</sup> together with the playing children; and the work of Dioscorides, except the main figure, in his cameo of *Diomedes*<sup>8</sup> with the *Palladium*. It is well known that the workmanship on the reverse of the finest coins of the kings of Syria and Egypt rarely equals that of the heads of these kings portrayed on the obverse. But great artists are wise even in their faults. They cannot err without teaching. One should observe their works as Lucian would have us observe the *Jupiter of Phidias*: as *Jupiter himself*, not his footstool.

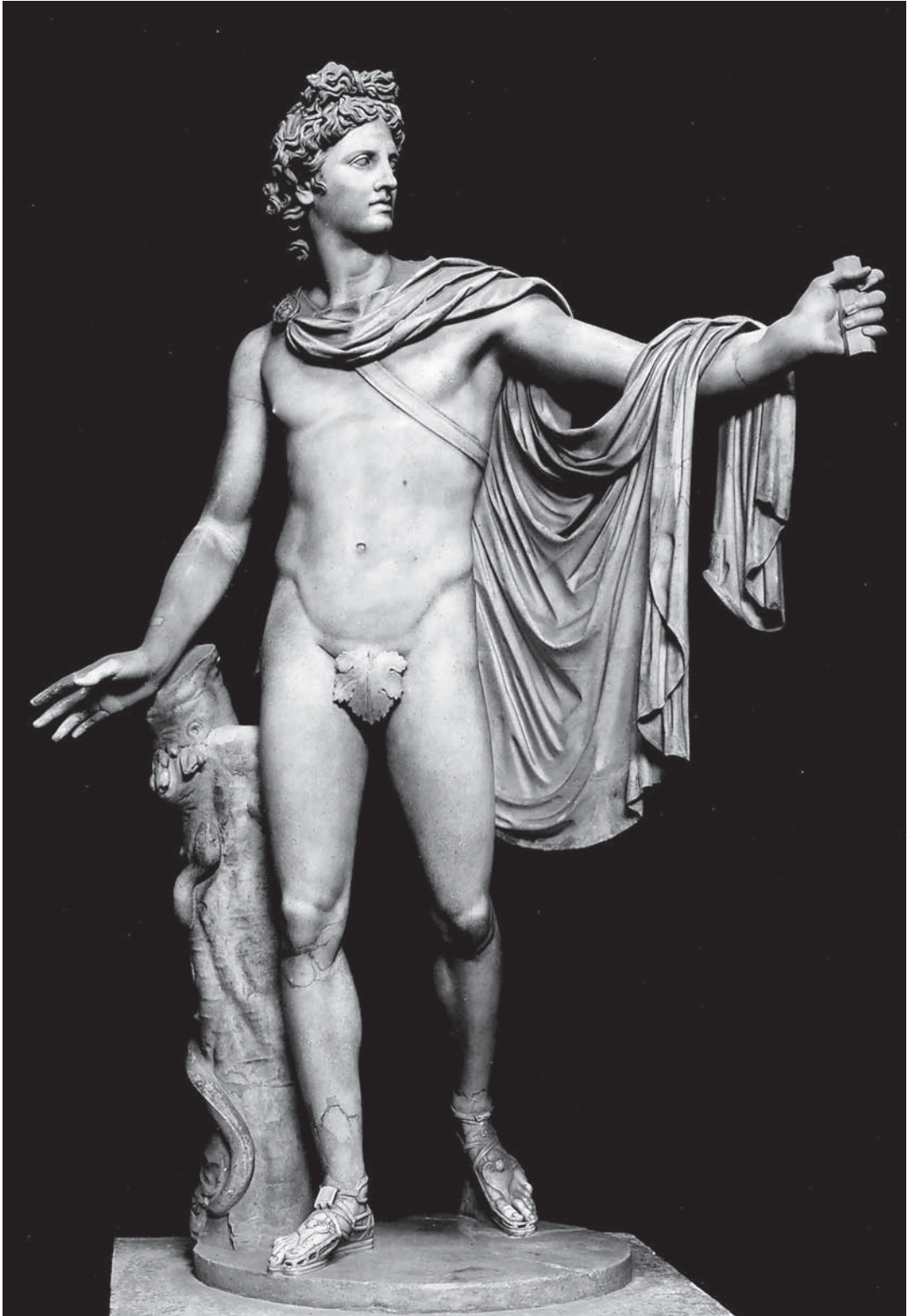
In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty, which, as an ancient interpreter of Plato<sup>9</sup> teaches us, come from images created by the mind alone.

The most beautiful body of one of us would probably no more resemble the most beautiful Greek body than *Iphicles* resembled his brother, *Hercules*.<sup>10</sup> The first development of the Greeks was influenced by a mild and clear sky; but the practice of physical exercises from an early age gave this development its noble forms. Consider, for example, a young Spartan conceived by a hero and heroine and never confined in swaddling clothes, sleeping on the ground from the seventh year on and trained from infancy in wrestling and swimming. Compare this Spartan with a young *Sybarite*<sup>11</sup> of our time and then decide which of the two would be chosen by the artist as a model for young *Theseus*, *Achilles*, or even *Bacchus*. Modelled from the latter it would be a *Theseus fed on roses*, while from the former would come a *Theseus fed on flesh*, to borrow the terms used by a Greek painter to characterize two different conceptions of this hero [3].

The grand games gave every Greek youth a strong incentive for physical exercise, and the laws demanded a ten month preparation period for the Olympic Games, in *Elis*,<sup>12</sup> at the very place where they were held. The highest prizes were not always won by adults but often by youths, as told in *Pindar's odes*. To resemble the god-like *Diagoras* was the fondest wish of every young man.<sup>13</sup>

Behold the swift Indian who pursues a deer on foot—how briskly his juices must flow, how flexible and quick his nerves and muscles must be, how light the whole structure of his body! Thus did Homer portray his heroes, and his *Achilles* he chiefly noted as being 'swift of foot'.

These exercises gave the bodies of the Greeks the strong and manly contours which the masters then imparted to their statues without any exaggeration or excess. [...]



#### IV. Noble Simplicity and Quiet Grandeur

The general and most distinctive characteristics of the Greek masterpieces are, finally, a noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, both in posture and expression. Just as the depths of the sea always remain calm however much the surface may rage, so does the expression of the figures of the Greeks reveal a great and composed soul even in the midst of passion.

Such a soul is reflected in the face of Laocoon<sup>14</sup>—and not in the face alone—despite his violent suffering [4]. The pain is revealed in all the muscles and sinews of his body, and we ourselves can almost feel it as we observe the painful contraction of the abdomen alone without regarding the face and other parts of the body. This pain, however, expresses itself with no sign of rage in his face or in his entire bearing. He emits no terrible screams such as Virgil's Laocoon, for the opening of his mouth does not permit it; it is rather an anxious and troubled sighing as described by Sadoletto.<sup>15</sup> The physical pain and the nobility of soul are distributed with equal strength over the entire body and are, as it were, held in balance with one another. Laocoon suffers, but he suffers like Sophocles' Philoctetes;<sup>16</sup> his pain touches our very souls, but we wish that we could bear misery like this great man.

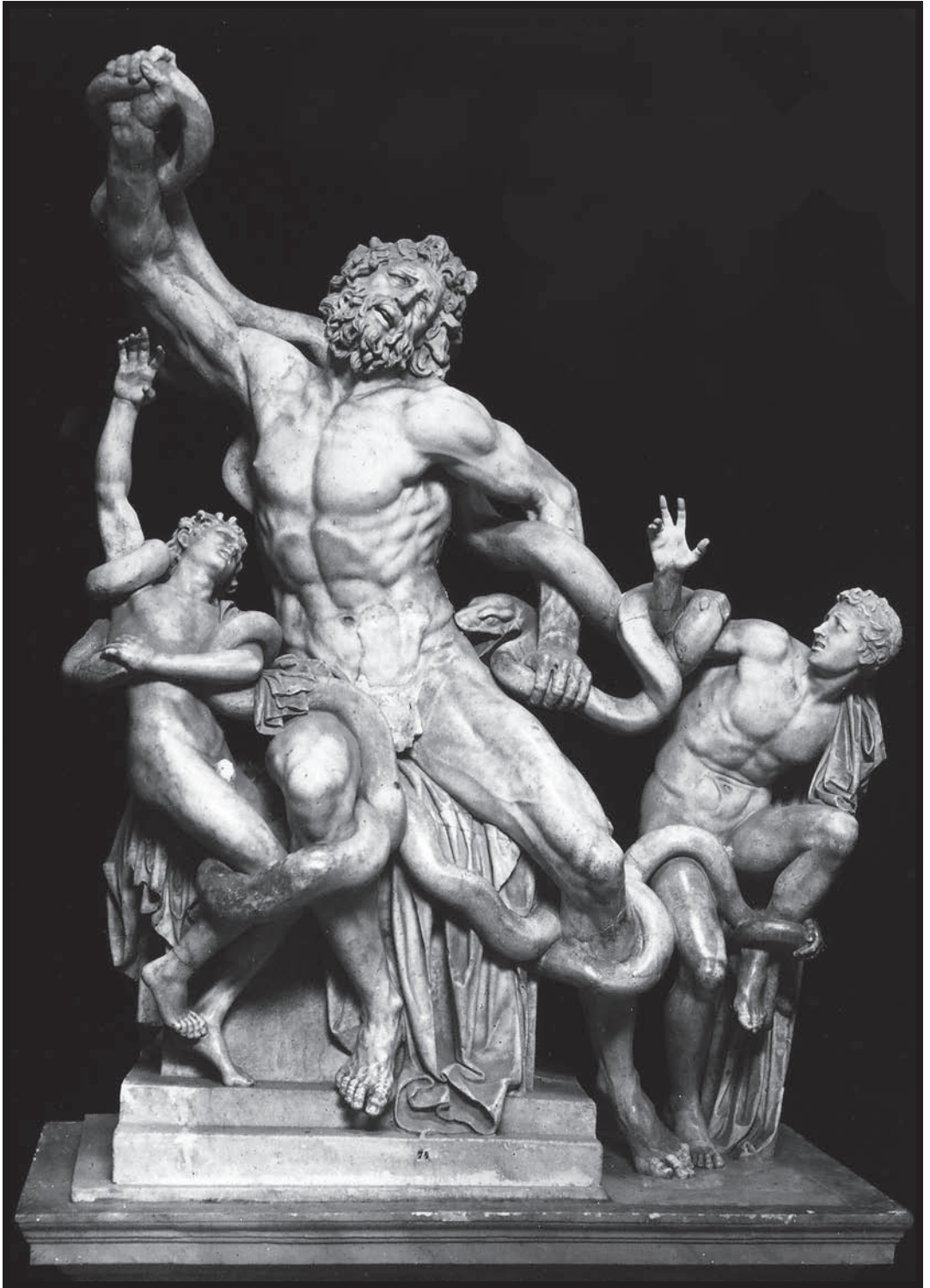
The expression of such nobility of soul goes far beyond the depiction of beautiful nature. The artist had to feel the strength of this spirit in himself and then impart it to his marble. Greece had artists who were at once philosophers, and there was more than one Metrodorus.<sup>17</sup> Wisdom extended its hand to art and imbued its figures with more than common souls.

If the artist had clothed him, as would indeed befit his station as a priest, Laocoon's pain would have lost half its expression. Bernini even claimed to detect in the rigidity of one of Laocoon's thighs the first effects of the snake's venom.

All movements and poses of Greek figures not marked by such traits of wisdom, but instead by passion and violence, were the result of an error of conception which the ancient artists called *parenthyrsos*.<sup>18</sup>

The more tranquil the state of the body the more capable it is of portraying the true character of the soul. In all positions too removed from this tranquillity, the soul is not in its most essential condition, but in one that is agitated and forced. A soul is more apparent and distinctive when seen in violent passion, but it is great and noble when seen in a state of unity and calm. The portrayal of suffering alone in Laocoon would have been *parenthyrsos*; therefore the artist, in order to unite the distinctive and the noble qualities of soul, showed him in an action that was closest to a state of tranquillity for one in such pain. But in this tranquillity the soul must be distinguished by traits that are uniquely its own and give it a form that is calm and active at the same time, quiet but not indifferent or sluggish.

The common taste of artists of today, especially the younger ones, is in complete opposition to this. Nothing gains their approbation but contorted postures and actions in which bold passion prevails. This they call art executed with spirit, or *franchezza*.<sup>19</sup> Their favorite term is *contrapposto*,<sup>20</sup> which represents for them the essence of a perfect work of art. In their figures they demand a soul which shoots like a comet out of their midst; they would like every figure to be an Ajax or a Capaneus.<sup>21</sup>



The arts themselves have their infancy as do human beings, and they begin as do youthful artists with a preference for amazement and bombast. Such was the tragic muse of Aeschylus; his hyperbole<sup>22</sup> makes his Agamemnon in part far more obscure than anything that Heraclitus wrote. Perhaps the first Greek painters painted in the same manner that their first good tragedian wrote.

Rashness and volatility lead the way in all human actions; steadiness and composure follow last. The latter, however, take time to be discovered and are found only in great matters; strong passions can be of advantage to their students. The wise artist knows how difficult these qualities are to imitate.

ut sibi quivis  
Speret idem, sudet multum frustra labore  
Ausus idem.

(Horace)<sup>23</sup>

La Fage, the great draughtsman, was unable to match the taste of the ancients. His works are so full of movement that the observer's attention is at the same time attracted and distracted, as at a social gathering where everyone tries to talk at once.

The noble simplicity and quiet grandeur of the Greek statues is also the true hallmark of Greek writings from their best period, the writings of the Socratic school. And these are the best characteristics of Raphael's greatness, which he attained through imitation of the Greeks.

So great a soul in so handsome a body as Raphael's was needed to first feel and to discover in modern times the true character of the ancients. He had, furthermore, the great good fortune to achieve this at an age when ordinary and undeveloped souls are still insensitive to true greatness.

We must approach his works with the true taste of antiquity and with eyes that have learned to sense these beauties. Then the calm serenity of the main figures in Raphael's 'Attila', which seem lifeless to many, will be for us most significant and noble. The Roman bishop here,<sup>24</sup> who dissuaded the king of the Huns from attacking Rome, does not make the gestures and movements of an orator but is shown rather as a man of dignity whose mere presence calms a violent spirit, as in Virgil's description:

Tum pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem  
Conspexere, silent arrectisque auribus astant.

(Aen. I)<sup>25</sup>

Full of confidence he faces the raging tyrant, while the two apostles hovering in the clouds are not like avenging angels but, if I may compare the sacred with the profane, like Homer's Jupiter, who makes Mount Olympus quiver with a blink of his eyes.

Algardi, in his famous representation of this same story in bas-relief on an altar of St Peter's in Rome, did not give or know how to give the figures of his two apostles the active tranquillity of his great predecessor. There they appeared like messengers of the lord of hosts, but here they are like mortal warriors with human weapons.

How few experts have been able to understand the grandeur of expression which Guido Reni gave his beautiful painting of Archangel Michael in the Church of the Capuchins in Rome. Concha's St Michael<sup>26</sup> is preferred



because his face shows anger and revenge, whereas Guido's archangel, after casting down the enemy of God and man, hovers over him without bitterness, his expression calm and serene.

Just as calm and serene is the avenging hovering angel with whom the English poet compares the victorious commander at Blenheim as protector of Britannia.<sup>27</sup>

The Royal Gallery of Paintings in Dresden now contains among its treasures one of Raphael's best works, as Vasari and others have noted. It is a Madonna and Child with St Sixtus and St Barbara kneeling on each side, and two angels in the foreground.<sup>28</sup> This picture was the central altar-piece at the monastery of St Sixtus in Piacenza. Art lovers and connoisseurs went to see this Raphael just as people traveled to Thespieae<sup>29</sup> solely to see Praxiteles' beautiful statue of Cupid.

Behold this Madonna, her face filled with innocence and extraordinary greatness, in a posture of blissful serenity! It is the same serenity with which the ancients imbued the depictions of their deities. How awesome and noble is her entire contour! The child in her arms is a child elevated above ordinary children; in its face a divine radiance illuminates the innocence of childhood. St Barbara kneels in worshipful stillness at her side, but far beneath the majesty of the main figure—in a humility for which the great master found compensation in the gentle charm of her expression. St Sixtus, kneeling opposite her, is a venerable old man whose features bear witness to his youth devoted to God.

St Barbara's reverence for the Madonna, which is made more vivid and moving by the manner in which she presses her beautiful hands to her breast, helps to support the gesture which St Sixtus makes with his hand. This gesture of ecstasy was chosen by the artist to add variety to his composition and is more appropriate to masculine strength than to feminine modesty.

Time has, to be sure, robbed this painting of much of its glory, and its color has partially faded, but the soul which the artist breathed into the work of his hands still makes it live.

All those who approach this and other works of Raphael in the hope of finding there the trifling beauties that make the works of Dutch painters so popular: the painstaking diligence of a Netscher or a Dou, the ivory flesh tones of a van der Werff, or the tidy manner of some of Raphael's countrymen in our times—those, I say, will never find in Raphael the great Raphael. [...]

## VI. Painting

Everything that can be said in praise of Greek sculpture should in all likelihood also hold true for Greek painting. But time and human barbarity have robbed us of the means to make sure judgments.

It is conceded only that Greek painters had knowledge of contour and expression; they are given no credit for perspective, composition, or coloring. This judgment is based partly on bas-reliefs, partly on the paintings of antiquity (one cannot say that they are Greek) discovered in and near Rome, in subterranean vaults of the palaces of Maecenas, of Titus, Trajan, and the Antonini. Of these, barely thirty have been preserved intact, and some only in the form of mosaics.

Turnbull included in his work on ancient paintings<sup>30</sup> a collection of the best-known items, drawn by Camillo Paderni and engraved by Mynde, which give the magnificent but misused paper of his book its only value. Among them are two copies from originals in the collection of the famous physician Richard Mead of London.

Others have already noted that Poussin made studies of the so-called 'Aldobrandini Marriage',<sup>31</sup> that there are drawings by Annibale Carracci of a presumed 'Marcus Coriolanus', and that there is a great similarity between the heads of Guido Reni's figures and those of the well-known mosaic 'The Abduction of Europa'.

If such remnants of frescos provided the only basis for judging the ancient paintings, one might be inclined even to deny that their artists knew contour and expression. We are informed that the paintings with life-sized figures taken, together with the walls, from the theater in Herculaneum give a poor impression of their skills: Theseus as the conqueror of the Minotaur,<sup>32</sup> with the young Athenians embracing his knees and kissing his hands; Flora with Hercules and a faun; an alleged 'Judgment of the Decemvir Appius Claudius'—all are, according to the testimony of an artist, either mediocre or poor. Not only do most of the faces lack expression but those in the 'Appius Claudius' lack even character. But this very fact proves that they are paintings by very mediocre artists; for the knowledge of beautiful proportion, of bodily contour, and expression found in Greek sculptors must also have been possessed by their good painters.

Although the ancient painters deserve recognition of their accomplishments, much credit is also due the moderns. In the science of perspective modern painters are clearly superior despite all learned defense of the ancients. The laws of composition and arrangement were imperfectly known to antiquity as evidenced by bas-reliefs dating from the times when Greek art flourished in Rome. As for the use of color, both the accounts of ancient writers and the remains of ancient paintings testify in favor of the moderns.

Various other objects of painting have likewise been raised to a higher degree of perfection in more modern times, for example, landscapes and animal species. The ancient painters seem not to have been acquainted with more handsome species of animals in other regions, if one may judge from individual cases such as the horse of Marcus Aurelius, the two horses in Monte Cavallo, the horses above the portal of San Marco's Church in Venice, presumably by Lysippus, or the Farnesian Bull and the other animals of this group.

It should be mentioned in passing that in the portrayal of horses the ancients did not observe the diametrical movements of the legs as seen in the Venetian horses and those depicted on old coins. Some modern artists have, in their ignorance, followed their example and have even been defended for doing so.

Our landscapes, especially those of the Dutch, owe their beauty mainly to the fact that they are painted in oil; their colors are stronger, more lively and vivid. Nature itself, under a thicker and moister atmosphere, has contributed not a little to the growth of this type of art. These and other advantages of modern painters over the ancients deserve to be better demonstrated, with more thorough proof than heretofore. [...]



# Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History

J.J. Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*, first published in Dresden in 1764, is often taken to be the first true 'history of art.'<sup>1</sup> Winckelmann raised art history from the chronicle of artists' lives and commissions to a higher level: he attempted systematic stylistic analysis, historical contextualization, and even iconographical analysis, especially if we include his publications of gems and other antiquities and his treatise on visual allegory.<sup>2</sup> Of course, Winckelmann also helped to forge one of the essential tools of general criticism: in his 1759 essays on the Belvedere *Torso* and *Apollo* and on the *Laocoon* [see 3, 4], included in the *History*, he produced what were for his time lengthy focused descriptions of the individual artwork as it appears to us, an apparition that can be turned either to aesthetic-ethical-evaluation or to historical-critical analysis. Winckelmann's enormous—undeniably formative—contribution to the establishment of art history as an intellectual enterprise and a scholarly discipline has been considered at length from a number of points of view.<sup>3</sup> Put most succinctly, Winckelmann's *History* inaugurally integrated the twin methods of what later became the professional discipline of art history—namely, 'formalism' and 'historicism'. Winckelmann explored the forms of Greco-Roman art and all the facts, going back to the role of climate, that he took to be relevant to explaining form historically.

It is well known, however, that major aspects of the content of Classical art—its inherence in the social practices of ancient Greek homoeroticism—were not usually acknowledged by Winckelmann. He employed an elaborate euphemism: for him, Greek art is formally about and historically depends on 'freedom'—although the 'freedom' to be or to do exactly what is left vague. It would be a misreading of German Enlightenment discourse to suppose that Winckelmann's *Freiheit* means political freedom alone; freedom is a cognitive condition.<sup>4</sup> Some recent commentators, chiefly Alex Potts, have explored Winckelmann's own republicanism and anticlericalism and the later critical and political reception of his 'historicism' determination of the form of Greek art in the civic freedom of the Greek *polis*.<sup>5</sup> But this aspect of Winckelmann's account hardly exhausts the matter. It is precisely the manifest formal-historical analysis Winckelmann offers—determining artistic production, somewhat uneasily, in the political structures of civil society—that we should now attempt to go beyond.

The history of art history, from the 1760s to the 1990s, has produced an approach in which art history is often reductively equated with the objective

historicist explanation of artistic form. As is often said, this paradigm constitutes a discipline. But what it disciplines are not the 'facts' of the history of art, or only secondarily the facts of the history of art. What it primarily and inaugurally disciplines is itself—by means of its supposed 'realism,' a standard cultural determinism with an underlying appeal to supposed universals of social process, grasped 'scientifically'; its cleaving of 'aesthetics' or 'criticism' from 'history' itself; its suppression of the subjective reality of the historian's own place and taste; and its claim to comprehend history through chronological and causal analysis without simultaneously and by the same terms acknowledging its own status as narrative. I want, here, to look at this defensive splitting—this *Ichspaltung im Abwehrvorgang*—in Winckelmann's *History*.<sup>6</sup>

At points in the text of the *History* and other writings, Winckelmann's understanding of the 'freedom' of Greek art does shine forth—but always in code. For example, the naturalistic beauty of Greek statues derived, he says, from the Greek sculptors' close observation of inherently beautiful boys naked in the gymnasium. But why the boys are beautiful is not represented as an hallucination of the historian-observer himself, who cannot actually see them. Instead it is said to result from the 'favorable' Greek climate (another hallucination) and practice of training men for war—facts which must somehow determine particular forms of natural beauty and of art. In general, throughout Winckelmann's account of ancient art such objective 'historicist' explanation overrides the 'subjective' aesthetic, political-sexual response that motivated it in the first place.

Many contradictions derive from this systematic transposition of subjective erotics—the idea or memory of what is subjectively beautiful and desirable in sexual, ethical, and political terms—into objectivizing formalist and historicist analysis. For example, according to the explicit standards of Winckelmann's analysis, the Hellenistic hermaphrodites, let alone works like the portraits of Hadrian's young lover Antinous, were contemporary with the total decline of political 'freedom' in Greece (that is, with the Roman conquest)—and thus could not embody the essence of Greek art. But none the less they are cited as great Classical works—indicating that the real denotation of 'freedom,' for Winckelmann, is not (or not only) in civic politics at all but rather in species of social-sexual organization possible in both democratic and authoritarian society.

Indeed, the *History* exhibits a general disjunction, as Potts has acutely observed, between the eras of specifically political freedom in the Greco-Roman world and the period of its great or Classical art.<sup>7</sup> We should add that Winckelmann defines classicism itself in relation to formal and historical precursors—Egyptian, archaic Greek, Etruscan, and late Roman (Byzantine) arts—which he cannot quite disentangle from classicism itself, supposedly the autonomous formal expression of historical factors peculiar to the fifth- and late fourth-century Greek city-states. For example, because Greece in the sixth century possessed the same climate and roughly the same militarized competitiveness of Greece in the fifth century, according to Winckelmann's historicism its art should be classically beautiful. What archaic Greece supposedly lacked, of course, was political freedom. But if Winckelmann is willing to admit the unfree, if Hellenized, art of Hadrianic Rome or Justinian's

Ravenna as producing great classicism, on what grounds can he exclude the sixth- and late fifth-century archaic or severe phases of Greek classicism?<sup>8</sup> Obviously the real point of distinction must lie in other aesthetic or ethical responses to the non- or prenaturalistic and the naturalistic works respectively, but Winckelmann does not directly produce his criteria. Instead the objective formal-historical chronology—with its statement of causes and sequences—is supposed in itself to render the distinction intelligible to us *ex post facto*. Despite their unfreedom, Rome or Ravenna preserve enough of a memory of Greek classicism to engender a Classical art, while preclassical Greece, although causally and chronologically closer to the zenith, did not. As Winckelmann's reasoning implies, identifying the Classical evidently turns on the play of memory and retrospective allusion—a condition foreclosed for all forerunners of the classical Greeks, who cannot remember and allude to what has not yet happened. Thus Egyptian art remains aesthetically inert. Significantly, however, Etruscan art gives Winckelmann trouble: it is neither really a forerunner nor quite an inheritor of fifth-century Greek art but rather a parallel cultural development. A reader of Winckelmann's book can be forgiven for not being able completely to work out these tangles, even though they might interest historians today: the general point is that the *History of Ancient Art* manages the erotic almost entirely off stage, a transference (*Übertragung*) or 'carrying over' in the strict sense.<sup>9</sup>

'Off stage,' that is, from the point of view of the reader. From the point of view of Winckelmann himself, however, it is possible that he was having things both ways. Exploring his sexual and ethical attractions—actively filling them out with images, information, and a social and historical reality, both through and in the very doing of his research—he finally transposes them all into another narrative for others.

Winckelmann is an enigmatic figure; and here I am not claiming fully to link my reading of his writings with historical analysis of his own life and work in their social-sexual and social-political context, although such a link could ultimately be made.<sup>10</sup> I will presume, however, that Winckelmann, both socially and personally defined as a sodomite (a role that he took little pains to disguise), participated in the male-male sodomitical subculture of his day—a subculture that revolved, like some modern urban homosexual subcultures, around certain cafes, theaters, and drinking establishments as well as open-air strolling in various quarters of the city and suburbs.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is entirely relevant to remember that one of Winckelmann's chief employments as papal antiquarian was to guide British, German, and other northern gentlemen on their tour through the ruins of Rome—an activity that by the late eighteenth century already clearly signified, at least for many participants, the availability of sex with local working boys, liaisons that tended to be frustrated or proscribed in the northern nations. That Winckelmann's apartment in Rome was graced with a bust of a beautiful young faun, which he published and described in the *History* and elsewhere, was not, then, merely a manifestation of his antiquarian scholarship in the questions of Greco-Roman art history.<sup>12</sup> It also was fully consistent with, and probably functioned partly as, his self-definition and representation in the contemporary culture to which he belonged.

Winckelmann's active same-sex erotics were recognized by Goethe, his acutest commentator, to motivate much of his conceptual labor.<sup>13</sup> But what

those erotics actually involved still remains uncertain. Because of the *History*'s emphasis on androgyny and hermaphroditism, it is useful to have Casanova's report of surprising Winckelmann relaxing with one of the young Roman castrati he favored,<sup>14</sup> as well as Winckelmann's own testimonies to his infatuations with noble German boys, especially a young nobleman, Friedrich von Berg, to whom he dedicated his 1763 essay 'On the Ability to Perceive the Beautiful in Art.' Before his murder in 1768, Winckelmann was a valued member of the Papal Court, the personal librarian to the great collector Cardinal Alessandro Albani. But he had been born to a poor family in Prussia, studying and finding his first secretarial jobs in a state with some of the most repressive laws against sodomy, harshly and somewhat hypocritically enforced for the lower classes by Frederick the Great.<sup>15</sup> Although he seems to have had a long affair in the 1740s with his first private student, a modern psychologist might say that through early middle age he ferociously sublimated both his sexual appetite and his political views. But his self-censorship was not only in the interest of personal security. As he moved up in the world, and especially after he moved to Italy in 1755, he was freer to move in the sexually permissive world of the upper classes. He also behaved opportunistically: recognizing that nominal Catholicism was a paper credential for employment in Rome, he converted. Again, the threads are tangled: he converted in order to get to Rome, for Rome was where he could best pursue classical studies—but for many worldly Europeans 'Rome,' as well as 'Greek art,' already signified sexual freedom and available boys.<sup>16</sup>

Without attempting to realize—some would say to literalize or reduce—a textual reading in terms of Winckelmann's own personal and professional history, it is striking to see how division between subject and object, and between subjective and objective, figures in Winckelmann's writing about the art-historical endeavor he himself invents. This division is not just a transposition of the subjective into the objective, or of the erotic-ethical into the formal-historical, as I have so far described it, for this might imply that the one can be replaced by the other without any loss—the treatise on beautiful Greek statues perfectly translating its author's desiring of naked Italian boys. Because Winckelmann imagines an interminable oscillation between the two positions, art history is not invented *through* division; it is invented *as* division and what we might call an endless acknowledgement of loss, an interminable mourning.

In a famous passage at the very end of the *History*, Winckelmann meditates on what he calls the 'downfall' of Greek art in the late Roman empire. In the final paragraph but one, he briefly describes the last work of art to be cited in his enormous work—an illuminated manuscript page thought to date from the reign of Justinian depicting 'in front of the throne of King David two female dancers with tucked-up dresses, who hold over their heads with both hands a floating drapery.' The two dancers are 'so beautiful,' Winckelmann writes, 'that we are compelled to believe that they have been copied from an ancient picture'—that is, from a lost Classical Greek painting. Thus, he says, to the end of art history—that is, to the end of Greek art—'may be applied the remark made by Longinus of the *Odyssey*, that in it we see Homer as the setting sun; its greatness is there, but not its force.' Examining these beautiful figures—the copy of a more 'forceful' original, they are the trace of its loss—

Winckelmann says, in the last paragraph of his history, that he feels 'almost like the historian who, in narrating the history of his native land, is compelled to allude to its destruction, of which he was a witness.'

But Winckelmann does not actually indicate any specific work that the manuscript has 'copied,' although he has earlier given many examples of the relation between prototype and copy. We are, he says, just 'compelled to believe' that the page is a 'copy,' and thus the trace of a loss, only because it is itself so 'beautiful'. Its 'beauty', for us, is what compels us to see a loss in it. But why should the beautiful dancers' being a 'copy' imply that something has been lost or destroyed, when Winckelmann recommends the imitation of Classical art precisely as a *finding* or *restoration* of the beautiful? Of course, the late Roman copy may lose something because it merely copies rather than 'imitates' in more synthetic fashion. Although Winckelmann does not directly say so, perhaps he thinks the dancers do not attain the *Nachahmung* recommended in 'Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works of Art in Painting and Sculpture' (1755).<sup>17</sup> But then how could they be 'beautiful', and how could he see them as the trace of a loss, when beauty is precisely the 'imitation' and thus the finding, not the 'copying' and thus the losing, of Classical art?

Furthermore, in meditating upon the loss that explains the beauty before him, in what sense can Winckelmann be a 'witness' to the destruction of Greek art? Its 'downfall' occurred between the age of Pericles and the age of Justinian—that is, between the time of the unspecified lost prototype and the manuscript. It did not actually occur in his own time. By the same token, in what sense could Greek art—from the age of Pericles to the age of Justinian—be Winckelmann's 'native land', the 'destruction' of which he witnesses? He was born in Prussia and came no closer to Greece than the collection of antiquities in Dresden—which were badly housed in a shed constructed for the king, who had purchased many of them from Italy in the first half of the century—or the Villa Albani, with its large but eclectic assemblage of ancient sculptures of varying quality, and the temple sites of southern Italy, which he described in an essay of 1759.

Indeed, in the terms of his own metaphor what Winckelmann witnesses does not obviously amount to a loss, a 'downfall', at all. Although the sun may set, it always rises again. And although 'Odysseus'—Greek art in the age of Justinian—may have wandered far from his native land, he *does* return home: it was other heroes of the *Iliad*, in all their 'force', who left their native land of Greece to perish at Troy. It must be, then, that the late Roman manuscript is like a sun endlessly setting, without going down and without rising, or like Odysseus endlessly returning home without getting there. But what kind of a 'downfall' is it that is always such a down-falling without full presence or complete absence—as Longinus says, a 'greatness' without 'force'?

Now it would be easy to say that Winckelmann witnesses the 'downfall' of Greek art in writing his *History of Ancient Art*. As an historian, we could say, he witnesses the historical loss of the 'force' of Greek art in the stylistic transformations that he chronicles—the setting of its sun from Pericles to Justinian. And it would be easy to conclude, in parallel, that it must be in his aesthetic imagination and especially in his personal (homo)erotics that Winckelmann takes Classical Greece as his 'native land'. Thus we could say that Winckelmann, as historian, witnesses the 'downfall' of the object with

which he imaginatively identifies—‘my native land’—by chronicling it, by producing an historical narrative of its transformation from Pericles to Justinian. If he were not the *historian* of Greek art, then he could not witness its destruction—seeing Classical Greek art as something that art has historically lost.

But the matter is not so simple. In his self-conscious, supremely nuanced German, Winckelmann carefully says that as an historian he is ‘compelled to allude’ to a destruction he has *already* witnessed—just as he has been ‘compelled to believe’ that the beauty before his eyes is a copy of something that has already been lost. Therefore it is not as an historian of art that he witnesses the destruction of Greek art: rather, it is as an historian that he writes about a loss he has already witnessed. Thus it may be his witnessing of the downfall of Greek art that constitutes him as its historian, rather than the other way around. The difference is between living through the loss to become its historian, and becoming the historian of the loss to live through it. In the former case, the loss is already part of one’s own history, a loss for oneself—although as an historian one writes about the loss as having taken place in history outside and before oneself, a loss for art; the subjective loss of the object becomes the objective loss of the object. In the latter case, however, the loss is *not* part of one’s own history, for it is only a loss for art, although as an historian one makes it so, a loss for oneself: objective loss becomes subjective. If Winckelmann acknowledges two losses—a loss within art history and a loss for oneself—as well as their complementary histories, the history one witnesses and the history within which one is witnessing history, the task is to relate the two—to separate, conjoin, reduce, or transcend them.

Most modern art history can be seen as an ‘objective’ account of the history of art using Winckelmann’s instruments of periodization, stylistic criticism, iconography, historicism, and ethical valuation. This practice is founded on radically distinguishing the two fields I have identified. Within the discipline, or, more accurately, with discipline, the loss—of the sexually, ethically, and politically beautiful or desirable—is always *outside* the art historian in the history of art as such; the art historian only ‘alludes’ to what takes place in a ‘native land’ in which he does not now and probably never did reside. None the less, as Winckelmann’s nuance implies, we must identify a necessary reflexive moment in which the loss must be *within* the art historian and his history in order for him to witness the history of art as any kind of loss—for if the loss were absolute, utterly unwitnessed by the art historian in his own history, then there would be nothing of the history of art to which he could possibly ‘allude’ in the first place.

Again Winckelmann puts it carefully. In concluding his own *History* with an example of the ‘downfall’ of Greek art, he is, he says, ‘almost like’ an historian writing about a destruction he has also witnessed. Yet in assuming this position, he has, as he notes, ‘already overstepped the boundaries of the history of art’. Strictly speaking, the history of art is the history of what has been lost in, and to, history. But one does not begin an art history unless what has been lost was once not unredeemably lost in an irreducibly past history one precisely did not witness. Rather, to begin an art history the loss must be in one’s own history to be ‘witnessed’ there. It is only there that it is *being seen to be being lost*. Something happens just outside the boundary of art history,



at a horizon or place of sunseting, where the object, the history of art, is witnessed as being lost—as being evacuated of its force despite its greatness, as departing or being destroyed; and the historian, writing his art history, alludes to his witnessing of this departing of the history of art.

Winckelmann depicts this condition in the final lines of the *History* in what I take to be the founding image of the discipline—or, more precisely, what founds the ‘objective’ need for (a) discipline. ‘Compelled to believe’ that what is before him, however beautiful, is just a ‘copy’ of what has been lost, precisely because he takes it as beautiful, and ‘compelled to allude’ to his ‘native land’ being destroyed, finally he ‘cannot refrain from searching into the fate of works of art as far as my eye could reach’—and he adds, ‘just as a maiden, standing on the shore of the ocean, follows with tearful eyes her departing lover with no hope of ever seeing him again, and fancies that in the distant sail she sees the image of her beloved’. The metaphor is intricate, but Winckelmann glosses himself: ‘Like that loving maiden we too have, as it were, nothing but a shadowy outline left of the object of our wishes, but that very indistinctness awakens only a more earnest longing for what we have lost, and we study the copies of the originals more attentively than we should have done the originals themselves if we had been in full possession of them.’

According to the logic I examined a moment ago, the ‘maiden’ is not the art historian *as* art historian, the one who has just presented a history of the development of Greek art and just ended it with this metaphor about the loss he has chronicled. Rather, she is that art historian *before* beginning an art history—witnessing the loss the history of which he will then chronicle. We should notice the shift here: before beginning the art history, witnessing the loss ‘she’ is female; after writing the art history, ‘he’ is a male ‘alluding’ to the loss ‘she’ witnessed. Although it is not my main topic here, one begins to see why androgyny, hermaphroditism, and the amalgamation of gender might play an absolutely central role in Winckelmann’s objective chronicle of the history of art:<sup>18</sup> they animate Winckelmann’s own history—as a ‘she’ witnessing the downfall and loss of Classical Greek art, the sailing of ‘her’ lover, the departing to which ‘he’ will allude—in the very suspension of decision between them. Indeed, the dynamic of subjective, feminized ‘witness’ and objective, masculinized ‘allusion’ is the very mode of Winckelmann’s homosexuality (or homotextuality)—to be specific, a delayed activation and partial transposition of loss from one register to the other, a fault-line across which the observing, objective subject, male for the moment, never quite refinds the object that subjectively she never wholly lost.

If ‘she’ is Penelope, then her ‘native land’ will be destroyed because Odysseus has left it. She will be beset with false suitors like the modern arts Winckelmann deplored. But in weeping at the shore she cannot know this yet. She mourns not the destruction of her native land, which she will only be able to see as the *historian* of the loss she also witnesses, but rather the departure of her lover, whom she has ‘no hope of ever seeing again.’ The art historian—and what she desires, of course, is a man—weeps not because he is an historian but because she is a lover; indeed, he becomes an historian because she was such a lover.

As a lover, she has lost the ‘object of desire.’ The loss occurred, however, not without having seen the beloved depart and not without him seeming



to appear to her, if only as an 'image' in the 'distant sail.' That is to say, the loss preserves the possibility of writing its history as he 'searches ... as far as my eye could reach,' looking out to rediscover what she saw departing. But once become an historian, the maiden finds that the beloved has been destroyed. The image of the departing beloved—returned by the 'distant sail' to the lover-historian standing on the shore of his native land—must be the image of the death of the beautiful beloved, the black sail of the ships announcing the deaths of the Athenian boys and girls. Thus the 'maiden' on the shore is not only a Penelope mourning her loss, being constituted as the one who will write the history of her native land as it is destroyed. He is *also* the lover Theseus, who cannot accept the loss and sails off into history itself to save his native land from being destroyed. The historian begins his history in order to *prevent* the loss she has already witnessed: 'he' is Theseus, sailing off from his native land in heroic rescue, because 'she' is already Penelope, expecting never again to see Odysseus, who kept her native land alive. But if he sails off, Theseus must become just like the Odysseus mourned by Penelope—one who leaves his native land and who is only endlessly returning to it without getting there. Another maiden, of course, will guide Theseus out of his labyrinth and back to love: there is the barest hint that the widening circle of division might close, although even Ariadne must finally watch her Theseus depart.

In sum, the historian, to become a historian, remains partly behind himself, standing on the shore in his 'native land,' precisely in order to witness the departing that sets him off in the first place—at the same time as he goes partly ahead of himself, sailing away to his 'native land' from destruction, the loss she himself (if I can put it this way) will witness. What is the loss, then, but a loss of part of the self, a part that once was (and still might be) real? She witnesses his departing and thus experiences the destruction of her native land; he alludes to her witnessing, and by chronicling the destruction thus partly prevents it. But although he sails off into the chronicle to prevent the destruction, he never actually returns to her except as an image or copy, and the loss is never fully made up: her subjective 'witness' always exceeds his objective 'allusion' coming behind, too late and merely as allusion.

This might be the place to identify the 'object of desire,' as such, that Winckelmann loses. Here we would need to situate Winckelmann's 'beautiful young men'—the Classical Greek athletes naked in the Gymnasium whose loss 'she' witnesses while relaxing with Italian boys but to whom 'he' can allude in the *History* of Classical art chronicling what she has lost. The resulting divisions would require us to trace Winckelmann's inability to reconcile the time of the 'beautiful' with the time of 'freedom'; or to admit the place of 'imitation' within the unfolding of Classical art itself; or to conceive a Greece outside its afterimagining Rome, or its forerunning Egypt and sidetracking Etruria; or to conceive Classical art outside an imprint, copy, or fragment in the first place. In each context, the object of desire is the lost historical object toward which the historian moves in his allusions and the subjective object from which his very witness of loss proceeds—in this case, neither Classical Greek art as such, merely a cold and lifeless fossil, nor beautiful Italian boys as such, merely available embraces, but the image of their identity, an object in consciousness which neither real sculpture nor real boy can do anything but copy because they are always found only in the move away from or back to it.<sup>19</sup> (Of

course, this object-in-consciousness or subjective object is, itself, a repetition. But I will not pursue any particular model for this relation; it is sufficient to remind ourselves that the constitution of the object is defensive and occurs in 'defensive process' [*Abwehrvorgang*].) To excavate Winckelmann's object of desire, whatever it might be, would also be to recognize his *History* as a great and exemplary work, for it comes close, I think, to finding an objective subject that almost satisfies its subjective object—the bust of a faun gracing his apartment in the Villa Albani, an object which, I believe, integrates his subjective erotic and objective scholarly inquiries. But this identification, although it deserves further exploration, takes me in directions too particular, and perhaps too literal, for the final observations I want to make.

Instead I want to generalize beyond the identification of any particular historian's particular loss. Such losses constitute the discipline of art history just because they are the objects for its subjectivity—not the artefacts in themselves, fossils with no intrinsic status, but rather the ways of their departings from art historians. Thus T. J. Clark, for example, mourns his loss—the 'rendezvous between artistic practice and ... alternative meanings to those of capital,'<sup>20</sup> here and there or once upon a time, he imagines, actually realized—like the tradition, community, democratic society, undiluted *jouissance*, truth, or gender equality: in any case, a particular subjective loss made out to be the objective reality of history. It is not the substance of such lost objects I want to discover; they are plainly the result, as Winckelmann engagingly put it, of an 'interview with spirits.' But they all share a status as the motivating objects of any art history which is, itself, interesting or *interested*, in the strict sense: troubled, 'searching ... as far as the eyes can reach,' the 'tearful' witnessing of loss, that which 'compels' the historian's 'allusion'—or, as Freud put it, what establishes the historian's 'conviction' (*Überzeugung*) about his history-to-be-written, that is, his 'carrying-over' or 'transference' (*Übertragung*) or what I have been calling his subjective-objective 'trans-position', not the transformation of one's practice but rather the placing of it 'across' the division of positions.<sup>21</sup>

As Winckelmann's practice implies, the life of art history is the mourning of the loss of the history of art. Therefore the *death* of art history would be the loss of its life-in-mourning. But art history could not be due to loss alone. Art history requires not only the loss of its objects but also, and much more important, its witnessing of that loss—that is, our witnessing not of the loss itself, since it took place long ago, but of the fact that what has been lost is, in fact, being-lost for us. The history of art is lost, but art history is still with us; and although art history often attempts to bring the object back to life, finally it is our means of laying it to rest, of putting it in its history and taking it out of our own, where we have witnessed its departure. To have the history of art as *history*—acknowledging the irreparable loss of the objects—we must give up art history as a bringing-to-life, as denial of departure. If it is not to be pathological, art history must take its leave of its objects, for they have already departed anyway.

For many there is a dilemma here. To the extent that we acknowledge the loss of the objects, we can only have art history as a pathological not-letting-go; but to the extent that we admit our desire to mourn, we can only have the history of art as a pathological walking-of-the-dead. Do we want a

pageant of corpses revived by the historian, dead things reanimated with their supposed original ideas and passions, a ghastly puppet show—like that ‘social history of art’ on such clairvoyant terms with the agencies and intentions, politics and subjectivities of the departed? Or an echoing mausoleum of the vanished, crypts within crypts endlessly swept out by the historian forever coming across the bones—like that ‘deconstruction’ so devoted to the vacated? Ethics, treating the objects as subjects, or forensics, treating the subjects as objects?<sup>22</sup>

But the supposed dilemma is a false one. Just as the departure is not an original, irreducible one—not a departure existing before our witnessing but always a departing for us—neither is the leave-taking completely outside the departure. It is always a taking-leave of what we witness departing. Put another way, although the departing, the history of art, and the leave-taking, art history, take place at different times and in different places, they are not two different histories—the histories of art and of the art historian—but inextricably *one* history. Art history is produced under ‘the shadow of the object,’ no matter how long ago or far away, by she who witnesses its retreat within him—an on-going taking-leave of a departing.<sup>23</sup> It will not be pathological precisely so long as it does not entirely divide into two different histories, subject and object, subjective and objective. The ‘shadow of the object’ is not only the field of death for and in the subject; the object ‘also offers the ego the inducement to live’<sup>24</sup>—if I can put it paradoxically but accurately, to live *as* death.

Winckelmann could have had two different histories held utterly apart from one another—antiquarian and sodomite, let us say. But his division is reconciled—although not, of course, effaced—in the witness and allusion of his work, its on-going mourning. Indeed, he invents art history precisely because his two histories—she ‘witnessing’ and he ‘alluding’—are conjoined in him without closure, without a full restoration, through ‘his’ activity of alluding to what ‘she’ witnesses being lost. If this mourning were to cease either through the absolute subjective departure of the object or its total objective restoration, then art history could not begin or would come to an end—but art history lived in Winckelmann because in division he and she mourn unceasingly, because as division *they* are a whole.

# Patterns of Intention

## Introduction: Language and Explanation

### I. The objects of explanation: pictures considered under descriptions

We do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures—or rather, we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification. For instance, if I think or say about Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* [5] something quite primitive like 'The firm design of this picture is partly due to Piero della Francesca's recent training in Florence', I am first proposing 'firm design' as a description of one aspect of the *Baptism of Christ's* interest. Then, secondly, I am proposing a Florentine training as a cause of that kind of interest. The first phase can hardly be avoided. If I simply applied 'Florentine training' to the picture it would be unclear what I was proposing to explain; it might be attached to angels in high-waisted gowns or to tactile values or whatever you wished.

Every evolved explanation of a picture includes or implies an elaborate description of that picture. The explanation of the picture then in its turn becomes part of the larger description of the picture, a way of describing things about it that would be difficult to describe in another way. But though 'description' and 'explanation' interpenetrate each other, this should not distract us from the fact that description is the mediating object of explanation. The description consists of words and concepts in a relation with the picture, and this relation is complex and sometimes problematic. I shall limit myself to pointing—with a quite shaky finger, since this is intricate ground beyond my competence—to three kinds of problem explanatory art criticism seems to meet.

### 2. Descriptions of pictures as representations of thought about having seen pictures

There is a problem about quite what the description is of. 'Description' covers various kinds of verbal account of a thing, and while 'firm design' is a description in one sense—as, for that matter, is 'picture'—it may be considered untypically analytical and abstract. A more straightforward and very different sort of description of a picture might seem to be this:

There was a countryside and houses of a kind appropriate to peasant country-people—some larger, some smaller. Near the cottages were straight-standing cypress trees. It was not possible to see the whole of these trees, for the houses got in the way, but their tops could be seen rising above the roofs. These trees, I dare say, offered the peasant a resting-place, with the shade of their boughs and the voices of the birds joyfully perched





in them. Four men were running out of the houses, one of them calling to a lad standing near—for his right hand showed this, as if giving some instructions. Another man was turned towards the first one, as if listening to the voice of a chief. A fourth, coming a little forward from the door, holding his right hand out and carrying a stick in the other, appeared to shout something to other men toiling about a wagon. For just at that moment a wagon, fully-loaded, I cannot say whether with straw or some other burden, had left the field and was in the middle of a lane. It seemed the load had not been properly tied down. But two men were trying rather carelessly to keep it in place—one on this side, one on the other: the first was naked except for a cloth round his loins and was propping up the load with a staff; of the second one saw only the head and part of his chest, but it looked from his face as if he was holding on to the load with his hands, even though the rest of him was hidden by the cart. And as for the cart, it was not a four-wheeled one of the kind Homer spoke of, but had only two wheels: and for that reason the load was jolting about and the two dark red oxen, well-nourished and thick-necked, were much in need of helpers. A belt girded the drover's tunic to the knee and he grasped the reins in his right hand, pulling at them, and in his left hand he held a switch or stick. But he had no need to use it to make the oxen willing. He raised his voice, though, saying something encouraging to the oxen, something of a kind an ox would understand. The drover had a dog too, so as to be able to sleep himself and yet still have a sentinel. And there the dog was, running beside the oxen. This approaching wagon was near a temple: for columns indicated this, peeping over the trees...

This—the greater part of a description written by the fourth-century Greek Libanius of a picture in the Council House at Antioch—works by retailing the subject-matter of the picture's representation as if it were real. It is a natural and unstrained way of describing a representational picture, apparently less analytical and abstract than 'firm design', and one we still use. It seems calculated to enable us to visualize the picture clearly and vividly: that was the function of the literary genre of description, *ekphrasis*, in which it is a virtuoso essay. But what really is the description to be considered as representing?

It would not enable us to reproduce the picture. In spite of the lucidity with which Libanius progressively lays out its narrative elements, we could not reconstruct the picture from his description. Colour sequences, spatial relations, proportions, often left and right, and other things are lacking. What happens as we read it is surely that out of our memories, our past experience of nature and of pictures, we construct something—it is hard to say what—in our minds, and this something he stimulates us to produce feels a little like having seen a picture consistent with his description. If we all now drew our visualizations—if that is what they are—of what Libanius has described, they would differ according to our different prior experience, particularly according to which painters it made us think of, and according to our individual constructive dispositions. In fact, language is not very well equipped to offer a notation of a particular picture. It is a generalizing tool. Again, the repertory of concepts it offers for describing a plane surface bearing an array of subtly differentiated and ordered shapes and colours is rather crude and remote. Again, there is an awkwardness, at least, about dealing with a simultaneously available field—which is what a picture is—in a medium as temporally linear as language: for instance, it is difficult to avoid tendentious reordering of the picture simply by mentioning one thing before another.

But if a picture is simultaneously available in its entirety, *looking* at a picture is as temporally linear as language. Does or might a description of a picture

reproduce the act of looking at a picture? The lack of fit here is formally obvious in an incompatibility between the gait of scanning a picture and the gait of ordered words and concepts. (It may help to be clear about how our optical act is paced. When addressing a picture we get a first general sense of a whole very quickly, but this is imprecise; and, since vision is clearest and sharpest on the foveal axis of vision, we move the eye over the picture, scanning it with a succession of rapid fixations. The gait of the eye, in fact, changes in the course of inspecting an object. At first, while we are getting our bearings, it moves not only more quickly but more widely; presently it settles down to movements at a rate of something like four or five a second and shifts of something like three to five degrees—this offering the overlap of effective vision that enables coherence of registration.) Suppose the picture in Antioch were present to us as Libanius delivered his *ekphrasis*, how would the description and our optical act get along together? The description would surely be an elephantine nuisance, lumbering along at a rate of something less than a syllable an eye-movement, coming first, sometimes after half a minute, to things we had roughly registered in the first couple of seconds and made a number of more attentive visits to since. Obviously the optical act of scanning is not all there is to looking: we use our minds and our minds use concepts. But the fact remains that the progression involved in perceiving a picture is not like the progression involved in Libanius's verbal description. Within the first second or so of looking we have a sort of impression of the whole field of a picture. What follows is sharpening of detail, noting of relations, perception of orders, and so on, the sequence of optical scanning being influenced both by general scanning habits and by particular cues in the picture acting on our attention.

It would be tedious to go on in this fussy way to the other things the description cannot primarily be about, because it will be clear by now what I am trying to suggest this is best considered as representing. In fact, there are two peculiarities in Libanius's *ekphrasis* which sensitively register what I have in mind. The first is that it is written in the past tense—an acute critical move that has unfortunately fallen out of use. The second is that Libanius is freely and openly using his mind: 'These trees, *I dare say*, offered...'; '*It seemed* the load had not been properly tied down...'; 'only two wheels: and *for that reason* ...'; 'one saw only the head and part of the chest, but *it looked* from his face *as if* he was ...'; 'columns *indicated* this, peeping over the trees...'. Past tense and cerebration: what a description will tend to represent best is thought after seeing a picture.

In fact, Libanius's description of subject-matter is not the sort of description one is typically involved with when explaining pictures: I used it partly to avoid a charge of taking 'description' in a tendentiously technical sense, partly to let a point or two emerge. The sort of description I shall be concerned with is much more like 'The design is firm', and it too can be linearly quite long. Here is an excellent passage from Kenneth Clark's account of Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ*, in which he develops an analysis of a quality which might be one constituent of 'firm design':

... we are at once conscious of a geometric framework; and a few seconds' analysis shows us that it is divided into thirds horizontally, and into quarters vertically. The horizontal divisions come, of course, on the line of the Dove's wings and the line of angels' hands, Christ's loin-cloth and the Baptist's left hand; the vertical divisions are the pink angel's



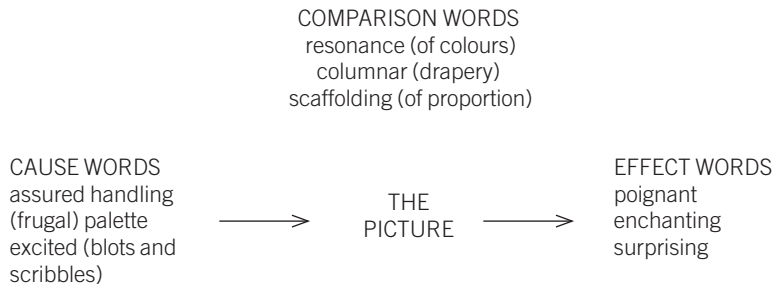
columnar drapery, the central line of the Christ and the back of St. John. These divisions form a central square, which is again divided into thirds and quarters, and a triangle drawn within this square, having its apex at the Dove and its base at the lower horizontal, gives the central motive of the design.

Here it is clearer than with Libanius's description that the words are representing less the picture than thought after seeing the picture.

There is much to be said, if one wants to match words and concepts with the visual interest of pictures, for both being and making clear—as Libanius and Kenneth Clark make clear—that what one offers in a description is a representation of thinking about a picture more than a representation of a picture. And to say we 'explain a picture as covered by a description' can conveniently be seen as another way of saying that we explain, first, thoughts we have had about the picture, and only secondarily the picture.

### 3. Three kinds of descriptive word

'...*about* the picture' is the proper way to put it. The second area of problem is that so many of the thoughts we will want to explain are indirect, in the sense that they are not pointed quite directly at the picture—considered, at least, as a physical object (which is not how, in the end, we will consider it). Most of the better things we can think or say about pictures stand in a slightly peripheral relation to the picture itself. This can be illustrated by taking and sorting a few words from Kenneth Clark's pages on Piero's *Baptism of Christ*:



One type of term, those on the right, refers to the effect of the picture on the beholder: *poignant* and so on. And indeed it is usually precisely the effect of the picture we are really concerned with: it has to be. But terms of this type tend to be a little soft and we sometimes frame our sense of the effect in secondarily indirect ways. One way is by making a comparison, often by metaphor, as in the type at the top: *resonance* of colour and so on. (One especially bulky sort of comparison, which we tend to work very hard with representational paintings, is to refer to the colours and patterns on the picture surface as if they were the things they are representing, as in Libanius.) And then there is a third type, that on the left. Here we describe the effect of the picture on us by telling of inferences we have made about the action or process that might have led to the picture being as it is: assured *handling*, of a frugal *palette*, *excited* blots and scribbles. Awareness that the picture's having an effect on us is the product of human action seems to lie deep in our thinking and talking

about pictures—so the arrows in the diagram—and what we are doing when we attempt a historical explanation of a picture is to try developing this kind of thought.

We have to use concepts of these indirect or peripheral kinds. If we confined ourselves to terms that referred directly or centrally to the physical object we would be confined to concepts like *large, flat, pigments on a panel, red and yellow and blue* (though there are complications about these), perhaps *image*. We would find it hard to locate the sort of interest the picture really has for us. We talk and think ‘off’ the object rather as an astronomer looks ‘off’ a star, because acuity or sharpness are greater away from the centre. And the three principal indirect moods of our language—speaking directly of the effect on us, making comparisons with things whose effect on us is of a similar quality, making inferences about the process which would produce an object having such an effect on us—seem to correspond to three modes of thinking about a picture, which we treat as something more than a physical object. Implicitly we treat it as something with a history of making by a painter and a reality of reception by beholders.

Of course, as soon as such concepts become part of a larger pattern, sustained thinking or sustained discourse—over a couple of pages in a book in this case—things become more complicated and less crisp. One type of thinking is subordinated to another in the hierarchy of syntax. Ambiguities or confluences of type develop, between the inferential and the comparative, in particular. There are shifts in the actual reference of terms.... But an indirectness of mood and thought remains in a complex weave. And when I applied the thought ‘firm design’ to the *Baptism of Christ* it was a thought that involved an inference about cause. It described the picture by speculating about the quality of the process that led to it being an object of a kind to make that impression on me that it does. ‘Firm design’ would go on the left-hand side of the diagram. In fact, I was deriving one cause of the picture, ‘firm design’, from another less proximate cause, ‘Florentine training’.

But it may be objected that to say that a concept like ‘design’ involves an element of inference about cause begs various questions about the actual operation of words. In particular, is one perhaps confusing the sense of the word, the range of its possible meanings, with its reference or denotation in the particular case? ‘Design’ has a rich gamut of sense:

Mental plan; scheme of attack; purpose; end in view; adaptation of means to ends; preliminary sketch for picture etc.; delineation, pattern; artistic or literary groundwork, general idea, construction, plot, faculty of evolving these, invention.

If I use the concept ‘design’ I do not normally use it in all these senses at once. If I used it of a picture in a more unqualified way—as in ‘I do like the design of this picture’—surely I would be shedding for the moment that part of its sense that lies in the process of making the picture and referring to a quality more intrinsic to the marks on the panel—‘pattern’ rather than ‘drawing’ or ‘purposing’ or ‘planning’? In its finished reference this may be so: I would be entitled to expect you to take it, for the purpose of criticism, in that more limited sense. But in arriving at it, I and you and the word would have been coming from the left of the field, so to speak: there are leftist and centrist uses of ‘design’ in current and frequent use, but if we pick on the centrist

denotation we have been active on the left at least to the extent of shelving its meanings. In semantics the colouring of a word used in one sense by other current senses is sometimes called 'reflected' meaning; in normal language it is not powerful. A better term for what happens with words and concepts matched with pictures—not at all a normal use of language—might be 'rejected' meaning, and one reason for its importance brings us to the third area of problem.

#### 4. The ostensivity of critical description

Absolutely 'design' and indeed 'firm' are very broad concepts. I could plausibly say either of Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* [4] or of Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*—'The design is firm'. The terms are general enough to embrace a quality in two very different objects; and, supposing you had no idea what the pictures looked like, they would tell you little that would enable you to visualize the pictures. 'Design' is not a geometrical entity like 'cube' or a precise chemical entity like 'water', and 'firm' is not a quantity expressible numerically. But in an art-critical description one is using the terms not absolutely; one is using them in tandem with the object, the instance. Moreover one is using them not informatively but demonstratively. In fact, the words and concepts one may wish to handle as a mediating 'description' of the picture are not in any normal sense descriptive. What is determining for them is that, in art criticism or art history, the object is present or available—really, or in reproduction, or in memory, or (more remotely) as a rough visualization derived from knowledge of other objects of the same class.

This has not always been so to the degree it now is so: the history of art criticism in the last five hundred years has seen an accelerating shift from discourse designed to work with the object unavailable, to discourse assuming at least a reproduced presence of the object. In the sixteenth century Vasari assumes no more than a generic acquaintance with most of the pictures he deals with; in particular, his celebrated and strange descriptions are often calculated to evoke the character of works not known to the reader. By the eighteenth century an almost disabling ambivalence had developed on this point. Lessing cannily worked with an object, the Laocoon group, that most of his readers would have known, as he only did himself, from engravings or replicas. Diderot, on the other hand, nominally writing for someone not in Paris, actually seems never to be clear whether or not his reader has been to the Salon he is discussing, and this is one reason for the difficulty of his criticism. By 1800 the great Fiorillo was adding footnotes to his books specifying the makers of the best engravings after the pictures he is discussing and he tends to concentrate on what can be seen in them. In the nineteenth century books were increasingly illustrated with engravings and eventually half-tones, and with Wölfflin, notoriously, art-critical discourse begins to be directed at a pair of black-and-white diapositive projections. We now assume the presence or availability of the object, and this has great consequences for the workings of our language.

In everyday life if I offer a remark like 'The dog is big', the intention and effect will depend a great deal on whether or not that dog is present or known to my hearers. If it is not, the 'big'—which, in the context of dogs, has a lim-

ited range of meaning—is likely to be primarily a matter of information about the dog; it is big, they learn, rather than small or middle-sized. But if it is present—if it is standing before us as I talk—then ‘big’ is more a matter of my proposing a kind of interest to be found in the dog: it is *interestingly* big, I am suggesting. I have used ‘dog’ to point verbally to an object and ‘big’ to characterize the interest I find in it.

If I say of a picture, present or reproduced or remembered, ‘The design is firm’, the remark’s force is rather specialized. What I am doing is not to inform, but to point to an aspect of its interest, as I see it. The act is one of demonstration: with ‘design’ I direct attention to one element in the picture and with ‘firm’ I propose a characterization of it. I am suggesting that the concept ‘firm design’ be matched with the interest of the picture. You may follow my prompting or not; and if you do follow my prompting you may agree or disagree.

So I am making two points here. As a verbalized proxy for the quality in Piero’s *Baptism of Christ*, ‘firm design’ would mean little; but by its reference to the instance it takes on more precise meaning. Since my remark about Piero’s picture is an act not of information but of demonstration in its presence, its meaning is largely ostensive: that is, it depends on both myself and my hearers supplying precision to it by reciprocal reference between the word and the object. And this is the texture of the verbal ‘description’ that is the mediating object of any explanation we may attempt. It is an alarmingly mobile and fragile object of explanation.

However it is also excitingly flexible and alive, and our disposition to move around in the space offered by the words is an energetic and muscular one. Suppose I use of the *Baptism of Christ* this sentence: ‘The design is firm because the design is firm.’ This is circular nonsense, in a way, but to a surprising extent we have the will to get meaning out of people’s statements. In fact, if you leave people for a minute with this sentence *and the picture*, some of them will begin to find a meaning in it—working from an assumption that if someone says something he intends a meaning, from the space within the words, and from the structural cue offered by the word ‘because’. And what some of them move towards is a meaning that could be caricatured as: ‘The [pattern] is firm because the [planning/drawing] is firm.’ Within the gamut of senses of ‘design’ they find references differentiated enough to set against each other: and, working from ‘because’, they derive the less causally suggestive from the more causally suggestive—the more centred from the more left. At the same time they must have shaded the two appearances of ‘firm’ differently too.

But the present point is that the ostensive working of our terms is going to make the object of explanation odd. We explain the picture as pointed up by a selective verbal description which is primarily a representation of our thoughts about it. This description is made up of words, generalizing instruments, that are not only often indirect—inferring causes, characterizing effects, making various kinds of comparison—but take on the meaning we shall actually use only in their reciprocal relation with the picture itself, a particular. And behind this lies a will to remark on an interest in the picture.

## 5. Summary

If we wish to explain pictures, in the sense of expounding them in terms of their historical causes, what we actually explain seems likely to be not the unmediated picture but the picture as considered under a partially interpretative description. This description is an untidy and lively affair.

Firstly, the nature of language or serial conceptualization means that the description is less a representation of the picture, or even a representation of seeing the picture, than a representation of thinking about having seen the picture. To put it in another way, we address a relationship between picture and concepts.

Secondly, many of the more powerful terms in the description will be a little indirect, in that they refer first not to the physical picture itself but to the effect the picture has on us, or to other things that would have a comparable effect on us, or to inferred causes of an object that would have such an effect on us as the picture does. The last of these is particularly to the point. On the one hand, that such a process penetrates our language so deeply does suggest that causal explanation cannot be avoided and so bears thinking about. On the other, one may want to be alert to the fact that the description which, seen schematically, will be part of the object of explanation already embodies preemptively explanatory elements—such as the concept of ‘design’.

Thirdly, the description has only the most general independent meaning and depends for such precision as it has on the presence of the picture. It works demonstratively—we are pointing to interest—and ostensibly, taking its meaning from reciprocal reference, a sharpening to-and-fro, between itself and the particular.

These are general facts of language that become prominent in art criticism, a heroically exposed use of language, and they have (it seems to me) radical implications for how one can explain pictures—or, rather, for what it is we are doing when we follow our instinct to attempt to explain pictures.

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# Aesthetics

## Introduction

What kind of knowledge do works of art actually provide? Is it different from other forms of thought? And what kind of knowledge is provided by constructing ‘histories’ of such phenomena?

Although the notion of ‘sensory’ knowledge as inferior to ‘rational’ thought had a long tradition in European theology, philosophy, and psychology (a tradition still alive), in the middle of the eighteenth century an argument began to be made that sensory knowledge had a perfection of its own, which in its way was analogous to that of logic or ‘reason’. It came to be argued that there were in fact *two* distinct and *analogous* kinds of knowing, and that in consequence there should be two kinds of theory or ‘sciences’ of knowledge corresponding to each: logic and *aesthetics*.

The first notable appearance of the term of aesthetics approximating its modern sense was as the title of a 600-page book written in Latin by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the *Aesthetica*.<sup>1</sup> It was coined to denote a special cognitive domain of sensual thinking, which he argued was distinct from rational or logical thought: truth as known through the senses. Baumgarten argued that sensible knowledge was a faculty of mind that he termed an *analogon rationis*—an *analogue* of reason and a unique mode of reasoning in its own right. In this he differed from the views of philosophers of a previous generation such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) or his disciple Christian Wolff (1679–1754), who held that the difference between sensation and thought was that the latter was lucid whereas the former was confused, and that moreover the latter cannot be made lucid without transforming it into thought (and by implication, into systematic discourse). In other words, as a ‘lower’ mode of cognition, sensation was taken to be but a primitive or preliminary stage of the same knowledge imagined to be represented most clearly by rational or logical thought. Baumgarten argued against any such hierarchalizing of modes of thinking, and went on to consider what the nature of beauty and fine art might be within the framework of a *non*-hierarchized cognition.

Several things were at stake here, not least being the canonical idea of art’s function as that of *mimesis* or the imitation of nature—a paradigm that underlay attitudes toward art down to and including Baumgarten’s contemporary, Winckelmann. The perception of beauty, for Baumgarten, involved the perception of perfection in things and in people (the latter constituting moral perfection). We conceive of such beauty not rationally but by *taste*—by



which was meant *extremely clear sense perception*. In these terms, the fine arts were analogous to fine sciences: their aim was not to ‘imitate’ nature (even in its most perfect examples) but rather to create perfect wholes out of indistinct images made extremely clear; in short, to create sensory knowledge.

One of the results of these innovations was the idea that sense perception could be perfected without turning it into (translating it in and by) logical or rational thought. The idea that sensory knowledge could have its own perfection—and, further, that an ‘aesthetic judgement’ about beauty or beautiful objects could have a validity for persons other than the individual artist making it—became the cornerstone of aesthetic philosophy as it was to develop in the latter half of the eighteenth century: the foundation and immediate background to the *Critique of Judgment* by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), published in 1790, excerpted here.<sup>2</sup>

Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (‘critique’ in the sense of analytic discernment rather than of criticism, and ‘judgement’ as the ability to judge) was divided into two interrelated sections. The first dealt with ‘Aesthetic Judgement’, and was devoted to the ability to make individual judgements about beauty on art and nature—that is, judgements of taste (a second part of this dealt with judgements about the ‘sublime’). The second section was devoted to ‘Teleological Judgement’, on the discernment of final causes or of the purposiveness in things.

In the ‘Aesthetic Judgement’, Kant addressed the following problem. In using the term ‘beautiful’ in speaking of natural or human objects, it is commonly assumed that beauty is a property or characteristic of the thing itself—and that, by extension, others should be able to confirm our judgement. What, then, is the nature of the perception of such properties in or of things? Are such aesthetic pleasures purely subjective or intersubjective or even universal? Kant argued that the judgement of taste (the ability to make such judgements) was universal, in contrast to judgements about what was merely agreed upon by individuals: ‘gathering votes and asking other people what kind of sensation they are having’, he argued, cannot account for the fact that judgements of taste are universal.

In trying to understand why such judgements of taste should be universal, Kant argued roughly as follows. The feeling involved in all judgements of taste is connected to two things: *theoretical knowledge*, knowledge of how things are, and *morality*, knowledge of how things ought to be. Nature was taken as having a ‘final cause’ or purposiveness which can be discerned through the faculty of aesthetic thinking, which goes beyond all (rational) concepts by creating intuitions about nature that transcend what is immediately perceptible. As with nature, so with art: judging artworks, Kant argued, is equivalent to judging the purposiveness of nature: in both cases we judge in terms of beauty, whether natural or artistic. Implications for the confluence and concordance of art and religion, and of a theological substrate in Western art historical thought (addressed more directly in the Coda at the end of this volume) may begin to emerge in Kant’s arguments.

Closely tied to aesthetic judgement is Kant’s concept of *genius*, which was a measure of the quality of an artwork and a *sign* of the degree of its purposiveness: genius as a great capacity for aesthetic thinking. Works of fine art are judged on the basis of *how much* genius they manifest. Nature is judged, as a

whole, as a system of purposes; on the basis of how its purposiveness is manifested in its appearance. Kant's interest in the aesthetic and in understanding what is at stake in judgments of taste in the beauty of artworks is thus essentially an interest in understanding how the knowledge and appreciation of art reflects, or is an analogue of, our appreciation of the purposiveness of nature. In this he may be as much allied with the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century as he was with the classical rationalists of the Enlightenment, for the *Critique of Judgement* suggested analogies between the artist-genius and the presumptive source of the purposiveness of the universe—the world itself (all of 'creation') as the (material) artefact of a(n immaterial or) divine Artificer; as, in short, 'designed' by a divine 'intelligence'.

At the same time, Kant was interested in understanding the sublime, and in understanding the Baroque as a great project of the imagination—the project that Winckelmann earlier shunned in his writings in favour of an idealist classicism. What distinguished Kant from Winckelmann with regard to notions of taste and beauty was his willingness to explore beyond or outside the boundaries and canons of 'good taste'. Against classical rationalism, he argued that what is beautiful is not merely the material image of some singular inner truth or rational essence in nature, but is related to a freedom of the imagination that constitutes the defining characteristic of humanity as a finite creature capable of thinking of the infinite. An aesthetics of the well-wrought would be far removed from what Kant regarded as true genius.

Kant's *Critique* appeared over two decades after Winckelmann's death. Although an earlier perspective on these issues<sup>3</sup> was published by Kant the same year as Winckelmann's *History* (1764), it is not clear whether Winckelmann was aware of Kant's work. From the later perspective of the *Critique*, a Winckelmannian classical rationalism would have probably seemed out of step with the new philosophy of aesthetics already pioneered by Baumgarten at the time that Winckelmann's own writing was beginning, in mid-century. It would have seemed to hark back to the old hierarchized notions of sensate knowledge as inferior to the ideals of rationality—ideas that could only have been compatible with an ideology grounded in a *singular* criterion or ideal of beauty.

In effect, Kant relativized notions of beauty, opening up the possibility of multiple coexisting aesthetic systems, united by the pan-human power or ability to make aesthetic judgements. Such a notion would have been foreign to Winckelmann (despite his own ultimate relativization or historicization of his beloved Greek ideal), but Kant appears to have accepted this as a challenge to understanding the problem of the apparent universality of the human capacity for aesthetic judgement. What distinguished Kant from Winckelmann was the former's understanding of Enlightenment, which he linked to his 'aesthetic conception of the public sphere as an intersubjective space of free discussion not mediated by a concept or a rule'.<sup>4</sup>

For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), the notion of the *symbol* played a central role in his philosophy of art, which is known particularly from his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts* of 1832–8, originally delivered four times between 1820 and 1830 at the University of Berlin.<sup>5</sup> Hegel's history of philosophy was constructed by analogy with his ideas regarding the historical development of art.

His notion of art was strikingly less complex or subtle than those which had developed in the aesthetic philosophy of the latter half of the eighteenth century, in that he regarded art as a secondary or surface phenomenon: as the presentation of common ('inner') ideas in diverse ('outer') sensual forms—thus returning to a pre-Baumgarten and pre-Kantian ideology privileging the Ideal or Thought by devalorizing visual knowledge, relegating it once again to a realm of confused intelligibility or primitive rationality. Art becomes for Hegel merely the *vehicle* or dependent medium of thought: its external form or shape: the *signifier*-form of a *signified*-content.

In this regard, and in contrast to Baumgarten and Kant, Hegel's interest in the aesthetic was confined to works of art, and not to the perception of art or of the beautiful as such, which might be manifest in artefacts generally, as well as in nature. The aesthetic sphere—now simply art—was for Hegel a symbolic medium whose principal function was to *represent and articulate spirit or divinity* in material form. Thus seen as a handmaid of religion, art shares with it the same subject matter, but whereas for Kant the aesthetic and the rational were distinct modes of knowing or epistemological technologies, for Hegel the aesthetic was but a debased reflection of the intelligible.

Hegel's counter-revolution (and resuscitation of earlier, pre-Kantian and pre-Baumgarten, philosophical perspectives, as expressed notably in the work of Leibniz) was linked to conventional concerns with promulgating a divine point of view in relationship to the works of mankind. He termed his meditations a 'theodicy' seeking to articulate the entirety of history as a narrative *process* of the unfolding of a divine idea in the (sensory, and, for Hegel, illusory) temporality of artistic change. Within the logic of this essentially theological rhetoric, this 'divine idea' (conjuring up one of its most ancient antecedents, the Platonic theory of Ideal Forms) is unchanging and immutable, whereas its changing 'representations' over time are but the confused ways in which 'mortal' beings attempt to grasp the 'immortal' and presumably unchanging singularity of divine perfection.

Although his ideas resonate with those of Winckelmann (for whom the visual arts were the means by which a culture's essential ideas were expressed and communicated), the resonance is primarily *structural*: for Hegel, the content of this epistemological paradigm is different and more focused upon the 'most essential' of a culture's essential ideas, which in his case are its ideas about 'divinity'. This allowed Hegel to compare and contrast peoples and cultures in an explicitly *evolutionary* manner, as palpable historical stages in the development of ideas about divinity, from the primitive to the sophisticated. His early nineteenth-century theodicy in effect revived traditional (Christian) religious ideology as the fulfilment of earlier partial or incomplete understandings of divinity onto a cosmic evolutionary pageant wherein the art of a people could be made legible as symbolic, metaphorical, and indexical with respect to its 'essential' concepts of the divine. The visible is made legible as representing episodes in a historical novel: the story of the growth and evolution of the idea of the spirit. What is clearly articulated in his *Lectures* is a theory of art as not merely historical but evolutionary and teleological; artistry as marking the evolution of ideas about divinity. All of which has its apex and culmination, unsurprisingly, in Hegel's vision of a north-western European Protestant vision of the Christian vision of the monotheist vision of a theist

idea of divinity. Art necessarily ‘ends’ for Hegel by its modern dissolution and absorption into religion; into a teleological spirituality (epitomized for him by the Protestant Reformation of Christianity) in no need of material representations.

At the same time, Hegel’s *Lectures* served equally as providing a methodical outline of the ways in which European (Christian) cultures and their antecedents both in Greece and Rome could be succinctly and definitively contrasted with those of the Near and Far East, as well as with the peoples, societies, and cultures of all other regions of the world—an endeavour very much in European consciousness since the time of European exploration, colonization, appropriation, and ongoing assimilation of other cultures beginning in the sixteenth century and still proceeding at full pace in Hegel’s own time. Europe’s self-fashioning as not only the ‘brain of the earth’s body’, but the apex of human spiritual evolution, is materially demonstrated by its art. Europe’s exterior is its (spiritual) prologue. To leave Europe would be to enter the *past*—the past as prologue to (Christian) European technological, cultural, aesthetic, and (above all) spiritual superiority.

What are the implications of Hegel’s theodicy for an understanding of the modern discipline of art history? His work contrasted not only with that of his recent predecessors in aesthetic philosophy—notably Baumgarten, Winckelmann, and most recently Kant—but also with Vasari (Chapter 1). As both a theorist and a practising artist, Vasari saw the history of artistic precedent as the unfolding of an intrinsic formal logic legible in the comparison and contrast of artworks of different times and places. This evolution culminated in the work of Vasari’s own artistic contemporary Michelangelo. But it may readily be imagined how a Hegelian perspective on the fine arts as the expression or representation of some deeper ideal (spiritual, cultural; personal or collective, etc.) would have proved remarkably suitable to the formation of a systematic discipline (or ‘science’) of art history in the decade following Hegel’s death. Such an interpretative field of knowledge production would of course find ready service in imagining and staging the histories of the nascent European states of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as of all other nations, empires, peoples, and cultures.

It would also provide a persuasive model and a powerful catalyst for organizing systematic art historical enquiry as a universal domain of historical knowledge production, potentially applicable to all times, places, and cultures: a more or less secularized version of Hegel’s theodicy, in which the *idea* of art itself (or of humanity, ethnicity, race, nationality, etc.) could be articulated as an evolutionary historical pageant (a secular teleology) from antiquity to the present.

The two final texts complement those of Kant and Hegel and bring the modern discourse on aesthetics into a contemporary critical framework: D. N. Rodowick’s ‘Impure Mimesis, or the Ends of the Aesthetic’, from Peter Brunette and David Wills (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture* (1994), and William Pietz’s ‘Fetish’, from Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (2003).

The former introduces Jacques Derrida’s critical reading of Kant’s idealist aesthetics and its ambivalent social, political, and institutional implications through an explication of key Derridean texts: his 1975 essay ‘Economic mimesis’,

and his widely influential 1978 book *La Vérité en peinture* (*The Truth in Painting*, 1987; an excerpt from which is included below in Chapter 6). Rodowick argues that Derrida's exhaustive reading of Kant was an interrogation of the ways in which the *idea* of the aesthetic emerged historically as a specific subfield of modern philosophy, creating a dilemma that Kant's *Critique of Judgement* was ostensibly designed to resolve (binarisms of subject vs. object, mind vs. nature, etc.). Rodowick foregrounds the theological subtext of the Kantian discourse on the arts in his discussion of Derrida's 'Economimesis' essay, which argued that it was a 'divine teleology' grounded the fine arts (a point particularly apt also in the discussion of Hegel's 'theodicy' above), effectively enshrining the artist as the exemplar of divine agency in the figure of Genius.<sup>6</sup>

The essay by William Pietz excerpted here will serve to historically and culturally contextualize the modern discourse on the arts, and in particular the enlightenment discourse on aesthetics, as inextricably linked to a Eurocentric perspective on the (debased) morality of the European Other. As he succinctly puts it, '[Kant's *Critique of Judgement* was] a solution to the problem of fetishism: the aesthetic faculty of a self-critical mind, for Kant, is one able to distinguish within sensuous experience between the purposiveness of its own subjectivity and the objective purposes found in natural teleological systems such as biological organisms.' The enlightened mind, he argued, was one that recognized a distinct faculty of aesthetic judgement; the unenlightened fetishist's lack of capacity for disinterested aesthetic judgement was a proof of an incapacity for moral autonomy and true freedom.

As Pietz makes quite clear, the Kantian linkage of such aesthetic discernment to moral and cognitive capacities was itself linked to ancient European philosophical traditions, represented most explicitly in Aristotle's definitions of what distinguished the properly human, namely art itself. These are issues explored in more detail below in Chapter 4 (especially in Claire Farago's 2002 essay 'Silent Moves: On Excluding the Ethnographic Subject from the Discourse on Art History').

The references in the two final essays of this chapter comprise a wide-ranging and diverse set of resources for understanding the historical contexts of the idea of aesthetics both in and out of art history. All the selected readings in this chapter provide a good overview both of what was at stake in the Kantian revolution of aesthetic philosophy and the Hegelian counter-revolutionary attempt to recast aesthetics in a pre-Kantian, theologically contingent framework. The primary sources and the best translations are cited in the Notes. The literature on Kant and Hegel is truly enormous, and summarizing it here would serve little practical purpose. Instead, I've listed a few texts which may be especially useful in understanding the backgrounds of eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy and its Hegelian aftermaths.

Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, translated by F. C. A. Koellin and J. P. Pettigrew (Princeton, 1951, originally published as *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, Tübingen, 1932), is a widely influential, early twentieth-century reinterpretation of that period. Donald W. Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison, 1974) is a detailed and methodical analysis of the *Critique of Judgement*. Moshe Barash's *Modern Theories of Art, i: From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (New York, 1990) is a useful synopsis of the work of many

philosophers, historians, and critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its passages on Winckelmann, Baumgarten, Kant, and Hegel are well written. In addition to the excellent introductory sections of Werner Pluhar's 1987 translation of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, cited here, another book also cited, Luc Ferry's *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, is an especially lucid discussion of Kant and Hegel, especially chapters 3 ('The Kantian Moment: The Subject of Reflection') and 4 ('The Hegelian Moment: The Absolute Subject and the Death of Art').

An essential earlier overview of Kant's *Critique* is Gilles Deleuze's *La Philosophie critique de Kant* (Paris, 1963), in translation as *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis, 1984); and see also the 1975 and 1978 texts by Derrida cited above.



# The Critique of Judgement

### III. The Critique of Judgement as a means of connecting the two parts of Philosophy in a whole

The Critique which deals with what our cognitive faculties are capable of yielding *a priori* has properly speaking no realm in respect of Objects; for it is not a doctrine, its sole business being to investigate whether, having regard to the general bearings of our faculties, a doctrine is possible by their means, and if so, how. Its field extends to all their pretensions, with a view to confining them within their legitimate bounds. But what is shut out of the division of Philosophy may still be admitted as a principal part into the general Critique of our faculty of pure cognition, in the event, namely, of its containing principles which are not in themselves available either for theoretical or practical employment.

Concepts of nature contain the ground of all theoretical cognition *a priori* and rest, as we saw, upon the legislative authority of understanding.—The concept of freedom contains the ground of all sensuously unconditioned practical precepts *a priori*, and rests upon that of reason. Both faculties, therefore, besides their application in point of logical form to principles of whatever origin, have, in addition, their own peculiar jurisdiction in the matter of their content, and so, there being no further (*a priori*) jurisdiction above them, the division of Philosophy into theoretical and practical is justified.

But there is still further in the family of our higher cognitive faculties a middle term between understanding and reason. This is *judgement*, of which we may reasonably presume by analogy that it may likewise contain, if not a special authority to prescribe laws, still a principle peculiar to itself upon which laws are sought, although one merely subjective *a priori*. This principle, even if it has no field of objects appropriate to it as its realm, may still have some territory or other with a certain character, for which just this very principle alone may be valid.

But in addition to the above considerations there is yet (to judge by analogy) a further ground, upon which judgement may be brought into line with another arrangement of our powers of representation, and one that appears to be of even greater importance than that of its kinship with the family of cognitive faculties. For all faculties of the soul, or capacities, are reducible to three, which do not admit of any further derivation from a common ground: the *faculty of knowledge*, the *feeling of pleasure or displeasure*, and the *faculty of desire*.<sup>1</sup> For the faculty of cognition understanding alone is legislative, if (as must be the case where it is considered on its own account free of confusion with the faculty of desire) this faculty, as that of *theoretical cognition*, is referred to nature, in respect of which alone (as phenomenon) it is possible for us to prescribe laws by means of *a priori* concepts of nature, which are properly pure concepts of understanding.—For the faculty of desire, as a higher faculty operating under the concept of freedom, only reason (in which alone this

concept has a place) prescribes laws *a priori*.—Now between the faculties of knowledge and desire stands the feeling of pleasure, just as judgement is intermediate between understanding and reason. Hence we may, provisionally at least, assume that judgement likewise contains an *a priori* principle of its own, and that, since pleasure or displeasure is necessarily combined with the faculty of desire (be it antecedent to its principle, as with the lower desires, or, as with the higher, only supervening upon its determination by the moral law), it will effect a transition from the faculty of pure knowledge, i.e. from the realm of concepts of nature, to that of the concept of freedom, just as in its logical employment it makes possible the transition from understanding to reason.

Hence, despite the fact of Philosophy being only divisible into two principal parts, the theoretical and the practical, and despite the fact of all that we may have to say of the special principles of judgement having to be assigned to its theoretical part, i.e. to rational cognition according to concepts of nature: still the Critique of pure reason, which must settle this whole question before the above system is taken in hand, so as to substantiate its possibility, consists of three parts: the Critique of pure understanding, of pure judgement, and of pure reason, which faculties are called pure on the ground of their being legislative *a priori*.

#### IV. Judgement as a Faculty by which Laws are prescribed *a priori*

Judgement in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, or law) is given, then the judgement which subsumes the particular under it is *determinant*. This is so even where such a judgement is transcendental and, as such, provides the conditions *a priori* in conformity with which alone subsumption under that universal can be effected. If, however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgement is simply *reflective*.

The determinant judgement determines under universal transcendental laws furnished by understanding and is subsumptive only; the law is marked out for it *a priori*, and it has no need to devise a law for its own guidance to enable it to subordinate the particular in nature to the universal.—But there are such manifold forms of nature, so many modifications, as it were, of the universal transcendental concepts of nature, left undetermined by the laws furnished by pure understanding *a priori* as above mentioned, and for the reason that these laws only touch the general possibility of a nature, (as an object of sense), that there must needs also be laws in this behalf. These laws, being empirical, may be contingent as far as the light of *our* understanding goes, but still, if they are to be called laws, (as the concept of a nature requires), they must be regarded as necessary on a principle, unknown though it be to us, of the unity of the manifold.—The reflective judgement which is compelled to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal, stands, therefore, in need of a principle. This principle it cannot borrow from experience, because what it has to do is to establish just the unity of all empirical principles under higher, though likewise empirical, principles, and thence the possibility of the systematic subordination of higher and lower. Such a transcendental principle, therefore, the reflective judgement can only give as a law from and to itself. It cannot derive it from any other quarter (as it would then be a deter-

minant judgement). Nor can it prescribe it to nature, for reflection on the laws of nature adjusts itself to nature, and not nature to the conditions according to which we strive to obtain a concept of it,—a concept that is quite contingent in respect of these conditions.

Now the principle sought can only be this: as universal laws of nature have their ground in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature (though only according to the universal concept of it as nature), particular empirical laws must be regarded, in respect of that which is left undetermined in them by these universal laws, according to a unity such as they would have if an understanding (though it be not ours) had supplied them for the benefit of our cognitive faculties, so as to render possible a system of experience according to particular natural laws. This is not to be taken as implying that such an understanding must be actually assumed, (for it is only the reflective judgement which avails itself of this idea as a principle for the purpose of reflection and not for determining anything); but this faculty rather gives by this means a law to itself alone and not to nature.

Now the concept of an Object, so far as it contains at the same time the ground of the actuality of this Object, is called its *end*, and the agreement of a thing with that constitution of things which is only possible according to ends, is called the *finality* of its form. Accordingly the principle of judgement, in respect of the form of the things of nature under empirical laws generally, is the *finality of nature* in its multiplicity. In other words, by this concept nature is represented as if an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the manifold of its empirical laws.

The finality of nature is, therefore, a particular *a priori* concept, which has its origin solely in the reflective judgement. For we cannot ascribe to the products of nature anything like a reference of nature in them to ends, but we can only make use of this concept to reflect upon them in respect of the nexus of phenomena in nature—a nexus given according to empirical laws. Furthermore, this concept is entirely different from practical finality (in human art or even morals), though it is doubtless thought after this analogy. [...]

## **PART I. Critique of Aesthetic Judgement**

### **First Section Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement**

#### **First Book Analytic of the Beautiful**

#### **First Moment of the Judgement of Taste<sup>2</sup>: Moment of Quality**

##### **§ 1 The judgement of taste is aesthetic**

If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the Object by means of understanding with a view to cognition, but by means of the imagination (acting perhaps in conjunction with understanding) we refer the representation to the Subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure. The judgement of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgement, and so not logical, but is aesthetic—which means that it is one whose determining ground *cannot be other than subjective*. Every reference of representations is capable of being objective, even that of sensations (in which case it signifies the real in an empirical representation). The one exception to this is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. This denotes nothing in

the object, but is a feeling which the Subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation.

To apprehend a regular and appropriate building with one's cognitive faculties, be the mode of representation clear or confused, is quite a different thing from being conscious of this representation with an accompanying sensation of delight. Here the representation is referred wholly to the Subject, and what is more to its feeling of life—under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure—and this forms the basis of a quite separate faculty of discriminating and estimating, that contributes nothing to knowledge. All it does is to compare the given representation in the Subject with the entire faculty of representations of which the mind is conscious in the feeling of its state. Given representations in a judgement may be empirical, and so aesthetic; but the judgement which is pronounced by their means is logical, provided it refers them to the Object. Conversely, be the given representations even rational, but referred in a judgement solely to the Subject (to its feeling), they are always to that extent aesthetic.

## § 2 The delight which determines the judgement of taste is independent of all interest

The delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object is called interest. Such a delight, therefore, always involves a reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground, or else as necessarily implicated with its determining ground. Now, where the question is whether something is beautiful, we do not want to know, whether we, or any one else, are, or even could be, concerned in the real existence of the thing, but rather what estimate we form of it on mere contemplation (intuition or reflection). If any one asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps, reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as that Iroquois *sachem* who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses. I may even go a step further and inveigh with the vigour of a *Rousseau* against the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. Or, in fine, I may quite easily persuade myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island, without hope of ever again coming among men, and could conjure such a palace into existence by a mere wish, I should still not trouble to do so, so long as I had a hut there that was comfortable enough for me. All this may be admitted and approved; only it is not the point now at issue. All one wants to know is whether the mere representation of the object is to my liking, no matter how indifferent I may be to the real existence of the object of this representation. It is quite plain that in order to say that the object *is beautiful*, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on the meaning which I can give to this representation, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the real existence of the object. Every one must allow that a judgement on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgement of taste. One must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste.

This proposition, which is of the utmost importance, cannot be better explained than by contrasting the pure disinterested<sup>3</sup> delight which appears in the judgement of taste with that allied to an interest—especially if we can also assure ourselves that there are no other kinds of interest beyond those presently to be mentioned.

### § 3 Delight in the agreeable is coupled with interest

*That is AGREEABLE which the senses find pleasing in sensation.* This at once affords a convenient opportunity for condemning and directing particular attention to a prevalent confusion of the double meaning of which the word ‘sensation’ is capable. All delight (as is said or thought) is itself sensation (of a pleasure). Consequently everything that pleases, and for the very reason that it pleases, is agreeable—and according to its different degrees, or its relations to other agreeable sensations, is attractive, charming, delicious, enjoyable, &c. But if this is conceded, then impressions of sense, which determine inclination, or principles of reason, which determine the will, or mere contemplated forms of intuition, which determine judgement, are all on a par in everything relevant to their effect upon the feeling of pleasure, for this would be agreeableness in the sensation of one’s state; and since, in the last resort, all the elaborate work of our faculties must issue in and unite in the practical as its goal, we could credit our faculties with no other appreciation of things and the worth of things, than that consisting in the gratification which they promise. How this is attained is in the end immaterial; and, as the choice of the means is here the only thing that can make a difference, men might indeed blame one another for folly or imprudence, but never for baseness or wickedness; for they are all, each according to his own way of looking at things, pursuing one goal, which for each is the gratification in question.

When a modification of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is termed sensation, this expression is given quite a different meaning to that which it bears when I call the representation of a thing (through sense as a receptivity pertaining to the faculty of knowledge) sensation. For in the latter case the representation is referred to the Object, but in the former it is referred solely to the Subject and is not available for any cognition, not even for that by which the Subject *cognizes* itself.

Now in the above definition the word sensation is used to denote an objective representation of sense; and, to avoid continually running the risk of misinterpretation, we shall call that which must always remain purely subjective, and is absolutely incapable of forming a representation of an object, by the familiar name of feeling. The green colour of the meadows belongs to *objective* sensation, as the perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness to *subjective* sensation, by which no object is represented: i.e. to feeling, through which the object is regarded as an Object of delight (which involves no cognition of the object).

Now, that a judgement on an object by which its agreeableness is affirmed, expresses an interest in it, is evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the delight presupposes, not the simple judgement about it, but the bearing its real existence has upon my state so far as affected by such an Object. Hence we do not merely say

of the agreeable that it *pleases*, but that it *gratifies*. I do not accord it a simple approval, but inclination is aroused by it, and where agreeableness is of the liveliest type a judgement on the character of the Object is so entirely out of place, that those who are always intent only on enjoyment (for that is the word used to denote intensity of gratification) would fain dispense with all judgement.

#### § 4 Delight in the good is coupled with interest

That is *good* which by means of reason commends itself by its mere concept. We call that *good for something* (useful) which only pleases as a means; but that which pleases on its own account we call *good in itself*. In both cases the concept of an end is implied, and consequently the relation of reason to (at least possible) willing, and thus a delight in the *existence* of an Object or action, i.e. some interest or other.

To deem something good, I must always know what sort of a thing the object is intended to be, i.e. I must have a concept of it. That is not necessary to enable me to see beauty in a thing. Flowers, free patterns, lines aimlessly intertwining—technically termed foliage—have no signification, depend upon no definite concept, and yet please. Delight in the beautiful must depend upon the reflection on an object precursory to some (not definitely determined) concept. It is thus also differentiated from the agreeable, which rests entirely upon sensation.

In many cases, no doubt, the agreeable and the good seem convertible terms. Thus it is commonly said that all (especially lasting) gratification is of itself good; which is almost equivalent to saying that to be permanently agreeable and to be good are identical. But it is readily apparent that this is merely a vicious confusion of words, for the concepts appropriate to these expressions are far from interchangeable. The agreeable, which, as such, represents the object solely in relation to sense, must in the first instance be brought under principles of reason through the concept of an end, to be, as an object of will, called good. But that the reference to delight is wholly different where what gratifies is at the same time called *good*, is evident from the fact that with the good the question always is whether it is mediately or immediately good, i.e. useful or good in itself; whereas with the agreeable this point can never arise, since the word always means what pleases immediately—and it is just the same with what I call beautiful.

Even in everyday parlance a distinction is drawn between the agreeable and the good. We do not scruple to say of a dish that stimulates the palate with spices and other condiments that it is agreeable—owning all the while that it is not good: because, while it immediately *satisfies* the senses, it is mediately displeasing, i.e. in the eye of reason that looks ahead to the consequences. Even in our estimate of health this same distinction may be traced. To all that possess it, it is immediately agreeable—at least negatively, i.e. as remoteness of all bodily pains. But, if we are to say that it is good, we must further apply to reason to direct it to ends, that is, we must regard it as a state that puts us in a congenial mood for all we have to do. Finally, in respect of happiness every one believes that the greatest aggregate of the pleasures of life, taking duration as well as number into account, merits the name of a



true, nay even of the highest, good. But reason sets its face against this too. Agreeableness is enjoyment. But if this is all that we are bent on, it would be foolish to be scrupulous about the means that procure it for us—whether it be obtained passively by the bounty of nature or actively and by the work of our own hands. But that there is any intrinsic worth in the real existence of a man who merely lives for *enjoyment*, however busy he may be in this respect, even when in so doing he serves others—all equally with himself intent only on enjoyment—as an excellent means to that one end, and does so, moreover, because through sympathy he shares all their gratifications,—this is a view to which reason will never let itself be brought round. Only by what a man does heedless of enjoyment, in complete freedom and independently of what he can procure passively from the hand of nature, does he give to his existence, as the real existence of a person, an absolute worth. Happiness, with all its plethora of pleasures, is far from being an unconditioned good.<sup>4</sup>

But, despite all this difference between the agreeable and the good, they both agree in being invariably coupled with an interest in their object. This is true, not alone of the agreeable, § 3, and of the mediately good, i.e. the useful, which pleases as a means to some pleasure, but also of that which is good absolutely and from every point of view, namely the moral good which carries with it the highest interest. For the good is the Object of will, i.e. of a rationally determined faculty of desire. But to will something, and to take a delight in its existence, i.e. to take an interest in it, are identical.

### § 5 Comparison of the three specifically different kinds of delight

Both the Agreeable and the Good involve a reference to the faculty of desire, and are thus attended, the former with a delight pathologically conditioned (by stimuli), the latter with a pure practical delight. Such delight is determined not merely by the representation of the object, but also by the represented bond of connexion between the Subject and the real existence of the object. It is not merely the object, but also its real existence, that pleases. On the other hand the judgement of taste is simply *contemplative*, i.e. it is a judgement which is indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. But not even is this contemplation itself directed to concepts; for the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement (neither a theoretical one nor a practical), and hence, also, is not *grounded* on concepts, nor yet *intentionally directed* to them.

The agreeable, the beautiful, and the good thus denote three different relations of representations to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, as a feeling in respect of which we distinguish different objects or modes of representation. Also, the corresponding expressions which indicate our satisfaction in them are different. The *agreeable* is what GRATIFIES a man; the *beautiful* what simply PLEASES him; the *good* what is ESTEEMED (*approved*), i.e. that on which he sets an objective worth. Agreeableness is a significant factor even with irrational animals; beauty has purport and significance only for human beings, i.e. for beings at once animal and rational (but not merely for them as rational—intelligent beings—but only for them as at once animal and rational); whereas the good is good for every rational being in general;—a proposition which can only receive

its complete justification and explanation in the sequel. Of all these three kinds of delight, that of taste in the beautiful may be said to be the one and only disinterested and *free* delight; for, with it, no interest, whether of sense or reason, extorts approval. And so we may say that delight, in the three cases mentioned, is related to *inclination*, to *favour*, or to *respect*. For FAVOUR is the only free liking. An object of inclination, and one which a law of reason imposes upon our desire, leaves us no freedom to turn anything into an object of pleasure. All interest presupposes a want, or calls one forth; and, being a ground determining approval, deprives the judgement on the object of its freedom.

So far as the interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable goes, every one says: Hunger is the best sauce; and people with a healthy appetite relish everything, so long as it is something they can eat. Such delight, consequently, gives no indication of taste having anything to say to the choice. Only when men have got all they want can we tell who among the crowd has taste or not. Similarly there may be correct habits (conduct) without virtue, politeness without good-will, propriety without honour, &c. For where the moral law dictates, there is, objectively, no room left for free choice as to what one has to do; and to show taste in the way one carries out these dictates, or in estimating the way others do so, is a totally different matter from displaying the moral frame of one's mind. For the latter involves a command and produces a need of something, whereas moral taste only plays with the objects of delight without devoting itself sincerely to any.

### **Definition of the beautiful derived from the first moment**

*Taste* is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest*. The object of such a delight is called *beautiful*.

### **Second Moment of the Judgement of Taste: Moment of Quantity**

#### **§ 6 The beautiful is that which, apart from concepts, is represented as the Object of a universal delight**

This definition of the beautiful is deducible from the foregoing definition of it as an object of delight apart from any interest. For where any one is conscious that his delight in an object is with him independent of interest, it is inevitable that he should look on the object as one containing a ground of delight for all men. For, since the delight is not based on any inclination of the Subject (or on any other deliberate interest), but the Subject feels himself completely *free* in respect of the liking which he accords to the object, he can find as reason for his delight no personal conditions to which his own subjective self might alone be party. Hence he must regard it as resting on what he may also presuppose in every other person; and therefore he must believe that he has reason for demanding a similar delight from every one. Accordingly he will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a quality of the object and the judgement logical (forming a cognition of the Object by concepts of it); although it is only aesthetic, and contains merely a reference of the representation of the object to the Subject;—because it still bears this resemblance to the logical judgement, that it may be presupposed to be valid

for all men. But this universality cannot spring from concepts. For from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (save in the case of pure practical laws, which, however, carry an interest with them; and such an interest does not attach to the pure judgement of taste). The result is that the judgement of taste, with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality.

### § 7 Comparison of the beautiful with the agreeable and the good by means of the above characteristic

As regards the *agreeable* every one concedes that his judgement, which he bases on a private feeling, and in which he declares that an object pleases him, is restricted merely to himself personally. Thus he does not take it amiss if, when he says that Canary-wine is agreeable, another corrects the expression and reminds him that he ought to say: It is agreeable *to me*. This applies not only to the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat, but to what may with any one be agreeable to eye or ear. A violet colour is to one soft and lovely: to another dull and faded. One man likes the tone of wind instruments, another prefers that of string instruments. To quarrel over such points with the idea of condemning another's judgement as incorrect when it differs from our own, as if the opposition between the two judgements were logical, would be folly. With the agreeable, therefore, the axiom holds good: *Every one has his own taste* (that of sense).

The beautiful stands on quite a different footing. It would, on the contrary, be ridiculous if any one who plumed himself on his taste were to think of justifying himself by saying: This object (the building we see, the dress that person has on, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our criticism) is beautiful *for me*. For if it merely pleases *him*, he must not call it *beautiful*. Many things may for him possess charm and agreeableness—no one cares about that; but when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Thus he says the *thing* is beautiful; and it is not as if he counted on others agreeing in his judgement of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he *demand*s this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste, which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to men to say: Every one has his own taste. This would be equivalent to saying that there is no such thing at all as taste, i.e. no aesthetic judgement capable of making a rightful claim upon the assent of all men.

Yet even in the case of the agreeable we find that the estimates men form do betray a prevalent agreement among them, which leads to our crediting some with taste and denying it to others, and that, too, not as an organic sense but as a critical faculty in respect of the agreeable generally. So of one who knows how to entertain his guests with pleasures (of enjoyment through all the senses) in such a way that one and all are pleased, we say that he has taste. But the universality here is only understood in a comparative sense; and the

rules that apply are, like all empirical rules, *general* only, not *universal*,—the latter being what the judgement of taste upon the beautiful deals or claims to deal in. It is a judgement in respect of sociability so far as resting on empirical rules. In respect of the good it is true that judgements also rightly assert a claim to validity for every one; but the good is only represented as an Object of universal delight *by means of a concept*, which is the case neither with the agreeable nor the beautiful.

### **§ 8 In a judgement of taste the universality of delight is only represented as subjective**

This particular form of the universality of an aesthetic judgement, which is to be met with in a judgement of taste, is a significant feature, not for the logician certainly, but for the transcendental philosopher. It calls for no small effort on his part to discover its origin, but in return it brings to light a property of our cognitive faculty which, without this analysis, would have remained unknown.

First, one must get firmly into one's mind that by the judgement of taste (upon the beautiful) the delight in an object is imputed to *every one*, yet without being founded on a concept (for then it would be the good), and that this claim to universality is such an essential factor of a judgement by which we describe anything as *beautiful*, that were it not for its being present to the mind it would never enter into any one's head to use this expression, but everything that pleased without a concept would be ranked as agreeable. For in respect of the agreeable every one is allowed to have his own opinion, and no one insists upon others agreeing with his judgement of taste, which is what is invariably done in the judgement of taste about beauty. The first of these I may call the taste of sense, the second, the taste of reflection: the first laying down judgements merely private, the second, on the other hand, judgements ostensibly of general validity (public), but both alike being aesthetic (not practical) judgements about an object merely in respect of the bearings of its representation on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Now it does seem strange that while with the taste of sense it is not alone experience that shows that its judgement (of pleasure or displeasure in something) is not universally valid, but every one willingly refrains from imputing this agreement to others (despite the frequent actual prevalence of a considerable consensus of general opinion even in these judgements), the taste of reflection, which, as experience teaches, has often enough to put up with a rude dismissal of its claims to universal validity of its judgement (upon the beautiful), can (as it actually does) find it possible for all that, to formulate judgements capable of demanding this agreement in its universality. Such agreement it does in fact require from every one for each of its judgements of taste,—the persons who pass these judgements not quarrelling over the possibility of such a claim, but only failing in particular cases to come to terms as to the correct application of this faculty.

First of all we have here to note that a universality which does not rest upon concepts of the Object (even though these are only empirical) is in no way logical, but aesthetic, i.e. does not involve any objective quantity of the judgement, but only one that is subjective. For this universality I use the expression *general validity*, which denotes the validity of the reference of a representation,

not to the cognitive faculties, but to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure for every Subject. (The same expression, however, may also be employed for the logical quantity of the judgement, provided we add *objective* universal validity, to distinguish it from the merely subjective validity which is always aesthetic.)

Now a judgement that has *objective universal validity* has always got the subjective also, i.e. if the judgement is valid for everything which is contained under a given concept, it is valid also for all who represent an object by means of this concept. But from a *subjective universal validity*, i.e. the aesthetic, that does not rest on any concept, no conclusion can be drawn to the logical; because judgements of that kind have no bearing upon the Object. But for this very reason the aesthetic universality attributed to a judgement must also be of a special kind, seeing that it does not join the predicate of beauty to the concept of the *Object* taken in its entire logical sphere, and yet does extend this predicate over the whole sphere of *judging Subjects*.

In their logical quantity all judgements of taste are *singular* judgements. For, since I must present the object immediately to my feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and that, too, without the aid of concepts, such judgements cannot have the quantity of judgements with objective general validity. Yet by taking the singular representation of the Object of the judgement of taste, and by comparison converting it into a concept according to the conditions determining that judgement, we can arrive at a logically universal judgement. For instance, by a judgement of taste I describe the rose at which I am looking as beautiful. The judgement, on the other hand, resulting from the comparison of a number of singular representations: Roses in general are beautiful, is no longer pronounced as a purely aesthetic judgement, but as a logical judgement founded on one that is aesthetic. Now the judgement, 'The rose is agreeable' (to smell) is also, no doubt, an aesthetic and singular judgement, but then it is not one of taste but of sense. For it has this point of difference from a judgement of taste, that the latter imports an *aesthetic quantity* of universality, i.e. of validity for every one which is not to be met with in a judgement upon the agreeable. It is only judgements upon the good which, while also determining the delight in an object, possess logical and not mere aesthetic universality; for it is as involving a cognition of the Object that they are valid of it, and on that account valid for every one.

In forming an estimate of Objects merely from concepts, all representation of beauty goes by the board. There can, therefore, be no rule according to which any one is to be compelled to recognize anything as beautiful. Whether a dress, a house, or a flower is beautiful is a matter upon which one declines to allow one's judgement to be swayed by any reasons or principles. We want to get a look at the Object with our own eyes, just as if our delight depended on sensation. And yet, if upon so doing, we call the Object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice, and lay claim to the concurrence of every one, whereas no private sensation would be decisive except for the observer alone and *his* liking.

Here, now, we may perceive that nothing is postulated in the judgement of taste but such a *universal voice* in respect of delight that is not mediated by concepts; consequently, only the *possibility* of an aesthetic judgement capable of being at the same time deemed valid for every one. The judgement of taste itself does not *postulate* the agreement of every one (for it is only competent

for a logically universal judgement to do this, in that it is able to bring forward reasons); it only *imputes* this agreement to every one, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation, not from concepts, but from the concurrence of others. The universal voice is, therefore, only an idea—resting upon grounds the investigation of which is here postponed. It may be a matter of uncertainty whether a person who thinks he is laying down a judgement of taste is, in fact, judging in conformity with that idea; but that this idea is what is contemplated in his judgement, and that, consequently, it is meant to be a judgement of taste, is proclaimed by his use of the expression ‘beauty’. For himself he can be certain on the point from his mere consciousness of the separation of everything belonging to the agreeable and the good from the delight remaining to him; and this is all for which he promises himself the agreement of every one—a claim which, under these conditions, he would also be warranted in making, were it not that he frequently sinned against them, and thus passed an erroneous judgement of taste. [...]

### **Definition of the beautiful drawn from the second moment**

The *beautiful* is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally.

### **Third Moment of Judgements of Taste: Moment of the Relation of the Ends Brought under Review in such Judgements**

#### **§ 10 Finality in general**

Let us define the meaning of ‘an end’ in transcendental terms (i.e. without presupposing anything empirical, such as the feeling of pleasure). An end is the object of a concept so far as this concept is regarded as the cause of the object (the real ground of its possibility); and the causality of a *concept* in respect of its *Object* is finality (*forma finalis*). Where, then, not the cognition of an object merely, but the object itself (its form or real existence) as an effect, is thought to be possible only through a concept of it, there we imagine an end. The representation of the effect is here the determining ground of its cause and takes the lead of it. The consciousness of the causality of a representation in respect of the state of the Subject as one tending *to preserve a continuance* of that state, may here be said to denote in a general way what is called pleasure; whereas displeasure is that representation which contains the ground for converting the state of the representations into their opposite (for hindering or removing them).

The faculty of desire, so far as determinable only through concepts, i.e. so as to act in conformity with the representation of an end, would be the will. But an Object, or state of mind, or even an action may, although its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end, be called final simply on account of its possibility being only explicable and intelligible for us by virtue of an assumption on our part of a fundamental causality according to ends, i.e. a will that would have so ordained it according to a certain represented rule. Finality, therefore, may exist apart from an end, in so far as we do not locate the causes of this form in a will, but yet are able to render the explanation of its possibility intelligible to ourselves only by deriving it from a will. Now we are not always obliged to look with the eye of reason into what



we observe (i.e. to consider it in its possibility). So we may at least observe a finality of form, and trace it in objects—though by reflection only—without resting it on an end (as the material of the *nexus finalis*).

### § 11 The sole foundation of the judgement of taste is the form of finality of an object (or mode of representing it)

Whenever an end is regarded as a source of delight it always imports an interest as determining ground of the judgement on the object of pleasure. Hence the judgement of taste cannot rest on any subjective end as its ground. But neither can any representation of an objective end, i.e. of the possibility of the object itself on principles of final connexion, determine the judgement of taste, and, consequently, neither can any concept of the good. For the judgement of taste is an aesthetic and not a cognitive judgement, and so does not deal with any *concept* of the nature or of the internal or external possibility, by this or that cause, of the object, but simply with the relative bearing of the representative powers so far as determined by a representation.

Now this relation, present when an object is characterized as beautiful, is coupled with the feeling of pleasure. This pleasure is by the judgement of taste pronounced valid for every one; hence an agreeableness attending the representation is just as incapable of containing the determining ground of the judgement as the representation of the perfection of the object or the concept of the good. We are thus left with the subjective finality in the representation of an object, exclusive of any end (objective or subjective)—consequently the bare form of finality in the representation whereby an object is *given* to us, so far as we are conscious of it—as that which is alone capable of constituting the delight which, apart from any concept, we estimate as universally communicable, and so of forming the determining ground of the judgement of taste. [...]

### § 17 The Ideal of beauty

There can be no objective rule of taste by which what is beautiful may be defined by means of concepts. For every judgement from that source is aesthetic, i.e. its determining ground is the feeling of the Subject, and not any concept of an Object. It is only throwing away labour to look for a principle of taste that affords a universal criterion of the beautiful by definite concepts; because what is sought is a thing impossible and inherently contradictory. But in the universal communicability of the sensation (of delight or aversion)—a communicability, too, that exists apart from any concept—in the accord, so far as possible, of all ages and nations as to this feeling in the representation of certain objects, we have the empirical criterion, weak indeed and scarce sufficient to raise a presumption, of the derivation of a taste, thus confirmed by examples, from grounds deep-seated and shared alike by all men, underlying their agreement in estimating the forms under which objects are given to them.

For this reason some products of taste are looked on as *exemplary*—not meaning thereby that by imitating others taste may be acquired. For taste must be an original faculty; whereas one who imitates a model, while show-

ing skill commensurate with his success, only displays taste as himself a critic of this model.<sup>5</sup> Hence it follows that the highest model, the archetype of taste, is a mere idea, which each person must beget in his own consciousness, and according to which he must form his estimate of everything that is an Object of taste, or that is an example of critical taste, and even of universal taste itself. Properly speaking, an *idea* signifies a concept of reason, and an *ideal* the representation of an individual existence as adequate to an idea. Hence this archetype of taste—which rests, indeed, upon reason's indeterminate idea of a maximum, but is not, however, capable of being represented by means of concepts, but only in an individual presentation—may more appropriately be called the ideal of the beautiful. While not having this ideal in our possession, we still strive to beget it within us. But it is bound to be merely an ideal of the imagination, seeing that it rests, not upon concepts, but upon the presentation—the faculty of presentation being the imagination.—Now, how do we arrive at such an ideal of beauty? Is it *a priori* or empirically? Further, what species of the beautiful admits of an ideal?

First of all, we do well to observe that the beauty for which an ideal has to be sought cannot be a beauty that is *free and at large*, but must be one *fixed* by a concept of objective finality. Hence it cannot belong to the Object of an altogether pure judgement of taste, but must attach to one that is partly intellectual. In other words, where an ideal is to have place among the grounds upon which any estimate is formed, then beneath grounds of that kind there must lie some idea of reason according to determinate concepts, by which the end underlying the internal possibility of the object is determined *a priori*. An ideal of beautiful flowers, of a beautiful suite of furniture, or of a beautiful view, is unthinkable. But, it may also be impossible to represent an ideal of a beauty dependent on definite ends, e.g. a beautiful residence, a beautiful tree, a beautiful garden, &c., presumably because their ends are not sufficiently defined and fixed by their concept, with the result that their finality is nearly as free as with beauty that is quite *at large*. Only what has in itself the end of its real existence—only *man* that is able himself to determine his ends by reason, or, where he has to derive them from external perception, can still compare them with essential and universal ends, and then further pronounce aesthetically upon their accord with such ends, only he, among all objects in the world, admits, therefore, of an ideal of *beauty*, just as humanity in his person, as intelligence, alone admits of the ideal of *perfection*.

Two factors are here involved. *First*, there is the aesthetic *normal idea*, which is an individual intuition (of the imagination). This represents the norm by which we judge of a man as a member of a particular animal species. *Secondly*, there is the *rational idea*. This deals with the ends of humanity so far as capable of sensuous representation, and converts them into a principle for estimating his outward form, through which these ends are revealed in their phenomenal effect. The normal idea must draw from experience the constituents which it requires for the form of an animal of a particular kind. But the greatest finality in the construction of this form—that which would serve as a universal norm for forming an estimate of each individual of the species in question—the image that, as it were, forms an intentional basis underlying the technic of nature, to which no separate individual, but only the race as a whole, is adequate, has its seat merely in the idea of the judging Subject. Yet

it is, with all its proportions, an aesthetic idea, and, as such, capable of being fully presented *in concreto* in a model image. Now, how is this effected? In order to render the process to some extent intelligible (for who can wrest nature's whole secret from her?), let us attempt a psychological explanation.

It is of note that the imagination, in a manner quite incomprehensible to us, is able on occasion, even after a long lapse of time, not alone to recall the signs for concepts, but also to reproduce the image and shape of an object out of a countless number of others of a different, or even of the very same, kind. And, further, if the mind is engaged upon comparisons, we may well suppose that it can in actual fact, though the process is unconscious, superimpose as it were one image upon another, and from the coincidence of a number of the same kind arrive at a mean contour which serves as a common standard for all. Say, for instance, a person has seen a thousand full-grown men. Now if he wishes to judge normal size determined upon a comparative estimate, then imagination (to my mind) allows a great number of these images (perhaps the whole thousand) to fall one upon the other, and, if I may be allowed to extend to the case the analogy of optical presentation, in the space where they come most together, and within the contour where the place is illuminated by the greatest concentration of colour, one gets a perception of the *average size*, which alike in height and breadth is equally removed from the extreme limits of the greatest and smallest statures; and this is the stature of a beautiful man. (The same result could be obtained in a mechanical way, by taking the measures of all the thousand, and adding together their heights, and their breadths (and thicknesses), and dividing the sum in each case by a thousand). But the power of imagination does all this by means of a dynamical effect upon the organ of internal sense, arising from the frequent apprehension of such forms. If, again, for our average man we seek on similar lines for the average head, and for this the average nose, and so on, then we get the figure that underlies the normal idea of a beautiful man in the country where the comparison is instituted. For this reason a negro must necessarily (under these empirical conditions) have a different normal idea of the beauty of forms from what a white man has, and the Chinaman one different from the European. And the process would be just the same with the *model* of a beautiful horse or dog (of a particular breed).—This *normal idea* is not derived from proportions taken from experience *as definite rules*: rather is it according to this idea that rules for forming estimates first become possible. It is an intermediate between all singular intuitions of individuals, with their manifold variations—a floating image for the whole genus, which nature has set as an archetype underlying those of her products that belong to the same species, but which in no single case she seems to have completely attained. But the normal idea is far from giving the complete *archetype* of *beauty* in the genus. It only gives the form that constitutes the indispensable condition of all beauty, and, consequently, only *correctness* in the presentation of the genus. It is, as the famous *Doryphorus* of *Polycletus* was called, the *rule* (and *Myron's* Cow might be similarly employed for its kind). It cannot, for that very reason, contain anything specifically characteristic; for otherwise it would not be the *normal idea* for the genus. Further, it is not by beauty that its presentation pleases, but merely because it does not contradict any of the conditions under

which alone a thing belonging to this genus can be beautiful. The presentation is merely academically correct.<sup>6</sup>

But the *ideal* of the beautiful is still something different from its *normal idea*. For reasons already stated it is only to be sought in the *human figure*. Here the ideal consists in the expression of the *moral*, apart from which the object would not please at once universally and positively (not merely negatively in a presentation academically correct). The visible expression of moral ideas that govern men inwardly can, of course, only be drawn from experience; but their combination with all that our reason connects with the morally good in the idea of the highest finality—benevolence, purity, strength, or equanimity, &c.—may be made, as it were, visible in bodily manifestation (as effect of what is internal), and this embodiment involves a union of pure ideas of reason and great imaginative power, in one who would even form an estimate of it, not to speak of being the author of its presentation. The correctness of such an ideal of beauty is evidenced by its not permitting any sensuous charm to mingle with the delight in its Object, in which it still allows us to take a great interest. This fact in turn shows that an estimate formed according to such a standard can never be purely aesthetic, and that one formed according to an ideal of beauty cannot be a simple judgement of taste.

### Definition of the beautiful derived from this third moment

*Beauty* is the form of *finality* in an object, so far as perceived in it *apart from the representation of an end*.<sup>7</sup>

### Fourth Moment of the Judgement of Taste: Moment of the Modality of the Delight in the Object

#### § 18 Nature of the modality in a judgement of taste

I may assert in the case of every representation that the synthesis of a pleasure with the representation (as a cognition) is at least *possible*. Of what I call *agreeable* I assert that it *actually* causes pleasure in me. But what we have in mind in the case of the *beautiful* is a *necessary* reference on its part to delight. However, this necessity is of a special kind. It is not a theoretical objective necessity—such as would let us cognize *a priori* that every one *will feel* this delight in the object that is called beautiful by me. Nor yet is it a practical necessity, in which case, thanks to concepts of a pure rational will in which free agents are supplied with a rule, this delight is the necessary consequence of an objective law, and simply means that one ought absolutely (without ulterior object) to act in a certain way. Rather, being such a necessity as is thought in an aesthetic judgement, it can only be termed *exemplary*. In other words it is a necessity of the assent of *all* to a judgement regarded as exemplifying a universal rule incapable of formulation. Since an aesthetic judgement is not an objective or cognitive judgement, this necessity is not derivable from definite concepts, and so is not apodictic. Much less is it inferable from universality of experience (of a thorough-going agreement of judgements about the beauty of a certain object). For, apart from the fact that experience would hardly furnish evidences sufficiently numerous for this purpose, empirical judgements do not afford any foundation for a concept of the necessity of these judgements.

### **§ 19 The subjective necessity attributed to a judgement of taste is conditioned**

The judgement of taste exacts agreement from every one; and a person who describes something as beautiful insists that every one *ought* to give the object in question his approval and follow suit in describing it as beautiful. The *ought* in aesthetic judgements, therefore, despite an accordance with all the requisite data for passing judgement, is still only pronounced conditionally. We are suitors for agreement from every one else, because we are fortified with a ground common to all. Further, we would be able to count on this agreement, provided we were always assured of the correct subsumption of the case under that ground as the rule of approval.

### **§ 20 The condition of the necessity advanced by a judgement of taste is the idea of a common sense**

Were judgements of taste (like cognitive judgements) in possession of a definite objective principle, then one who in his judgement followed such a principle would claim unconditioned necessity for it. Again, were they devoid of any principle, as are those of the mere taste of sense, then no thought of any necessity on their part would enter one's head. Therefore they must have a subjective principle, and one which determines what pleases or displeases, by means of feeling only and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity. Such a principle, however, could only be regarded as a *common sense*. This differs essentially from common understanding, which is also sometimes called common sense (*sensus communis*): for the judgement of the latter is not one by feeling, but always one by concepts, though usually only in the shape of obscurely represented principles.

The judgement of taste, therefore, depends on our presupposing the existence of a common sense. (But this is not to be taken to mean some external sense, but the effect arising from the free play of our powers of cognition.) Only under the presupposition, I repeat, of such a common sense, are we able to lay down a judgement of taste. [...]

### **§ 22 The necessity of the universal assent that is thought in a judgement of taste, is a subjective necessity which, under the presupposition of a common sense, is represented as objective**

In all judgements by which we describe anything as beautiful we tolerate no one else being of a different opinion, and in taking up this position we do not rest our judgement upon concepts, but only on our feeling. Accordingly we introduce this fundamental feeling not as a private feeling, but as a public sense. Now, for this purpose, experience cannot be made the ground of this common sense, for the latter is invoked to justify judgements containing an 'ought'. The assertion is not that every one *will* fall in with our judgement, but rather that every one *ought* to agree with it. Here I put forward my judgement of taste as an example of the judgement of common sense, and attribute to it on that account *exemplary* validity. Hence common sense is a mere ideal

norm. With this as presupposition, a judgement that accords with it, as well as the delight in an Object expressed in that judgement, is rightly converted into a rule for every one. For the principle, while it is only subjective, being yet assumed as subjectively universal (a necessary idea for every one), could, in what concerns the consensus of different judging Subjects, demand universal assent like an objective principle, provided we were assured of our subsumption under it being correct.

This indeterminate norm of a common sense is, as a matter of fact, presupposed by us; as is shown by our presuming to lay down judgements of taste. But does such a common sense in fact exist as a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience, or is it formed for us as a regulative principle by a still higher principle of reason, that for higher ends first seeks to beget in us a common sense? Is taste, in other words, a natural and original faculty, or is it only the idea of one that is artificial and to be acquired by us, so that a judgement of taste, with its demand for universal assent, is but a requirement of reason for generating such a *consensus*, and does the 'ought', i.e. the objective necessity of the coincidence of the feeling of all with the particular feeling of each, only betoken the possibility of arriving at some sort of unanimity in these matters, and the judgement of taste only adduce an example of the application of this principle? These are questions which as yet we are neither willing nor in a position to investigate. For the present we have only to resolve the faculty of taste into its elements, and to unite these ultimately in the idea of a common sense.

#### **Definition of the beautiful drawn from the fourth moment**

The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, is cognized as object of a *necessary* delight. [...]



# Philosophy of Fine Art

## Division of the Subject

After the foregoing introductory remarks it is now time to pass on to the study of our subject itself. But the introduction, where we still are, can in this respect do no more than sketch for our apprehension a conspectus of the entire course of our subsequent scientific studies. But since we have spoken of art as itself proceeding from the absolute Idea, and have even pronounced its end to be the sensuous presentation of the Absolute itself, we must proceed, even in this conspectus, by showing, at least in general, how the particular parts of the subject emerge from the conception of artistic beauty as the presentation of the Absolute. Therefore we must attempt, in the most general way, to awaken an idea of this conception.

It has already been said that the content of art is the Idea, while its form is the configuration of sensuous material. Now art has to harmonize these two sides and bring them into a free reconciled totality. The *first* point here is the demand that the content which is to come into artistic representation should be in itself qualified for such representation. For otherwise we obtain only a bad combination, because in that case a content ill-adapted to figurativeness and external presentation is made to adopt this form, or, in other words, material explicitly prosaic is expected to find a really appropriate mode of presentation in the form antagonistic to its nature.

The *second* demand, derived from the first, requires of the content of art that it be not anything abstract in itself, but concrete, though not concrete in the sense in which the sensuous is concrete when it is contrasted with everything spiritual and intellectual and these are taken to be simple and abstract. For everything genuine in spirit and nature alike is inherently concrete and, despite its universality, has nevertheless subjectivity and particularity in itself. If we say, for example, of God that he is simply *one*, the supreme being as such, we have thereby only enunciated a dead abstraction of the sub-rational Understanding. Such a God, not apprehended himself in his concrete truth, will provide no content for art, especially not for visual art. Therefore the Jews and the Turks have not been able by art to represent their God, who does not even amount to such an abstraction of the Understanding, in the positive way that the Christians have. For in Christianity God is set forth in his truth, and therefore as thoroughly concrete in himself, as person, as subject, and, more closely defined, as spirit. What he is as spirit is made explicit for religious apprehension as a Trinity of Persons, which yet at the same time is self-aware as *one*. Here we have essentiality or universality, and particularization, together with their reconciled unity, and only such unity is the concrete. Now since a content, in order to be true at all, must be of this concrete kind, art too demands similar concreteness, because the purely abstract universal has not in itself the determinate character of advancing to particularization and phenomenal manifestation and to unity with itself in these.

Now, *thirdly*, if a sensuous form and shape is to correspond with a genuine and therefore concrete content, it must likewise be something individual, in itself completely concrete and single. The fact that the concrete accrues to both sides of art, i.e. to both content and its presentation, is precisely the point in which both can coincide and correspond with one another; just as, for instance, the natural shape of the human body is such a sensuously concrete thing, capable of displaying spirit, which is concrete in itself, and of showing itself in conformity with it. Therefore, after all, we must put out of our minds the idea that it is purely a matter of chance that to serve as such a genuine shape an actual phenomenon of the external world is selected. For art does not seize upon this form either because it just finds it there or because there is no other; on the contrary, the concrete content itself involves the factor of external, actual, and indeed even sensuous manifestation. But then in return this sensuous concrete thing, which bears the stamp of an essentially spiritual content, is also essentially *for* our inner [apprehension]; the external shape, whereby the content is made visible and imaginable, has the purpose of existing solely for our mind and spirit. For this reason alone are content and artistic form fashioned in conformity with one another. The *purely* sensuously concrete—external nature as such—does not have this purpose for the sole reason of its origin. The variegated richly coloured plumage of birds shines even when unseen, their song dies away unheard; the torch-thistle, which blooms for only one night, withers in the wilds of the southern forests without having been admired, and these forests, jungles themselves of the most beautiful and luxuriant vegetation, with the most sweet-smelling and aromatic perfumes, rot and decay equally unenjoyed. But the work of art is not so naïvely self-centred; it is essentially a question, an address to the responsive breast, a call to the mind and the spirit.

Although illustration by art is not in this respect a matter of chance, it is, on the other hand, not the highest way of apprehending the spiritually concrete. The higher way, in contrast to representation by means of the sensuously concrete, is thinking, which in a relative sense is indeed abstract, but it must be concrete, not one-sided, if it is to be true and rational. How far a specific content has its appropriate form in sensuous artistic representation, or whether, owing to its own nature, it essentially demands a higher, more spiritual, form, is a question of the distinction which appears at once, for example, in a comparison between the Greek gods and God as conceived by Christian ideas. The Greek god is not abstract but individual, closely related to the natural [human] form. The Christian God too is indeed a concrete personality, but is *pure* spirituality and is to be known as *spirit* and in spirit. His medium of existence is therefore essentially inner knowledge and not the external natural form through which he can be represented only imperfectly and not in the whole profundity of his nature.

But since art has the task of presenting the Idea to immediate perception in a sensuous shape and not in the form of thinking and pure spirituality as such, and, since this presenting has its value and dignity in the correspondence and unity of both sides, i.e. the Idea and its outward shape, it follows that the loftiness and excellence of art in attaining a reality adequate to its Concept will depend on the degree of inwardness and unit in which Idea and shape appear fused into one.

In this point of higher truth, as the spirituality which the artistic formation has achieved in conformity with the Concept of spirit, there lies the basis for the division of the philosophy of art. For, before reaching the true Concept of its absolute essence, the spirit has to go through a course of stages, a series grounded in this Concept itself, and to this course of the content which the spirit gives to itself there corresponds a course, immediately connected therewith, of configurations of art, in the form of which the spirit, as artist, gives itself a consciousness of itself.

This course within the spirit of art has itself in turn, in accordance with its own nature, two sides. *First*, this development is itself a spiritual and universal one, since the sequence of definite conceptions of the world, as the definite but comprehensive consciousness of nature, man, and God, gives itself artistic shape. *Secondly*, this inner development of art has to give itself immediate existence and sensuous being, and the specific modes of the sensuous being of art are themselves a totality of necessary differences in art, i.e., the *particular arts*. Artistic configuration and its differences are, on the one hand, as spiritual, of a more universal kind and not bound to *one* material [e.g. stone or paint], and sensuous existence is itself differentiated in numerous ways; but since this existence, like spirit, has the Concept implicitly for its inner soul, a specific sensuous material does thereby, on the other hand, acquire a closer relation and a secret harmony with the spiritual differences and forms of artistic configuration.

However, in its completeness our science is divided into three main sections:

*First*, we acquire a *universal* part. This has for its content and subject both the universal Idea of artistic beauty as the Ideal, and also the nearer relation of the Ideal to nature on the one hand and to subjective artistic production on the other.

*Secondly*, there is developed out of the conception of artistic beauty a *particular* part, because the essential differences contained in this conception unfold into a sequence of particular forms of artistic configuration.

*Thirdly*, there is a *final* part which has to consider the individualization of artistic beauty, since art advances to the sensuous realization of its creations and rounds itself off in a system of single arts and their genera and species.

### **(i) The Idea of the Beauty of Art or the Ideal**

In the first place, so far as the first and second parts are concerned, we must at once, if what follows is to be made intelligible, recall again that the Idea as the beauty of art is not the Idea as such, in the way that a metaphysical logic has to apprehend it as the Absolute, but the Idea as shaped forward into reality and as having advanced to immediate unity and correspondence with this reality. For the *Idea as such* is indeed the absolute truth itself, but the truth only in its not yet objectified universality, while the Idea as the *beauty of art* is the Idea with the nearer qualification of being both essentially individual reality and also an individual configuration of reality destined essentially to embody and reveal the Idea. Accordingly there is here expressed the demand that the Idea and its configuration as a concrete reality shall be made completely adequate

to one another. Taken thus, the Idea as reality, shaped in accordance with the Concept of the Idea, is the *Ideal*.

The problem of such correspondence might in the first instance be understood quite formally in the sense that any Idea at all might serve, if only the actual shape, no matter which, represented precisely this specific Idea. But in that case the demanded *truth* of the Ideal is confused with mere *correctness* which consists in the expression of some meaning or other in an appropriate way and therefore the direct rediscovery of its sense in the shape produced. The Ideal is not to be thus understood. For any content can be represented quite adequately, judged by the standard of its own essence, without being allowed to claim the artistic beauty of the Ideal. Indeed, in comparison with ideal beauty, the representation will even appear defective. In this regard it may be remarked in advance, what can only be proved later, namely that the defectiveness of a work of art is not always to be regarded as due, as may be supposed, to the artist's lack of skill; on the contrary, defectiveness of *form* results from defectiveness of *content*. So, for example, the Chinese, Indians, and Egyptians, in their artistic shapes, images of gods, and idols, never get beyond formlessness or a bad and untrue definiteness of form. They could not master true beauty because their mythological ideas, the content and thought of their works of art, were still indeterminate, or determined badly, and so did not consist of the content which is absolute in itself. Works of art are all the more excellent in expressing true beauty, the deeper is the inner truth of their content and thought. And in this connection we are not merely to think, as others may, of any greater or lesser skill with which natural forms as they exist in the external world are apprehended and imitated. For, in certain stages of art-consciousness and presentation, the abandonment and distortion of natural formations is not unintentional lack of technical skill or practice, but intentional alteration which proceeds from and is demanded by what is in the artist's mind. Thus, from this point of view, there is imperfect art which in technical and other respects may be quite perfect in its *specific* sphere, and yet it is clearly defective in comparison with the concept of art itself and the Ideal.

Only in the highest art are Idea and presentation truly in conformity with one another, in the sense that the shape given to the Idea is in itself the absolutely true shape, because the content of the Idea which that shape expresses is itself the true and genuine content. Associated with this, as has already been indicated, is the fact that the Idea must be determined in and through itself as a concrete totality, and therefore possess in itself the principle and measure of its particularization and determinacy in external appearance. For example, the Christian imagination will be able to represent God in human form and its expression of *spirit*, only because God himself is here completely known in himself as *spirit*. Determinacy is, as it were, the bridge to appearance. Where this determinacy is not a totality emanating from the Idea itself, where the Idea is not presented as self-determining and self-particularizing, the Idea remains abstract and has its determinacy, and therefore the principle for its particular and solely appropriate mode of appearance, not in itself, but outside itself. On this account, then, the still abstract Idea has its shape also external to itself, not settled by itself. On the other hand, the inherently concrete Idea carries within itself the principle of its mode of appearance and

is therefore its own free configurator. Thus the truly concrete Idea alone produces its true configuration, and this correspondence of the two is the Ideal.

## **(ii) Development of the Ideal into the Particular Forms of the Beauty of Art**

But because the Idea is in this way a concrete unity, this unity can enter the art-consciousness only through the unfolding and then the reconciliation of the particularizations of the Idea, and, through this development, artistic beauty acquires a *totality of particular stages and forms*. Therefore, after studying artistic beauty in itself and on its own account, we must see how beauty as a whole decomposes into its particular determinations. This gives, as the *second* part of our study, the doctrine of the *forms of art*. These forms find their origin in the different ways of grasping the Idea as content, whereby a difference in the configuration in which the Idea appears is conditioned. Thus the forms of art are nothing but the different relations of meaning and shape, relations which proceed from the Idea itself and therefore provide the true basis for the division of this sphere. For division must always be implicit in the concept, the particularization and division of which is in question.

We have here to consider *three* relations of the Idea to its configuration.

(a) *First*, art begins when the Idea, still in its indeterminacy and obscurity, or in bad and untrue determinacy, is made the content of artistic shapes. Being indeterminate, it does not yet possess in itself that individuality which the Ideal demands; its abstraction and one-sidedness leave its shape externally defective and arbitrary. The first form of art is therefore rather a *mere search* for portrayal than a capacity for true presentation; the Idea has not found the form even in itself and therefore remains struggling and striving after it. We may call this form, in general terms, the *symbolic* form of art. In it the abstract Idea has its shape outside itself in the natural sensuous material from which the process of shaping starts and with which, in its appearance, this process is linked. Perceived natural objects are, on the one hand, primarily left as they are, yet at the same time the substantial Idea is imposed on them as their meaning so that they now acquire a vocation to express it and so are to be interpreted as if the Idea itself were present in them. A corollary of this is the fact that natural objects have in them an aspect according to which they are capable of representing a universal meaning. But since a complete correspondence is not yet possible, this relation can concern only an *abstract* characteristic, as when, for example, in a lion strength is meant.

On the other hand, the abstractness of this relation brings home to consciousness even so the foreignness of the Idea to natural phenomena, and the Idea, which has no other reality to express it, launches out in all these shapes, seeks itself in them in their unrest and extravagance, but yet does not find them adequate to itself. So now the Idea exaggerates natural shapes and the phenomena of reality itself into indefiniteness and extravagance; it staggers round in them, it bubbles and ferments in them, does violence to them, distorts and stretches them unnaturally, and tries to elevate their phenomenal appearance to the Idea by the diffuseness, immensity, and splendour of the formations employed. For the Idea is here still more or less indeterminate

and unshapable, while the natural objects are thoroughly determinate in their shape.

In the incompatibility of the two sides to one another, the relation of the Idea to the objective world therefore becomes a *negative* one, since the Idea, as something inward, is itself unsatisfied by such externality, and, as the inner universal substance thereof, it persists *sublime* above all this multiplicity of shapes which do not correspond with it. In the light of this sublimity, the natural phenomena and human forms and events are accepted, it is true, and left as they are, but yet they are recognized at the same time as incompatible with their meaning which is raised far above all mundane content.

These aspects constitute in general the character of the early artistic pantheism of the East, which on the one hand ascribes absolute meaning to even the most worthless objects, and, on the other, violently coerces the phenomena to express its view of the world whereby it becomes bizarre, grotesque, and tasteless, or turns the infinite but abstract freedom of the substance [i.e., the one Lord] disdainfully against all phenomena as being null and evanescent. By this means the meaning cannot be completely pictured in the expression and, despite all striving and endeavour, the incompatibility of Idea and shape still remains unconquered.—This may be taken to be the first form of art, the symbolic form with its quest, its fermentation, its mysteriousness, and its sublimity.

(*b*) In the *second* form of art which we will call the *classical*, the double defect of the symbolic form is extinguished. The symbolic shape is imperfect because, (i) in it the Idea is presented to consciousness only as indeterminate or determined *abstractly*, and, (ii) for this reason the correspondence of meaning and shape is always defective and must itself remain purely abstract. The classical art-form clears up this double defect; it is the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea in the shape peculiarly appropriate to the Idea itself in its essential nature. With this shape, therefore, the Idea is able to come into free and complete harmony. Thus the classical art-form is the first to afford the production and vision of the completed Ideal and to present it as actualized in fact.

Nevertheless, the conformity of concept and reality in classical art must not be taken in the purely *formal* sense of a correspondence between a content and its external configuration, any more than this could be the case with the Ideal itself. Otherwise every portrayal of nature, every cast of features, every neighbourhood, flower, scene, etc., which constitutes the end and content of the representation, would at once be classical on the strength of such congruity between content and form. On the contrary, in classical art the peculiarity of the content consists in its being itself the concrete Idea, and as such the concretely spiritual, for it is the spiritual alone which is the truly inner [self]. Consequently, to suit such a content we must try to find out what in nature belongs to the spiritual in and for itself. The *original* Concept itself it must be which *invented* the shape for concrete spirit, so that now the *subjective* Concept—here the spirit of art—has merely *found* this shape and made it, as a natural shaped existent, appropriate to free individual spirituality. This shape, which the Idea as spiritual—indeed as individually determinate spirituality—assumes when it is to proceed out into a temporal manifestation, is the human form. Of course personification and anthropomorphism have often



been maligned as a degradation of the spiritual, but in so far as art's task is to bring the spiritual before our eyes in a sensuous manner, it must get involved in this anthropomorphism, since spirit appears sensuously in a satisfying way only in its body. The transmigration of souls is in this respect an abstract idea and physiology should have made it one of its chief propositions that life in its development had necessarily to proceed to the human form as the one and only sensuous appearance appropriate to spirit.

But the human body in its form counts in classical art no longer as a merely sensuous existent, but only as the existence and natural shape of the spirit, and it must therefore be exempt from all the deficiency of the purely sensuous and from the contingent finitude of the phenomenal world. While in this way the shape is purified in order to express in itself a content adequate to itself, on the other hand, if the correspondence of meaning and shape is to be perfect, the spirituality, which is the content, must be of such a kind that it can express itself completely in the natural human form, without towering beyond and above this expression in sensuous and bodily terms. Therefore here the spirit is at once determined as particular and human, not as purely absolute and eternal, since in this latter sense it can proclaim and express itself only as spirituality.

This last point in its turn is the defect which brings about the dissolution of the classical art-form and demands a transition to a higher form, the *third*, namely the *romantic*.

(c) The romantic form of art cancels again the completed unification of the Idea and its reality, and reverts, even if in a higher way, to that difference and opposition of the two sides which in symbolic art remained unconquered. The classical form of art has attained the pinnacle of what illustration by art could achieve, and if there is something defective in it, the defect is just art itself and the restrictedness of the sphere of art. This restrictedness lies in the fact that art in general takes as its subject-matter the spirit (i.e. the *universal*, infinite and concrete in its nature) in a *sensuously* concrete form, and classical art presents the complete unification of spiritual and sensuous existence as the *correspondence* of the two. But in this blending of the two, spirit is not in fact represented in its *true nature*. For spirit is the infinite subjectivity of the Idea, which as absolute inwardness cannot freely and truly shape itself outwardly on condition of remaining moulded into a bodily existence as the one appropriate to it.

Abandoning this [classical] principle, the romantic form of art cancels the undivided unity of classical art because it has won a content which goes beyond and above the classical form of art and its mode of expression. This content—to recall familiar ideas—coincides with what Christianity asserts of God as a spirit, in distinction from the Greek religion which is the essential and most appropriate content for classical art. In classical art the concrete content is *implicitly* the unity of the divine nature with the human, a unity which, just because it is only immediate and implicit, is adequately manifested also in an immediate and sensuous way. The Greek god is the object of naïve intuition and sensuous imagination, and therefore his shape is the bodily shape of man. The range of his power and his being is individual and particular. Contrasted with the individual he is a substance and power with which the individual's inner being is only implicitly at one but without itself

possessing this oneness as inward subjective knowledge. Now the higher state is the *knowledge* of that *implicit* unity which is the content of the classical art-form and is capable of perfect presentation in bodily shape. But this elevation of the implicit into self-conscious knowledge introduces a tremendous difference. It is the infinite difference which, for example, separates man from animals. Man is an animal, but even in his animal functions, he is not confined to the implicit, as the animal is; he becomes conscious of them, recognizes them, and lifts them, as, for instance, the process of digestion, into self-conscious science. In this way man breaks the barrier of his implicit and immediate character, so that precisely because he *knows* that he is an animal, he ceases to be an animal and attains knowledge of himself as spirit.

Now if in this way what was implicit at the previous stage, the unity of divine and human nature, is raised from an *immediate* to a *known* unity, the *true* element for the realization of this content is no longer the sensuous immediate existence of the spiritual in the bodily form of man, but instead the *inwardness of self-consciousness*. Now Christianity brings God before our imagination as spirit, not as an individual, particular spirit, but as absolute in spirit and in truth. For this reason it retreats from the sensuousness of imagination into spiritual inwardness and makes this, and not the body, the medium and the existence of truth's content. Thus the unity of divine and human nature is a known unity, one to be realized only by *spiritual* knowing and *in spirit*. The new content, thus won, is on this account not tied to sensuous presentation, as if that corresponded to it, but is freed from this immediate existence which must be set down as negative, overcome, and reflected into the spiritual unity. In this way romantic art is the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself.

We may, therefore, in short, adhere to the view that at this third stage the subject-matter of art is *free concrete spirituality*, which is to be manifested as *spirituality* to the spiritually inward. In conformity with this subject-matter, art cannot work for sensuous intuition. Instead it must, on the one hand, work for the inwardness which coalesces with its object simply as if with itself, for subjective inner depth, for reflective emotion, for feeling which, as spiritual, strives for freedom in itself and seeks and finds its reconciliation only in the inner spirit. This *inner* world constitutes the content of the romantic sphere and must therefore be represented as this inwardness and in the pure appearance of this depth of feeling. Inwardness celebrates its triumph over the external and manifests its victory in and on the external itself, whereby what is apparent to the senses alone sinks into worthlessness.

On the other hand, however, this romantic form too, like all art, needs an external medium for its expression. Now since spirituality has withdrawn into itself out of the external world and immediate unity therewith, the sensuous externality of shape is for this reason accepted and represented, as in symbolic art, as something inessential and transient; and the same is true of the subjective finite spirit and will, right down to the particularity and caprice of individuality, character, action, etc., of incident, plot, etc. The aspect of external existence is consigned to contingency and abandoned to the adventures devised by an imagination whose caprice can mirror what is present to it, *exactly as it is*, just as readily as it can jumble the shapes of the external world

and distort them grotesquely. For this external medium has its essence and meaning no longer, as in classical art, in itself and its own sphere, but in the heart which finds its manifestation in itself instead of in the external world and *its* form of reality, and this reconciliation with itself it can preserve or regain in every chance, in every accident that takes independent shape, in all misfortune and grief, and indeed even in crime.

Thereby the separation of Idea and shape, their difference and inadequacy to each other, come to the fore again, as in symbolic art, but with this essential difference, that, in romantic art, the Idea, the deficiency of which in the symbol brought with it deficiency of shape, now has to appear *perfected* in itself as spirit and heart. Because of this higher perfection, it is not susceptible of an adequate union with the external, since its true reality and manifestation it can seek and achieve only within itself.

This we take to be the general character of the symbolic, classical, and romantic forms of art, as the three relations of the Idea to its shape in the sphere of art. They consist in the striving for, the attainment, and the transcendence of the Ideal as the true Idea of beauty. [...]

# Impure Mimesis, or the Ends of the Aesthetic

tout fleurira au bord d'une tombe désaffectée ...

—Jacques Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture*

With respect to the activity of aesthetic judgment, we are living in an age of reaction. Not only do the writings of the 'cultural literacy' movement represent a reactionary politics, but also their views indicate a palpable withdrawal from history. Paradoxically, within their ranks this phenomenon is cause for both celebration and mourning. In political economy, the end of History, with capitalism triumphant, has been proclaimed; at the same time, neoconservative educators agonize over the end of the aesthetic.

As recent challenges to NEA funding for 'controversial artists' demonstrate, in question here is what can be counted as 'artistic' or 'aesthetic' activity. The appeal to the universality of Western European values in this respect is curious, because the modern use of the term 'aesthetics'—a product of Enlightenment philosophy—is less than 200 years old. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it had no widespread acceptance in English until the latter half of the nineteenth century. A history of the transformation of the Greek term *aisthesis*—referring generally to problems of sense perception, and having its own complex history—into our modern sense of the term 'aesthetic,' as well as the range of meanings and activities it defines, would be of inestimable value, but beyond the limits of my present argument. As Raymond Williams points out, our modern idea of the 'aesthetic' developed over time as a systematic retreat in philosophy from understanding the social and historical meanings of representational practices.<sup>1</sup> Thus a critique of the 'political economy' of art would have to confront two interrelated ideas: first, the autonomy of the aesthetic as an interiorized, subjective activity, as opposed to social and collective ones; second, the value and self-identity of autonomous art as free of monetary value. The emergence of the aesthetic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is intimately linked both to problems of epistemology—deciding cognitive relations between subject and object—and to the theory of signs—the problem of representation, how signs differ from each other and in their mediate relation to knowledge. A deconstruction of the 'aesthetic' might hasten the dissolution of this concept, already pushed to the extreme limits of its internal contradictions by the demands of contemporary capitalism, thus liberating new concepts for understanding transformations in the semiotic environment that are already taking place.

Jacques Derrida has introduced a number of questions that this genealogical critique should address in his reading—in ‘Parergon,’ in *The Truth in Painting* and ‘Economimesis’<sup>2</sup>—of Kant’s analytic of aesthetic judgment in *The Critique of Judgement*.<sup>3</sup> Derrida demonstrates how Kant’s conception of the ends and activities of art strategically obscure the inability of Enlightenment philosophy to bridge or to resolve distinctions between mind and nature, subject and object. From the eighteenth century, the problem of hierarchical distinctions among the arts is based on an interiorization of subjectivity that identifies ‘discourse’ with speech and pure thought, as distinguished from external perceptions derived from nature. This particular division of the verbal and the visual simultaneously elevates poetry as the highest art (because it is closest to speech and thus to thought), while identifying and ranking other artistic forms through an analogy with speech and linguistic meaning.

The question of aesthetic value is also paramount. Derrida’s reading of Kant through the condensation ‘economimesis’ elaborates the central issues that a genealogical critique of the idea of the aesthetic in Enlightenment thought must address. This is not simply a question of conjoining the ‘aesthetic’ (mimesis as a process of imitation in relation to nature) and the ‘economic,’ thereby demonstrating the allegiance of art to ideology as well as its reliance on capital. Derrida examines how the idealist elaboration of the aesthetic as an ontological question increasingly excludes consideration of the material and historical forces that are continually transforming representational practices and aesthetic experience. Idealist philosophy serves—through the elaboration of the aesthetic—to create an inverse ratio between the ontological and the historical. Derrida explores only one side of the question, namely, a critique of the onto-theological foundations of the ‘aesthetic.’ However, he does open the possibility of understanding how assertions of the autonomy and universality of the aesthetic become ever more strident, as representational practices become increasingly dominated by patterns of consumption and exchange governed by the logic of commodities and the emergence of a mass public. In the current stage of development of capital, it is not that the aesthetic is now threatening to disappear, as the critics of reaction fear. Rather, it has never in fact existed, except as an ideology, in the terms elaborated since the eighteenth century in Western philosophy.

Derrida’s reading of Kant is not about the interpretation of artworks, nor is he concerned with the goals and objectives of aesthetics. Instead, he performs a critical reading of the way in which an idea of the aesthetic emerges in philosophy as one of its specific areas of inquiry. Kant is a predecessor as well as an adversary in this respect. In order to claim a specific territory for aesthetic judgments as essentially different from moral and scientific judgments, Kant critiques both Lord Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, who equate moral and aesthetic judgments with matters of feeling, and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who attempts to ground judgments of the beautiful in rational principles, thereby elevating aesthetics to the rank of a science. Thus Kant’s third *Critique* is privileged for its exemplarity: its demonstration of how the conceptual identity of the artwork, and the organization of the domain of aesthetics, emerged in modern philosophy. By the same token,

Derrida finds the problem of the example itself to be the most important and most fragile element of Kant's argument.

In *The Truth in Painting*, the chapter on the parergon in particular traces how the domain of aesthetic inquiry emerges in Kant's philosophy—that is, how the aesthetic attempts to define itself, to mark off its borders, and to give itself activities and ends distinct from other forms of philosophical work. In his opening paragraph, Derrida establishes a historical topography, beginning with the *Critique of Judgement*, which insists that the question of art be asked ontologically. As Derrida explains, this paradigm demands that,

We must know of what we speak, what concerns the value of beauty *intrinsically* and what remains external to our immanent sense of it. This permanent demand—to distinguish between the internal or proper meaning and the circumstances of the object in question—organizes every philosophic discourse on art, the meaning of art and meaning itself, from Plato to Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. It presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and the outside of the art object, in this case a *discourse on the frame*.<sup>4</sup>

Kant opens the terrain that modern aesthetic inquiry occupies. But the paradox of Kant's analysis is that his solution to the specificity of aesthetic judgments *creates* the dilemma it was designed to resolve. The very insistence on enframing—defining on one hand the self-identity of art, and on the other the specificity of aesthetic judgments—is what in fact *produces* the divisions between object and subject, inside and outside, mind and nature, that the third *Critique* claims to transcend. While enclosing and protecting an interior, the frame also produces an outside with which it must communicate. If the third *Critique* is to complete its teleological movement, this externality must also be framed—a process creating a new outside, a new necessity for enframement, and so on ad infinitum. For Derrida, this is the *energeia* of parergonal logic.

For Kant, the principal goal and problem of the *Critique of Judgement* is to identify a bridge between his first two critiques, those of pure and practical reason. Derrida cites Kant's own assessment of the problem:

[B]etween the realm of the natural concept, as the sensible, and the realm of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, there is a great gulf fixed, so that it is not possible to pass from the former to the latter (by means of the theoretical employment of reason), just as if they were so many separate worlds, the first of which is powerless to exercise influence on the second: still the latter is *meant* to influence the former. . . . There must, therefore, be a ground of the *unity*. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Kant poses two separate, absolutely divided worlds across the following concepts: object–subject, nature–mind, external–internal, outside–inside, sensible–supersensible, natural concept or understanding–concept of freedom or reason.

In this respect, Kant's approach to *aisthesis* must be distinguished from that of Greek philosophy. Where the latter elaborates a complex continuum between nature and mind, the material body and immaterial soul, *aisthesis* and *noesis*, Kant views them as divided worlds separated by an abyss. Yet some communication must exist between them. This abyss is not to be bridged by pure reason, however, that is, by determinate concepts, because that would make aesthetic and scientific judgments equivalent. A judgment of pure



taste requires instead a logic of analogy, of telling examples, of symbols and figures—in other words, a discourse of/on the aesthetic that is governed ultimately by the logic of logo-centrism. Here Derrida's reading of 'economimesis' is paired with another special condensation: 'exemplorality.' Through the rhetoric of 'as if' introduced in Kant's third *Critique* by the discursive structure of the example, and a logic of semblance without identity originating in analogies referring to the model of speech, a bridge is extended between these discontinuous worlds. Although aesthetic judgement belongs to neither pure nor practical reason, Kant asserts nevertheless that it links them in a metaphysical system by demonstrating what is common to all three.

In a work of pure philosophy, which should stand alone as a complete system of thought, 'examples' define one instance of parerga. Indeed, Kant's first use of the term appears in the section on 'Elucidation by Examples' (§14) in 'The Analytic of the Beautiful.' Simply speaking, for Kant, parerga include all of those things that are 'attached' to the work of art but are not part of its intrinsic form or meaning: the frame of a painting, the colonnades of palaces, the drapery on statues. They are ornamental—an adjunct or supplement to the intrinsic beauty of the artwork. Parerga border the work (as identity and activity) but are not part of it, they resemble the work without being identical with it, and they belong to the work while being subsidiary to it. As such, the parergon encloses the work, brackets it on four sides; yet it also communicates with the outside, attracting or focusing the senses so they may better intuit the work at hand.

The nature of this communication is significant. The object of Kant's *Critique* is not art per se. Art or the making of art has no place in Kant's philosophy. The philosopher has nothing to say, and should have nothing to say, to the painter or poet about the exercise of their arts. The role of the philosopher is to articulate, within her or his proper field, the conceptual foundations that make artistic activity possible and permit it to be intuited and judged. This is a question of the analytic of aesthetic judgment—the specificity of judgment rather than the specificity of art. Just as the analytic of the beautiful must enframe the work of art, defining what is proper to it as an object of pure taste, what is proper to the subject in this experience must be exactly delimited in the conditions of aesthetic judgment.

Aesthetic judgment, therefore, requires a specific formalization of the object–subject dilemma; it concerns the delimitation of the proper objects of pure taste and an analytic of the subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure arising in relation to them. Kant's meticulous delimitation of the conditions of object and subject in aesthetic judgment, however, has not yet answered the fundamental question of the third *Critique*: How does judgment define the base or foundation of philosophical inquiry by constructing a bridge between pure and practical reason? Derrida notes that for Kant,

Understanding and reason are not two disjunct faculties; they are articulated in a specific task and a specific number of processes, precisely those which set articulation, that is, discourse, in motion. Between the two faculties, in effect, an articulate member, a third faculty comes into play. This intermediary, which Kant rightfully calls *Mittelglied*, middle articulation, is judgment (*Urteil*).<sup>6</sup>

The modality of aesthetic judgments is similarly tied to the forms of speech. Derrida writes that

We are familiar with the example: I stand before a palace. Someone asks me whether I think it is beautiful, or rather whether I can say 'this is beautiful.' It is a question of judgment, of a judgment of universal validity, and everything must therefore be in the form of statements, questions, and answers. Even though the aesthetic affect is irreducible, judgment demands that I say 'this is beautiful' or 'this is not beautiful.'<sup>7</sup>

Judgment formulates itself as statements, questions, and answers. It is a kind of dialogue, but of what sort? Across a series of divisions—between interlocutors engaged in 'aesthetic' conversation, between the subject (spectator) and the object (palace), and within the philosophical subject internally divided in its faculties—a filigree of words is woven. Within the space of the statement, universal communication must occur freely between spatially detached and isolate parts.

Everything eventually returns to the power of *logos* to breathe life into judgment and harmonize the faculties. The key to understanding how aesthetic judgment illuminates the process of philosophical judgment, however, is expressed in the following question: How can aesthetic judgments appeal to a *universal* consensus and communicability when their origin is radically subjective, individual, and nonconceptual?

This appeal to universality informs Kant's famous emphasis on the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgments, which is defined on the one hand by freedom, and on the other by a noncognitive pleasure: the *Wohlgefallen* proper to the object of pure taste. Freedom, as the realm of the concept of the supersensible, is especially important in Kant's attempt to unify his philosophical system. This indicates, first of all, that aesthetic judgments are detached from all contingent demands or extrinsic motives, especially economic ones. There must be an absolute lack of interest in the object's existence; otherwise the critic cannot operate with perfect freedom. The spectator must have nothing at stake. If the critic invests in the object, as it were, his or her judgment cannot transcend its subjective origins and pretend to universal communicability.

The criterion of universality is also tied to the way Kant uses the idea of freedom to divide and differentiate the activities and ends of the work of art from those of nature, quotidian labor, and science. In this respect, it defines the aesthetic subjectivity of those who create as well as those who judge.

The division of art from nature is the greatest and most important territorial border in the third *Critique*. Doubtless, Kant preserves the classical distinction between *physis* and *technè*, where nature as mechanical necessity is opposed to art as the arena where human freedom is most clearly exercised. Ultimately, the Kantian definition of mimesis—which weaves a bold analogy between how God represents himself in nature, the artist in Fine Art, and the philosopher in judgment—attempts to bridge these oppositions by deriving its 'rules' from nature, but only as a free production, rather than mechanical repetition. Like every freedom protected by 'laws,' however, these rules restrict more than they allow. They instigate hierarchies of rank and privilege, empowerment and disfranchisement, elevated and lowered beings. In this respect, freedom is first of all human freedom; the work of art is always the work of 'man' (*ein Werk der Menschen*). In Kant's example, despite their order

and symmetry, the works of bees ('cells of wax regularly constructed') cannot be considered works of art. This is the first move in a parergonal logic that divides humanity from animality—raising 'man' and his productions above nature, while not being strictly separate from it—in order to bring humanity in general by degrees closer to divinity.

In this hierarchy, mechanical repetition and ends-directed labor are not restricted to animals alone. Derrida points out that Kant's comments on the relations among nature, art, and imitation are placed between two remarks on 'salary.' The first, in 'On Art in General' (§43), divides liberal or free (*freie*) art from salaried or mercenary art (*Lohnkunst*). The second, in 'On the Division of the Fine Arts' (§51), declares that 'in the Fine-Arts the mind must occupy itself, excite and satisfy itself without having any end in view and independently of any salary.' Art appears only in the absence of economy; its significance, value, and means of circulation may not be defined by money. 'By right,' Kant states, 'we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choices that bases its acts on reason' (§43).

Thus the hierarchy that orders beings in nature according to the relation of humanity to animality replicates itself as a scale evaluating the activity and labor of individuals. As 'mercenary' art, craft is based on a vulgar economy and quotidian use. For Kant, however, the artist is no common laborer, as Derrida summarizes in three points. The first is Kant's suggestion that 'free art is more human than remunerated work.'<sup>8</sup> Just as the play of freedom in artistic activity elevates humanity above the instinctual activity of bees, the 'liberal' artist is more fully human than the wage laborer. Second, Kant implies that just as man's elevation in nature empowers him to enlist the utility of animals toward his ends and 'higher' labors, so too may the freer individual, the artist, enlist the mercenary work of the craftsperson, or use the vulgar tools of craft, without the value of art being implicated in an economy of usefulness and exchange. Oppositions deriving from nature–man and animal–human are thus reproduced as hierarchies defining the relative value of individuals and their labor, subordinating remunerated work and the lesser freedom of the craftsperson to the higher ends of the artist.

Similar criteria divide art from science and in turn reproduce hierarchical distinctions between mechanical and aesthetic art on one hand, and in aesthetic art between agreeable and fine arts (*schöne Kunst*) on the other. Here we return to the problem of noncognitive pleasure in aesthetic judgments. For Kant, there is no law applicable to the imagination save what is derived from understanding. When the imagination proceeds only according to a determinate law, the forms produced are determined by concepts. This is the ideal of scientific knowledge where the imagination is subordinated to the elaboration of concepts of understanding. The *Wohlgefallen* appropriate to scientific statements, for example, derives only from a formal perfection in harmony with concepts; it is experienced as the 'good' and has nothing to do with the beautiful as such, which, for Kant, is resolutely nonconceptual.

Unlike the scientist, the pure artist (Genius, in Kant's account) does not require reflexive conceptualization to accomplish exemplary works of fine art. By the same token, the lesser forms of art, and the pleasure defining them, are all characterized by their relative proximity to the conceptual. In Derrida's gloss,

An art that conforms to knowledge of a possible object, which executes the operations necessary to bring it into being, which knows in advance that it must produce and consequently does produce it, such a *mechanical art* neither seeks nor gives pleasure. One knows how to print a book, build a machine, one avails oneself of a model and a purpose. To mechanical art Kant opposes aesthetic art. The latter has its immediate end in pleasure.<sup>9</sup>

In a similar way, aesthetic art divides into two hierarchic species, for aesthetic art is not always fine or beautiful art. *Pure* taste has, in fact, a literal meaning for Kant. It elevates or lowers the aesthetic arts according to the criterion of whether their pleasures are empirical or spiritual. Within aesthetic art, the ‘agreeable arts’—for example, conversation, jest, the art of serving and managing dinner as well as an evening’s entertainment, including music and party games—seek their ends in enjoyment (*Genuß*). The *Wohlgefallen* appropriate to fine art, however, involves pleasure without ‘enjoyment’—at least in the sense of an empirical, if incommunicable, sensation. Being purposive only for itself, it can have no finality in the sense of satisfying a physical appetite or filling an empirical lack, thus yielding Kant’s basic definition:

Fine art . . . is a way of presenting [*Vorstellungsart*] that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose [*ohne Zweck*], the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication. The very concept of universal communicability carries with it [the requirement] that this pleasure must be a pleasure of reflection rather than one of enjoyment arising from mere sensation. Hence aesthetic art that is also fine art is one whose standard is the reflective power of judgment, rather than sensation proper [§44].<sup>10</sup>

Pure pleasure and pure taste belong only to judgment and reflection; at the same time, judgment and reflection must be without concepts. Only on this basis do the criteria of freedom and noncognitive pleasure assure the universality of aesthetic judgment as particularly human by subtracting out the creaturely distractions and temptations of worldly life. If fine art involves the ‘production of freedom,’ this is freedom from economic or political interest, and from the finality of scientific investigation or ends-directed labor, as well as a pleasure free of physical appetites.

If the experience of fine art is resolutely without *concepts*, then why should philosophy take an interest, if only the moral interest involving practical reason and concepts of freedom, in the beautiful? This is linked to a second question: Because the definition of judgments of pure taste seems to recede from both the social and the creaturely toward an interiorized, immaterial subjectivity, how does the experience of fine art advance ‘the culture of our mental powers [with respect to] social communication’? In other words, how is the pleasure—without enjoyment or concept—of art returned to the space of philosophical communication in the predicate ‘This is beautiful’?

These questions are answered by considering the curious role of mimesis in the third *Critique*. The version of mimesis that Derrida reads in Kant is governed not by a logic of semblance or imitation, but rather by a logic of analogy. For example, Kant defends philosophy’s moral interest in the beautiful because, despite its lack of conceptual grounding, the judgment of taste nonetheless *resembles* logical judgment because of its universality. Thus, in aesthetic judgment, the philosopher may

talk about the beautiful as if [*als ob*] beauty were a characteristic of the object and the judgment were logical (namely a cognition of the object through concepts of it), even though in fact the judgment is only aesthetic and refers the object's presentation [*Vorstellung*] merely to the subject. He will talk in this way because the judgment does resemble [*Ähnlichkeit hat*] a logical judgment inasmuch as we may presuppose it to be valid for everyone. On the other hand, this universality cannot arise from concepts. For from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (except in pure practical laws; but these carry an interest with them, while none is connected with pure judgments of taste). It follows that, since a judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim to being valid for everyone, but without having a universality based on concepts. In other words, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality [§6].<sup>11</sup>

By similar criteria of 'universality,' and despite the abyss that essentially divides humanity from nature, Kant renders art and nature as equivalent, because they share the lawfulness without a law, or purposiveness without purpose (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*), that governs their beautiful forms. In both cases, logical relations of identity and nonidentity rest side by side like discordant notes that nevertheless ring with a strange harmony.

In this way, Kant's theory of mimesis asserts the superiority of beauty in nature and derives the beautiful in art from its relation to nature. But that relation is defined not by a logic of the copy but rather by a rhetoric of production and reproduction. In finding common ground between art, nature, and genius, mimesis requires a logic of equivalent activities, not one of mirrors. This implies a third distinction that divides the artisan from the artist as the difference between a reproductive imagination and a productive imagination that is originary, spontaneous, and playful. In Derrida's view, the value of play in Kant defines a form of productivity that is purer, freer, and more human, as opposed to work, which is ends-directed, unpleasant, and exchanged against a salary. Reproductive imagination is therefore a vulgar realism—reproduction in the form of likeness, or repetition as identity. In contrast, productive imagination—regardless of whether it applies to acts of creating or of judging aesthetic objects—is characterized by a paradoxical freedom that is the imagination's 'free conformity to law.'

The liberties implied here, as well as their limitations, are central to how Kant's notions of mimesis mediate difficulties of subject and object. On one hand, the free play of imagination is limited by the forms of the object intuited: '[A]lthough in apprehending a given object of sense the imagination is tied to a determinate form of this object and to that extent does not have free play (as it does [e.g.] in poetry), it is still conceivable that the object may offer it just the sort of form in the combination of its manifold as the imagination, if it were left to itself [and] free, would design in harmony with the *understanding's lawfulness* in general.'<sup>12</sup> A judgment of beauty becomes possible, then, when the harmony of form in the object is intuited as analogous to a harmony in the subject that the imagination would form with respect to the understanding if, paradoxically, the former were left in perfect freedom to conform itself to the lawfulness of the latter.

Resemblance, then, limits the freedom of the imagination, if for no other reason than that it may function as an aim, purpose, or end. And the more semblance between sign and referent, the more extreme are these limitations.

On the other hand, without an underlying 'lawfulness' there would be no ground for uniting understanding, moral judgments, and judgments of taste, and no language with which to communicate them. By a process of analogy this sense of lawfulness without a law and purposiveness without purpose, whose original territory is that of nature, informs and 'naturalizes' every reference in the third *Critique* to representation, signification, or language.

Through mimesis, then, art does not imitate nature in the sense of reproducing its visible signs. Art does not reproduce nature; it must *produce like* nature, that is, in perfect freedom. And paradoxically, for Kant the moment in which an artistic production is most fully human—in other words, most clearly and unnaturally fabricated by human hands—is the moment when it most clearly replicates the effects of the actions of nature. Thus Kant writes:

In [dealing with] a product of fine art, we must become conscious that it is art rather than nature, and yet the purposiveness in its form must seem [*scheinen*] as free from all constraint [*Zwang*] of chosen rules as if [*als ob*] it were a product of mere nature. It is this feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive powers, a play that yet must also be purposive, which underlies that pleasure [*Lust*] which alone is universally communicable, although not based on concepts. Nature, we say, is beautiful [*schön*] if it also looks like art; and art can be called fine [*schön*] art only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature [§45].<sup>13</sup>

In their most ontologically pure forms, artistic productions resemble nature most clearly when they have most clearly liberated themselves from natural laws. Art and nature are most analogous in the purity of their freedom from one another. This is Kant's most daring move in the teleological orientation of the third *Critique*, because it turns the chasm between mind and nature, subject and object, into the ground for their unity.

At this point Derrida reemphasizes how a *divine teleology*, in fact a process of ontotheological naturalization, underwrites the logic of economimesis, securing the identification of human action with divine action. However, this identification does not necessarily subordinate humanity to a God in whose image it has been fashioned. Rather, like the identification with an other on the stage—or, better yet, like a good method actor—the artist produces in his or her activity a divine subjectivity. In this way the logic of economimesis secures the figure of Genius as the exemplar of a divine agency in art where the artist creates—without concepts, as a pure and free productivity of the imagination—in a fashion analogous to the way God produces his works in nature. For Kant, fine art is the art of genius, and genius is a gift of nature, an endowment of its productive freedom. And what nature gives to genius, genius gives to art in the form of 'nonconceptual rules.' In so doing, genius 'capitalizes freedom but in the same gesture naturalizes the whole of *economimesis*.'<sup>14</sup>

The same divine teleology that ranks and orders artistic labor and subjectivity also organizes a hierarchy within the fine arts. According to the logic wherein art and nature are most clearly alike when, in their beautiful forms, they are most different, Kant asserts that poetry is the highest form of expression, as well as the most mimetic, because it most radically rejects imitation. Because the factor of resemblance in signs limits the freedom of the imagination, the imagination is most free and open to play in contemplation of linguistic signs because of their arbitrariness, their noncontingent relation to



the natural world, and because the gift of language most clearly marks the abyss separating the human from the instinctual and creaturely. Because of their relation to language, among liberal artists poets are the most free and, in conferring the freedom of the imagination to humanity, are most like God. This relation between God and genius defines the ‘immaculate commerce’ informing Kant’s theory of aesthetic communication, and Derrida recognizes the tautology:

An infinite circle plays [with] itself and uses human play to reappropriate the gift for itself. The poet or genius receives from nature what he gives of course, but first he receives from nature (from God), besides the given, the giving, the power to produce and to give more than he promises to men. ... *All that must pass through the voice.* ...

Being what he is, the poet gives more than he promises. More than anyone asks of him. And this more belongs to the understanding: it announces a game and it gives something conceptual. Doubtless it is a plus-law [*un plus-de-loi*] ..., but one produced by a faculty whose essential character is *spontaneity*. Giving more than he promises or than is asked of him, the genius poet is paid for this more by no one, at least within the political economy of man. But God supports him. He supports him with speech and in return for gratitude He furnishes him his capital, produces and reproduces his labor force, gives him surplus value and the means of giving surplus value.

This is a poetic commerce because God is a poet. There is a relation of hierarchical analogy between the poetic action of the speaking art, at the summit, and the action of God who dictates *Dichtung* to the poet.<sup>15</sup>

At the origin of all analogy, then, is the word of God; in the third *Critique* everything returns to *logos* as origin. And for this reason, Derrida argues that the ‘origin of analogy, that from which analogy proceeds and towards which it returns, is the *logos*, reason and word, the source as mouth and as an outlet [*embouchure*].’<sup>16</sup> Kant’s privileging of oral examples, the ‘exemplorality’ of the *Critique of Judgement*, underwrites the crucial function of mimesis in Kant’s attempt to resolve the dilemmas of subject and object formulated in his philosophical system.

I have already discussed how Kant’s portrayal of ‘pure’ judgments of taste relies on a rejection of empirical sensation and a withdrawal of the physical body. Curious, then, how the centrality of the mouth figures in the *Critique of Judgement*. Above all, in the section ‘On the Division of the Fine Arts,’ it organizes a hierarchy among the arts, and in the terms of aesthetic value (taste or disgust), by defining them with respect to the expressive organization of the human body. For Derrida, the figured circle of the mouth, and the circularity of immaculate commerce in spoken communication, organizes a parergonal logic of the subject in Kant. Just as the ‘frame’ of painting had both to protect the intrinsic purity of art and to open up commerce with the outside, the mouth establishes a privileged border between the interiority of the subject and an outside that must be represented and communicated to others, whose purest form of expression is speech. For Kant, those individuals who lack any ‘feeling for beautiful nature’ are those who ‘confine themselves to eating and drinking—to the mere enjoyments of sense,’ or who would prefer the trick of imitating a nightingale’s song ‘by means of a tube or reed in [the] mouth’ to the song of the poet celebrating nature in lyric. Therefore, the purest judgment of taste, the truest art, and the purest *Wohlgefallen* passes through orality, but only

in a nontactile, nonsensuous fashion. Singing and hearing thus represent 'the unconsummated voice or ideal consumption, of a heightened or interiorized sensibility,' as opposed to 'a consuming orality which as such, has an interested taste or as actual taste, can have nothing to do with pure taste.'<sup>17</sup>

The purest objects of taste, as well as the best judgments, pass in and out of the subject on the immateriality of breath, rather than through vulgar consumption or emesis.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Kant's *Anthropology*, hearing prevails over sight among the 'objective' senses, that is, senses that give a mediate perception of the object. Unlike sight, hearing is not governed by the form of objects that may yield a determinate relation, a restriction of freedom in the play of ideas. Conversely, both voice and hearing have a sympathetic relation to air, which passes outside of and into the subject as communicative vibrations. As Kant writes in his *Anthropology*:

It is precisely by this element, moved by the organ of voice, the mouth, that men, more easily and more completely, enter with others in a community of thought and sensations, especially if the sounds that each gives the other to hear are articulated and if, linked together by understanding according to laws, they constitute a language. The form of an object is not given by hearing, and linguistic sounds [*Sprachlaute*] do not immediately lead to the representation of the object, but by that very fact and because they signify nothing in themselves, at least no object, only, at most, interior feelings, they are the most appropriate means for characterizing concepts, and those who are born deaf, who consequently must also remain mute (without language) can never accede to anything more than an *analogon* of reason [§18].<sup>19</sup>

This identification of speech with reason and a pure interiority of thought assures that a logocentric bias organizes the division and ranking of the fine arts in the *Critique of Judgement*. Kant bases his categorization of the fine arts—speech (*redende*), the visual or formative (*bildende*) arts, and the art of the play of sensations (*Spiel der Empfindungen*)—on an analogy with verbal communication whose fundamentals include word, gesture, and tone. Where aesthetic value is concerned, the decisive criterion is a nonsensuous similarity where lyric, because of its relation of nonidentity with the signs of nature, is most like them because it allows the imagination to respond freely and without determination. Despite his potential iconoclasm in this respect, Kant ranks painting higher than music because of its ability to expand the mental powers that must unite in the activity of judgment. The problem here is the temporality of music. Kant disparages music not only because it is ephemeral but also because temporally and spatially it undermines the freedom and autonomy of subjective contemplation. Whereas the spectator can interrupt the temporality of painterly contemplation by averting his or her eyes, he or she cannot interrupt a musical performance, which often 'extends its influence (on the neighborhood) farther than people wish, and so, as it were, imposes itself on others and hence impairs the freedom of those outside the musical party.'<sup>20</sup> Returning to the *Anthropology*, Kant argues that sight is the most noble of the senses because it is the least tactile and least affected by the object; therefore, one assumes that among the plastic arts, painting will benefit from this nobility. However, though sight may be the most noble sense, hearing, for Kant, is the least replaceable, owing to the intimate relation between speech and concepts. Here again Kant refers, in a rather objectionable way, to

the situation of deaf-mutes, who, because of the absence of hearing, will never attain 'true' speech and thus reason:

[H]e will never attain real concepts [*wirklichen Begriffen*], since the signs necessary to him [gestures, for example] are not capable of universality. ... Which deficiency [*Mangel*] or loss of sense is more serious, that of hearing or of sight? When it is inborn, deficiency of hearing is the least reparable [*ersetzlich*] [§22].

For similar reasons, among the discursive arts, poetry (*Dichtkunst*) is superior to oratory (*Beredsamkeit*) because the latter, especially as a public art, potentially deceives and machinates, treating men 'like machines' (§53). It is a mercenary art that promises more than it gives, while expecting something in return from its audience, namely, the winning of people's minds. Therefore, in the third *Critique*, poetry is the highest art because 'it is the art which imitates the least, and which therefore resembles most closely divine productivity. It produces more by liberating the imagination; it is more playful because the forms of external sensible nature no longer serve to limit it.'<sup>21</sup> By the same token, poetic genius is the highest form of aesthetic subjectivity because, in its analogous relation to the divine *logos*, it is the most free and confers the most liberty on the imagination of individuals:

It expands the mind: for it sets the imagination free and offers [*darbietet*] us, from among the unlimited variety of possible forms that harmonize with a given concept, though within that concept's limits, that form which links [*verknüpft*] the exhibition [*Darstellung*] of the concept with a wealth of thought [*Gedankenfülle*] to which no linguistic expression [*Sprachausdruck*] is completely adequate [*völlig adäquat*], and so poetry rises [*sich erhebt*] aesthetically to ideas [§53].<sup>22</sup>

In Kant's view, by freeing us from the limits of external, sensual nature, poetry binds linguistic presentation to the fullness of thought, rendering the presence of ideas to thought, in a way that no other art can. And even if, as a figured 'aesthetic' language, it is inadequate to the absolute plenitude of the suprasensible, it is nonetheless closer to truth. Unlike rhetoric, which uses the figurative potential of language to deceive purposely and to limit freedom of the imagination, poetry fully discloses that it is mere play that nonetheless can be used to extend the power of understanding.

Thus Derrida rightly insists that Kant derives a theory of value from the arbitrariness of the vocal signifier, that is, its difference with respect to external sensible nature. The difference, immateriality, and interiority of the vocal signifier align it with the realm of freedom:

Communication here is closer to freedom and spontaneity. It is also more complete, since interiority expresses itself here directly. It is more universal for all these reasons. ... And once sounds no longer have any relation of natural representation with external sensible things, they are more easily linked to the spontaneity of the understanding. Articulated, they furnish a language in agreement with its laws. Here indeed we have the arbitrary nature of the vocal signifier. It belongs to the element of freedom and can only have interior or ideal signifieds, that is, conceptual ones. Between the concept and the system of hearing-oneself speak, between the intelligible and speech, the link is privileged. One must use the term hearing-oneself-speak [*le s'entendre-parler*] because the structure is autoaffective; in it the mouth and the ear cannot be dissociated.<sup>23</sup>

The nature of this freedom is marked in every case by a profound interiorization, a retreat from the external signs of nature into a purely subjective autonomy whose measure is the autoaffective structure of logocentrism. Here we must try to bring together the analytic of judgments of pure taste and the analytic of the beautiful, while rethinking the relation between subject and object, as well as mind and nature, implied by Kant's theory of signification in the third *Critique*. In this manner, the circle of orality passes again through three otherwise autonomous realms: those of nature (God), art (poetry), and philosophy (judgment).

The self-identity of judgment as a mental power separate from cognition (understanding or pure reason) and desire (practical reason) derives only from the feelings of pleasure or displeasure that belong to it. Nevertheless, Kant insists that the philosopher should take a moral interest in the beautiful in nature in spite of the nonconceptual and disinterested pleasure devolving from judgments of pure taste, for this *Wohlgefallen* would not be explicable if there were not a principle of harmony (*Uebereinstimmung*) between what nature produces in its beautiful forms and our disinterested pleasure in them. Whereas the latter is detached from all determined ends or interests, there must be some means of demonstrating the analogous relation between the purposiveness of nature and our *Wohlgefallen*.

This demonstration cannot take place through pure concepts of understanding. However, for Kant this harmony is legible, or perhaps it would be better to say audible, in the impure mimesis, the relation of identity in non-identity, that determines the autoaffective structure of *logos* as the origin of analogy in the third *Critique*. There must be 'language' in nature, or at least the traces of a formalization organizing the apparent disorder of nature as legible signs. Otherwise the beautiful in nature could never be intuited. The experience of *Wohlgefallen* itself, which binds imagination and language in the predication 'This is beautiful,' is evidence enough for Kant that there is poetry in nature of which God is the author, even if a theological proof is ultimately insufficient for him. Through his insistence on an analogy between moral judgments and judgments of taste, Kant asserts the superiority of natural beauty and attests to its aesthetic legibility in a judgment of pure taste, that is, our ability to 'read the "ciphered language" [*Chiffreschrift*] that nature "speaks to us figurally [*figürlich*] through its beautiful forms," its real signatures which make us consider it, nature, as art production. Nature lets itself be admired as art, not by accident but according to well-ordered laws' (§42).<sup>24</sup> Later, Derrida summarizes this idea by stating that, for Kant,

Beautiful forms, which signify nothing and have no determined purpose are therefore *also, and by that very fact*, encrypted signs, a figural writing set down in nature's production. The *without* of pure detachment is in truth a language that nature speaks to us. ... Thus the in-significant non-language of forms which have no purpose or end and make no sense, this silence is a language between nature and man.<sup>25</sup>

This analogy between nature and art is parergonal, forging an identity between otherwise exclusive realms, those of humanity and nature: Nature speaks, but silently; it writes, but figurally; it is endowed with interest that can only be taken in a disinterested way. With the controlled indeterminacy that marks every parergon, the realms of nature and humanity are given a com-

mon language, and yet denied the space of reciprocal communication; they must remain extrinsic to one another. But this does not mean that a dialogue will not take place. Finding the beautiful in nature and art, we may experience them both aesthetically. However, the extrinsic form of aesthetic objects, activities, and situations has less to do with the power of judging than with the peculiarities of an internal (silent) dialogue between imagination and the understanding that arises in the subject, but only on one necessary condition: that the purpose or ends of this experience remain indeterminate and inscrutable, and therefore without finality. While intractably dividing object and subject, the ‘disinterestedness’ of the aesthetic nonetheless inspires communication by inscribing the circle of the mouth on the (philosophical) body of the subject. The purposelessness of both nature and art opens up a dialogue in the necessary interiority of aesthetic judgment. In Derrida’s assessment of Kant, this

purposelessness [*le sans-fin*] ... leads us back inside ourselves. Because the outside appears purposeless, we seek purpose within. There is something like a movement of interiorizing suppliance [*suppléance intériorisante*], a sort of slurping [*suçotement*] by which, cut off from what we seek outside ... , we seek and give within, in an autonomous fashion, not by licking our chops, or smacking our lips or whetting our palates, but rather ... by giving ourselves orders, categorical imperatives, by chatting with ourselves through universal schemas once they no longer come from outside.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, the nonconceptual pleasure inherent in judgments of pure taste is associated with the play of freedom as ‘a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the imagination without an objective harmony,’<sup>27</sup> in a movement of idealizing interiorization. Everything recedes—from the extrinsic, the empirical, and the corporeal—into the subjective, the internal, and the spiritual. This is why one must not consult the aesthetic object with cognition in mind. Rather, it is a subjective, interiorized investigation of the origin of a pleasure that is non-conceptual and thus nondiscursive.

This is the final ground for the essential disinterestedness of aesthetic judgments. In order to say that an object is beautiful, and to demonstrate that the philosopher has pure taste, everything returns to the meaning that the subject can give to the representation (*Darstellung*), excluding any factor that would make the subject dependent on the real existence of the object. For this reason, Derrida states that the *Wohlgefallen*, the pleasure affect that is proper to art in the Kantian sense, takes the form of an autoaffection, an interiorized and self-authenticating dialogue. In *Of Grammatology*, the logocentric circle of autoaffection is critiqued as a self-producing and self-authenticating movement that identifies reason and fullness of being with the temporality of speech. Thinking, at least the pure thought of philosophy, is represented as ‘hearing oneself speak,’ a formula Derrida reprises in relation to Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. The comparative authenticity and veracity of poetic speech, its capacity for mimesis without semblance, the indissociable relation between the mouth and the ear, the irreplaceability of hearing, the association of speech with interiority, with concepts, and with internal sense—all of these factors mark an insistence that the position of *logos* in Kant’s system is not one analogy among others. The linguistic signifier is that ‘which regulates all analogy,’ writes Derrida, ‘and which itself is not analogical, since it forms the

ground of analogy, the *logos* of analogy towards which everything flows back but which itself remains without system, outside of the system that it orients as its ends and its origin, its *embouchure* and its source.<sup>28</sup>

In Derrida's chapter on the *parergon*, this internal speech also represents a discursive invagination of the aesthetic. Something in the pure alterity of the beautiful initiates a silent, internal dialogue between the mental powers of imagination and understanding that in turn externalizes itself as speech, assuring its communication in judgment. This is not a dialectic, but rather a series of discrete exchanges rendered as equivalent because they share a common modality. In this manner, autoaffectation, in the proper *Wohlgefallen*, becomes for Kant the possibility of mastering the opposition between mind and nature, the inside and the outside, and the subject's relation to the object. Similarly, though the *Wohlgefallen* that breathes life into aesthetic judgment is the property of the subject, it is itself not intrinsically 'subjective':

Since this affect of *enjoying something* remains thoroughly subjective, we may speak here of an autoaffectation. The role of imagination and thus of time in the entire discourse confirms this. Nothing which exists, as such, nothing in time and in space can produce this affect which affects itself with itself. And nevertheless, *enjoying something*, the *something* of *enjoyment* also indicates that this autoaffectation extends beyond itself: it is pure heteroaffectation. The purely subjective affect is provoked by that which we call the beautiful, that which is said to be beautiful: *outside*, in the object and independent of its existence. From which, the indispensable, critical character of the recourse to judgment: the structure of autoaffectation is such that it is affected by a pure objectivity about which we must say, 'This *is* beautiful,' and "This statement has universal validity.' Otherwise there would be no problem, no discourse on art. *The wholly other affects me with pure pleasure while depriving me of both concept and enjoyment. . . . Utterly irreducible heteroaffectation inhabits—intrinsically—the hermetic autoaffectation: this is the 'grosse Schwierigkeit': it does not install itself in the comfortable arrangement of the overworked subject/object couple, within an arbitrarily determined space. . . .*

And all the same time it is there, pleasure, something remains; *it is there, es gibt, ça donne*, pleasure is what is given; for no one, but it remains and it is the best, the purest. And it is this remainder that gives rise to speech, since it is discourse on the beautiful that is primarily under consideration once again, discursivity with the structure of the beautiful and not only a discourse arising out of the beautiful.<sup>29</sup>

Just as there could not be beauty in nature if there were not, by analogy, a poetry of nature, a discourse could not emerge from the beautiful if the beautiful were not itself discursive. This is why the orality of poetry has the most pure affinity with that of aesthetic judgment—not only because they are the most purely internal and autoaffecting, but also because art and judgment share the same frame (i.e., the circle of the mouth). Judgment must speak or state the beautiful, even if the beautiful eludes it conceptually, in order to supplement beauty's nonconceptual lack and return it to the space of philosophy. The autoaffective circle that produces the judgment of pure taste also informs how God figures his order in nature, how the gift of 'natural' creativity is transmitted to genius, how genius bestows the gift of form on poetic language, and in turn how a judgment of pure taste is engendered by contemplation of the beautiful forms of poetry or of nature. As *parerga*, there is an essential relation here between the frame and the signature, on one hand, and the circle of the mouth in relation to exemplorality, on the other. Just



as the inscription of the signature ensures an external authorizing presence within the purportedly pure aesthetic interiority delimited by the frame, the figure of the mouth and the circularity between speech and hearing ensure a passageway between mind and nature, the inside and the outside, subject and object, where heteroaffection and autoaffection fly into and out of one another, gliding on the wings of speech.

This peculiar oscillation in the analytic of pure taste replicates exactly that of the analytic of the beautiful, defining the status of both as *parerga*. The frame is supposed to decide what is intrinsic to the artwork, defining its ontological character as such. The frame is there to divide and exclude, separate the outside from the inside, and to control any commerce between them. Yet it must also be a bridge, for the whole point of the third *Critique* is an extrinsic appeal—the relation between the spectator and the artwork and how that confrontation between two unique identities, between subject and object, produces a unity in the form of judgments of pure taste. The *parergon* is therefore a logic of ‘controlled indeterminacy’ or of a ceaseless vibration between inside and outside, the intrinsic and extrinsic, subject and object, the reflective and the determinant, the singular and the universal, the conceptual and the nonconceptual, mind and nature. In short, the ontological question of ‘what is,’ which is meant to define the integral being of art and of aesthetic subjectivity, seems paradoxically to appeal to, and be infected with, the outside in the very asking of the question. The frame of Kant’s analytic thus functions itself as a *parergon*. In Derrida’s words, it is ‘summoned and assembled like a supplement because of the lack—a certain “internal” indetermination—in the very thing it enframes.’<sup>30</sup> This indetermination is, in fact, the ontological uncertainty of the very idea of the aesthetic:

The analytic *determines* the frame as *parergon*, that which simultaneously constitutes and destroys it, makes it hold (as in *hold together*, it constitutes, mounts, enshrines, sets, borders, assembles, protects—so many operations assembled by the *Einfassung*) and fall at the same time. A frame is in essence constructed and therefore fragile, this is the essence or truth of the frame. If such a thing exists. But this ‘truth’ can no longer be a ‘truth,’ it defines neither the transcendent nor the contingent character of the frame, only its character as *parergon*.

Philosophy wants to examine this ‘truth,’ but never succeeds. That which produces and manipulates the frame sets everything in motion to efface its effect, most often by naturalizing it to infinity, in God’s keeping. . . .<sup>31</sup>

As Derrida insists, a *parergon* is added only to supplement a lack in the system it augments. No simple exteriority defines the space of *parerga*, for they also constitute an ‘internal structural link. . . inseparable from a lack within the *ergon*. And this lack makes for the very unity of the *ergon*.’<sup>32</sup> (Indeed, the *Critique of Judgement* is itself *parergonal*, which is why Derrida decides to read a work of philosophy as if it were a work of art. It is a detachable volume within Kant’s system of philosophy, while being at the same time functionally inseparable. The third *Critique* must bridge the gap opened between the first two and thus complete Kant’s system of transcendental idealism, enframe it from inside, making the system visible in its entirety.) The frame is summoned to give an ontological presence and shape to a

space that otherwise threatens to dissolve in aporia; the circle is there to give form to what is otherwise an absent center, and to provide a concept for an otherwise conceptless blank space. This is another way of saying that the aesthetic is an imaginary concept, but in the psychoanalytic rather than Kantian manner. Feeding a regressive fantasy of presence and autonomy, it detaches the work from the field of history by resolutely excluding any social meaning, including the economic and the political. Thus the frame functions as ‘the invisible limit of (between) the interiority of meaning (protected by the entire hermeneutic, semiotic, phenomenological, and formalist tradition) and (of) all the extrinsic empiricals which, blind and illiterate, dodge the question.’<sup>33</sup>

In this respect, I would like to conclude with some brief remarks on the division between the verbal and visual in Kant, as well as Derrida’s rather cryptic but frequent references to the work of mourning in the Kantian experience of pure taste and the *Wohlgefallen* appropriate to it.

I have argued elsewhere that the eighteenth century produced a hierarchical opposition between the verbal and the visual, linguistic and plastic representation, as ontological categories that can no longer be sustained, if indeed they ever could.<sup>34</sup> Kant does not produce this hierarchy in as definite a way as Lessing before him or Hegel after him. Kant’s ideas concerning the division of the fine arts are not specifically iconoclastic, nor is he concerned, as Lessing is in the *Laocoön*, with defining and preserving territorial borders among the arts, thereby reproducing the ontological drive of the aesthetic within a definition of the *differencia specifica* of various artistic media. There is one exception—poetry. Here an ontological imperative unites object and subject, the question of the aesthetic and that of judgment, in the autoaffective identification of speech, reason, and freedom that defines the logocentrism of the third *Critique*. In Derrida’s gloss,

Kant specifies that the only thing one ought to call ‘art’ is the production of freedom by means of freedom [*Hervorbringung durch Freiheit*]. Art properly speaking puts free-will [*Willkür*] to work and places reason at the root of its acts. There is therefore no art, in a strict sense, except that of a being who is free and *logon ekon* [has speech].<sup>35</sup>

Although poetry is the highest art for Kant, because, imitating the least, it is the most free, the principle of nonsensuous similarity is not the only criterion for ranking the arts. If it were, music would have to be ranked higher than painting. But here the preference for private as opposed to public experience emerges at the same time that sight (though being the noblest sense) is subordinated to hearing as the least replaceable. Both the privilege of the poetic and the exemplorality of the third *Critique* point to what amounts to a transcendent principle, ranking the arts according to their ability to exhibit ‘aesthetic ideas.’ For Kant, *Spirit* (*Geist*) is the animating principle that defines the purposiveness of mental life. ‘By an aesthetic idea,’ writes Kant, ‘I mean a presentation of the imagination [*Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft*] which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] *concept*, can be adequate, so that no language [*Sprache*] can express it completely and allow us to grasp it’ (§49).<sup>36</sup> Further on, Kant summarizes:

In a word, an aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected, when we use imagination in its freedom, with such a multiplicity of partial presentations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it. Hence it is a presentation that makes us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which would otherwise be mere letters, with spirit.<sup>37</sup>

The intervening example entails Kant's reading of a poem by Frederick the Great, about which Derrida has much to say. I restrict myself to pointing out that the graphic presentation of speech in writing finally combines all the elements adhering to a judgment of pure taste. Lack of semblance produces a surfeit of freedom; the wider the abyss between an external *representamen* and its internal apprehension, the higher the pitch of mental powers whose agitation breeds concepts. Through the eye, the noblest and least tactile sense, comes the purest, the most immaterial, and most interior hearing. All interest has finally withdrawn: The poet withdraws into writing, itself the best representation of speech, if only a supplementary one, because of its nonsensuous similarity. Yet only this pure, interior speech animates it as *Geist*, gives meaning and value to language that would otherwise be mere letters, just as, paradoxically, the king returns political economy to the third *Critique* through his patronage. In sum, lack of semblance, maximization of freedom and the subjective powers of desire, absolute interiorization—this is the formula that only poetry provides. And despite the implied preference for poetic writing and the silence of reading, only *logos* can return meaning to spirit as 'hearing oneself speak,' and in the third *Critique* this is true for every art, spatial or temporal, plastic or linguistic.

Thus Kant participates importantly in forging the division between the verbal and the visual as it emerges in eighteenth-century thought. But the ontological surplus that adheres in the former is so powerful that Kant seems indifferent to the latter. The formal status of the plastic and musical arts is taken for granted. They can be dispensed with quickly to move on to more pressing business. However, this absence of reflection on the 'lower' arts—despite the process of division and hierarchy that seems to demand it—nonetheless continues to function through a sort of repression. It returns in the third *Critique* through the supplementary logic of examples (for example, verbal images like that of judgment as a 'bridge' over the abyss separating understanding and reason), but more importantly in the square of the frame and the circle of the mouth. The square and the circle as figured spaces are crucial to Derrida's reading,<sup>38</sup> for in the *Critique of Judgement* the figural incessantly inhabits and haunts the logocentric space that attempts to exorcise it, and the more the space of *logos* attempts to purify itself in the language of philosophy, the more figural and analogical that language becomes. While representing the drive for enframing and enclosure that informs the ontological imperative of the aesthetic, the parergon simultaneously presents its empty center, in fact, the absence of a center as ontological lack. In this manner, Derrida's genealogical critique demonstrates the breadth and complexity of what must be deconstructed in the idea of the aesthetic. This does not mean restoring to philosophy the task of assessing the meaning and value of the visual arts. That would only overturn the hierarchy by restoring the ontology in another way; it would not deconstruct it.

What is most important is understanding how philosophy has produced the problem of the self-definition of the arts, as well as the autonomy of fine art and of aesthetic meaning, as a response to the very indeterminacy or undecidability of all ontological questions.

The earlier references to the *revenants* haunting the third *Critique* lead finally to Derrida's comparison of the *Wohlgefallen* of pure taste to the work of mourning. According to psychoanalytic theory, mourning is a process wherein the subject mentally replaces the loss of a loved object. The death of the object is what gives rise to mourning, which is why the idea of the aesthetic appears in an era marked by ever increasing reification, culminating in our own age. The work of mourning is also characterized by a process of interiorization, in fact, a process of incorporation that erects the lost object within the subject as an idealized image. The historical irony of the idea of the aesthetic derives from understanding that the rise and decline of an ideal of Art do not develop across a continuum; rather, they are two sides of the same process. Derrida is correct in reading in this irony the tautological orientation of transcendental idealism. It is not that Art dies and therefore must be mourned; this is the anxiety of the cultural literacy movement. Rather, it is the unconscious fear that Art may never have existed—and will never be able to exist in the economic age that desires it as a supplement to alienation and lack of freedom—that accounts for the ideologies subtending transcendental idealism.

But everything blossoms beside a deconsecrated tomb. I thus offer in conclusion the following funeral image. In a simply but elegantly appointed auditorium, two Old Master paintings, in identical gold frames, lean uncertainly against an off-white background. They are neither attached to the space nor hung from it, for their stay here will be a short one. Indeed, they may never be seen again, for although they are too large to fit in your wallet, they will store easily in a vault. They are in transit, and above them hangs a sign not unlike the ones found in railroad stations and airports the world over. It reads 'Sotheby's Founded 1744' and records the value of these works, which shifts second by second, in dollars, pounds, francs, marks, lira, and yen. The caption to this image reads 'Dede Brooks Makes Her Bid: Sotheby's president wants her auction house to be a stock exchange for art.'<sup>39</sup>

This image presents the ultimate irony of the cultural literacy movement, as well as the affectations of taste and connoisseurship that have so profoundly marked the institutional development of art history. We are in the last stage of the era of the aesthetic. The split in consciousness that attempts to repress the economic and the political in the aesthetic has never been so severe. Similarly, we now occupy an age when the economic has almost completely possessed what is called the aesthetic, as well as the most advanced technologies of representation available to us. It is hard to comprehend how this dialectic can develop further, although there is no guarantee that it will not. Nonetheless, it renders ironic in ever more powerful and visceral terms the hue and cry for the restoration of traditional concepts of 'value' and hierarchies of evaluation, of the self-identity of the artist and of aesthetic work as free from value, and of the necessary relation between beauty and nature. Paradoxically, this work of mourning is possible only because the political and economic society that neoconservatives most fervently pray for has reached an advanced stage of development. And if Art is finally and incontrovertibly being converted

into capital, this is because the ideology of the aesthetic was itself seeded and nurtured by a capitalist political economy. This is the historical lesson that Derrida's philosophical deconstruction of the aesthetic enables us to examine and work through. The contradictory consciousness of the neoconservative movement derives from the refusal to understand that their ideology of the aesthetic, whose disappearance they fear, derives from the political economy they celebrate as globally triumphant. This has been true for nearly 300 years. Thus, the more they cheer on the triumph of capitalism, the deeper they dig their own cultural graves.

This conclusion should cheer those interested in a contestary art, and a contestary cultural criticism, to the extent that they themselves can work through and indeed liberate themselves philosophically from the idea of the aesthetic.

# Fetish

The original theory of fetishism was a product of the same intellectual movement in eighteenth-century Europe—usually referred to as the Enlightenment—that legitimated the belief that the fine arts and aesthetic judgment form a self-contained domain of human experience. Indeed, both ‘aesthetics’ and ‘fetishism’ were eighteenth-century neologisms that became generally accepted in European intellectual culture in the third quarter of that century. ‘Aesthetics’ was a term developed by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the volumes of whose unfinished *Aesthetica* were published in the 1750s and popularized during this period by his student and collaborator, G. F. Meier. The word ‘fetishism’ was coined by the French *philosophe* Charles de Brosses, whose *Du culte des dieux fétiches ou parallèle de l’ancienne religion de l’Égypte avec la religion actuelle de la Nigritie* introduced the term to the French intellectual community in 1757.

Both aesthetics and fetishism marked philosophical attempts to theorize certain subjective processes and creedal effects specific to the perceiving mind’s direct relation to ‘sensuous materiality’, a dimension of human experience inadequately accounted for by the established rational psychologies derived from René Descartes and John Locke. Although the theory of fetishism formed part of the Enlightenment critique of religious superstition, while that of aesthetics marked the successful effort to identify artworks and aesthetic feeling as forming a discrete domain of enlightened experience—one quite distinct from the domain proper to sacramental objects and religious sentiment and from that of utilitarian objects and economic reasoning—the underlying philosophical problem of understanding the powers and processes entailed in our passionate apprehension of sensuously material objects has ever since placed the idea of the fetish and that of art in a certain theoretical proximity. As early as 1764, in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Immanuel Kant used the aesthetic categories of Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) to explain the quasi-religious fetishes that supposedly characterized African culture as products of a debased aesthetic sensibility whose degraded sense of the beautiful lacked all sense of the sublime. The common view of European intellectuals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that primitive fetishes were the exemplary cultural artifacts of the most unenlightened spirits and the least civilized societies, those remaining frozen in a historyless stasis before the threshold of true religious understanding and self-conscious aesthetic judgment. As G. F. W. Hegel explained in his lectures on aesthetics, fetish worship is ‘not yet art.’

The work in which the term *fétichisme* was coined, Charles de Brosses’s *Du culte des dieux fétiches*, was itself originally presented to the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres as an intervention in contemporary debates over literary hermeneutics. Attacking prevailing allegorical methods that inter-



preted ancient myths and cult beliefs as primitive intimations of the universal truths of Christian theology or Platonic philosophy, de Brosses argued that the primordial form of religion was wholly nonallegorical and nonuniversal. This still widespread form of religious belief he called fetishism, the direct worship of particular earthly material objects as themselves endowed with quasi-personal intentionality and divine powers capable of gratifying mundane desires. Drawing on the arguments of David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), de Brosses explained fetish worship as the expression of a 'metaphor natural to man.' Driven by anxiety regarding the uncertain outcome of events necessary to meet their vital needs, primitive people fixed on certain material objects associated by chance with their fears and desires and, lacking any true scientific understanding of physical causality, they personified the unknown powers of particular material objects as gods whom they might worship and manipulate to bring about passionately desired events. Such a materialist religion was thoroughly nontranscendental and nonuniversal. It was, as the young Karl Marx put it in 1842, quite simply 'the religion of sensuous desire.'

The Enlightenment theory of fetishism was a theory of what we might call the primary process of unenlightenment, one lacking the reality principle of the civilized that distinguished between subjective desire and objective causality, and hence between the moral sphere of society enabled by rational intentionality and human purpose and the impersonal sphere of nature ruled by mechanical laws and contingent events. Attributing intentional purposiveness to material objects associated by chance with the gratification of human desires, the fetishist both mystified the physical world by attributing to it a human-oriented teleology and reified the social world by subjecting all capacity for moral autonomy to mechanical rituals and dogmatic beliefs. In this light, one can view Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) as a solution to the problem of fetishism: the aesthetic faculty of a self-critical mind, for Kant, is one able to distinguish within sensuous experience between the purposiveness of its own subjectivity and the objective purposes found in natural teleological systems such as biological organisms. The recognition of the distinct faculty of aesthetic judgment by the enlightened mind evidences a self-consciousness that no longer confuses the desires and purposes of its own practical subjectivity with objective systems known through its empirical observations. Moreover, it is our aesthetic faculty itself that directs the mind toward those unexperienceable transcendental ideas that are the only ground of true moral conduct. The unenlightened fetishist, apprehending the material world directly from the perspective of his or her material desires, lacking the capacity for disinterested judgment, conflates subjective desire with natural teleology; the fetishist's lack of aesthetic discrimination is thus proof of an incapacity for moral autonomy and true freedom. Such, in any event, is the conclusion we find in such philosophers as Kant and Hegel and, generally, in European intellectual culture in the age of the African slave trade.

The Enlightenment concept of fetishism as a fixated chiasmus that projected the spontaneous intentionality of subjective desire into inanimate material things, while subjecting humanity's free will and power of decision to the false necessity of depersonalized institutional forms, expressed a conceptual framework suited to the self-enabling presuppositions of the nineteenth-century human sciences. The limits of this framework were most

radically exposed in this period by the founder of sociology, the utopian positivist Auguste Comte. For Comte, establishing the true science of society meant not only replacing the false methods of theology and metaphysics with scientific positivism, it meant replacing the false religion of God with the true religion of humanity. Where Kant had secured the autonomy of our aesthetic sensibility by distinguishing it within our faculty of sensuous judgment from our capacity for teleological belief, Comte stressed the importance of that primordial state of experiential inquiry when the mind is as yet unsure whether the connections it suspects are causally objective or libidinally expressive. Comte argued that for humanity to achieve the scientific utopia he envisioned people had to recover their primitive capacity for 'pure fetishism,' that state of spontaneously impassioned surmise able to entertain radically new scientific insights into causal relations and also able to express that self-constituting, fixational impulse toward irrationally absolute devotion which, in Comte's view, was the ground not only of religious worship but of personal love and collective loyalty. A scientific positivism supplemented by such pure fetishism represented, for Comte, the true religion, that of humanity and material life. Declaring himself the pope of this new dispensation, Comte designed a new catechism and a calendar of worship containing various 'positivist saints' and material fetishes, including what he called 'the Great Fetish,' the earth itself. Comte himself practiced what he preached: each day in his living room he would worship a lock of hair clipped from his deceased mistress. In thus subverting the boundary between science and religion, between aesthetic experience and fetishistic obsession, Comte demonstrated the limits beyond which the new disciplines of the human sciences could not go without destroying the theoretical presuppositions upon which their own claim to intellectual authority depended.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, respectable sociologists found a theory of primitive religion that they could live with: the theory of totemism. The general theory of totemism indicated that the truth of God and of sacramental objects was society, a group's collective existence as expressed and reinforced by institutional forms. From this perspective—for instance, in Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912)—'fetishism' could be viewed as a secondary effect of collective representations upon the illusory pictures people have of themselves as singularly determined, autonomous individuals. The sociologist knows that it is not the psychological processes of idiosyncratic individuals but rather the institutionalized structures of collective life that determine a given form of life and that shape the lived worlds of individuals. This implies, of course, a particular sort of *antiaesthetic theoretical position perhaps most forcefully expressed in contemporary writing* by Pierre Bourdieu. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Bourdieu dismisses the conventional view of art as a self-contained domain proper to a distinct type of subjective activity grounded in human nature, arguing that the beginning of scientific wisdom is precisely to see *that art is itself a fetish*, an institutionally constructed object of lived belief. The scientific approach to understanding art as fetish is to analyze not only the processes producing the works themselves but also those producing the belief that there is such a thing as art at all.

Insofar as the scientific observer claims to possess a method for understanding fetishism that need not itself participate in the delusional experience it studies, the concept of fetishism being employed is likely structured along the lines of the original Enlightenment theory.

## William Pietz: Fetish

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# Form, Content, Style

## Introduction

It has been observed on not a few occasions that the history of art after Hegel has been a long playing-out of the dilemmas and contradictions set in motion by his idealist counter-revolutionary aesthetic philosophy of the 1820s. Although such an observation may seem dramatically reductive, it may not be entirely unjust. It may well be the case that what Hegel's work did accomplish was the projection of a powerfully persuasive framework for imagining a viably systematic art historical discipline with common goals and an apparently clear system of procedures for the production of historical and cultural knowledge.

Yet at the same time, when understood as part of a larger historical picture, Hegel's vision was indissolubly linked to a very ancient and continuing European tradition of discussion and debate on the nature of 'form' and 'meaning', dating back to Plato and Aristotle, and deeply informing Christian theology. Hegel's counter-revolution consisted in reaffirming certain philosophical positions of Leibniz—with their dual roots in Platonic thought and Christian theology—that Enlightenment aesthetic philosophers such as Kant had in some respects reacted against during the latter half of the eighteenth century. There is more than a faint echo of Plato in Hegel's devaluation of art as representation rather than as creation, an ambivalence that persists to this day, as noted above in the introduction to the previous chapter.

(Briefly put, Plato observed that while individual forms (horses, humans, tables) have a transient material existence, their *forms* always reappear, apparently eternally. What constitutes horses as horses, then, must be some eternal 'essence' of which they partake, and without which they could not keep reappearing with such astonishing fidelity to type. Such Forms were thus in one sense more 'real' than their physical 'manifestations'. This led Plato to devalue art and artifice as the least real or ideal of things, for art was taken by him as an imitation of a 'pure' world of Forms or Ideas.<sup>1</sup> The ways in which such claims resonate with Christian cosmology founded on a dualism of an 'immaterial' and perfect (divine) realm and an imperfect (and mortal) 'material' world are obvious.)

Hegel's perspective on art curiously resembles one facet of the attempt by Byzantine theologians a millennium earlier who, in their debates with the Iconoclasts who wished to destroy all religious imagery, argued that if paintings and icons were of no intrinsic value in themselves, yet they were indeed valuable as a *medium* through which the divine spirit could be apprehended,



however faintly, by mortals.<sup>2</sup> Hegel maintained a (Platonic and Leibizian) perspective on art and sensory knowledge as the realm of confused intelligibility or primitive rationality while at the same time valorizing it as a vehicle or a means through which Spirit or the Ideal might be made manifest. His version of iconoclasm derived not from ninth-century (Eastern, Orthodox Christian) Byzantium but from the more historically immediate sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant banishing or marginalizing of the religious imagery so central to traditional (iconophilic, Western, Catholic) Christianity.

Hegel's work sought to address the central dilemma of the idealist tradition by seeking to reconcile two radically contrary claims: (a) that art objects had timeless value in themselves, and (b) that they were but transient and illusory phenomena. His 'solution' (his 'theodicy') was in fact a very old and traditional theological one: to valorize art's role as an instrument of Spirit (or religion, of which he claimed that art was a symbol) by imagining art's own internal 'history' as a secondary yet nonetheless valuable chronological *record* and index of the unfolding of a divine Spirit. In other words, art was to have a history *only if read properly*: if read as an evolution not of aesthetic forms for their own sake, for their own (ultimately limitless) unfolding aesthetic logic (as Vasari claimed), but as representing a divine teleology; a great spiritual unfolding. Art, in short, was a transitory phenomenon; a temporary way-station reflecting a person or people's ability to be spiritually enlightened.

To practise art history—the profession and institution which was unfolding in Germany and soon afterward elsewhere in the decade after Hegel's Berlin *Lectures* of the 1820s—could thus be construed as an elevated secular religiosity wherein the unfolding of the spirit of a time (*Zeitgeist*), or of a people, could be traced systematically and empirically in the genealogy of a people's manufacture. This new epistemological technology—along with the museum movement which gave it a palpable functional civic form—could be taken as addressing a very clear and urgent promise—that of conferring meaning and sense upon the increasingly incomprehensible material world of the burgeoning European Industrial Revolution and the social and physical upheavals attendant upon the formation of new nation-states and their new forms of citizenship and political representation. This new, rapidly industrializing world was massively saturated with literally millions of new artefacts and commodities of all kinds, from all over the world as well as from all periods of the world's history. Seen in this light, Hegel's theodicy or theologized aesthetic history can be seen as one facet of a massive social and intellectual movement of the first third of the nineteenth century which in many diverse ways sought to confer various kinds of historicist legibility on experience. Phenomena were to be meaningful insofar as they could be *seen to occupy* (both discursively and materially; both in textual 'histories' and in museum collections<sup>3</sup>) chronological or genealogical positions in an overall developmental sequence. From individual identities to national entities; from the realm of human experience to the entire planet and its biosphere, the significance of things was being articulated as historical, evolutionary, developmental, and progressive.

What Hegel's work accomplished for European modernity in a very pragmatic sense was to make it possible to effectively envision all aesthetic phenomena—and by extension all human artifice—as fundamentally historical

in a dualistic sense: in terms of their ‘forms’ and in terms of the ‘contents’, meanings, and functions of those forms. By keeping these nominally distinct in this (potentially reversibly hierarchized) manner, each might be cogently imagined as having ‘lives’ of its own and their own genealogies and histories: the ‘life of forms’ and the ‘history of ideas’ (on the theological substrate of this dualism, see the Coda at the end of this volume).

It is no exaggeration to claim that the subsequent history of ‘art history’ down to the present may be written as a historical drama based on ongoing and, in the terms in which they have been played out, quite possibly unresolvable debates about theoretical and methodological positions taken on these issues. As a number of the readings in this volume will make it abundantly clear, many of these debates centre on validating one or another prefabricated position—and the history of such positions from one academic generation to the next resembles an oscillation between the extremes of two poles—now on the side of ‘form’, now on the side of ‘content’ or ‘context’. Yet despite periodic ‘turns toward’ or ‘returns to’ one or another position (‘the object’; ‘meaning’; ‘space’; ‘time’; ‘the viewer’; ‘the author’; etc.) no contextualization of art will ever seem to be satisfying or complete, nor will any view of ‘form’ be entirely pure or satisfyingly divested of extraneous and distracting matter.

The readings in this chapter deal with questions of *form*, *content*, and *style*: core concepts affecting all aspects of disciplinary practice from the nineteenth century to the present. The texts chosen range in time from 1915 (Wölfflin) to 2003 (Summers), and include one of the most widely influential discussions of style (Gombrich, 1968) and a recent (2003) gloss on the subject by Summers.

The Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) was generally regarded as one of the most important and influential figures in the field of art history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; one whose reputation stemmed as much from his success as a vivid and innovative lecturer (in Basel, Munich, Berlin, and Zurich) as from his lifelong project of systematizing the art historical analysis of form and style. His efforts in this regard were inspired by the work of his father, a distinguished scholar of linguistics and language history, and his interest in comprehending the broad underlying stylistic characteristics of a people and a period undoubtedly reflect the enterprise of his university teacher, the great historian of the Italian Renaissance Jacob Burckhardt (1818–97), to whose university chair he succeeded upon the latter’s retirement.

The selection excerpted here is drawn from his 1915 *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*,<sup>4</sup> a book which, having been instantly controversial, became for much of the early and mid-twentieth century an essential statement of principle and method which several generations of art historians have been compelled to address as much by emulation as by negative criticism. For many it was a canonical statement of a certain ‘formalism’ in art history—an approach to art in which the genealogical development of material and formal changes (the physical face of the Hegelian or idealist coin) was an internally coherent system of differences, according to measured and in theory predictable variations in the underlying distinctive features of objects. In this respect, his *Principles* was an attempt to articulate visual change and historical aesthetic evolution on the analogy of the models of linguistic evolution, which were thought in the late nineteenth century

to take place according to an internal structural or systemic logic, rather than as reflections of actual usage or of social and other contexts. It was widely believed that Wölfflin's principles were derived from close empirical analyses of the contrasts between Renaissance and Baroque art. The excerpt here is perhaps the clearest explication of his general theory.

The next three excerpts deal with aspects of the idea of *style* in art historical practice. The first, by Ernst Gombrich, was originally published (1968) in a social sciences encyclopedia, and contains extensive references to relevant texts in the humanities and social sciences. It is perhaps the most generically applicable and conventionally accepted approach to the subject. The next two, by Renaissance art historian David Summers, represent further inflections of the formalist tradition in modern Western art history. The earlier one (1989) grapples with what the writer describes as the 'materialist' and 'historicist' tradition in the discipline, briefly contrasting the approaches of Gombrich and Walter Benjamin, and arguing that the historicism of the latter was 'essentialist' and 'idealist'.

The second excerpt (2003) is included as one of a number of recent attempts to identify and globally generalize salient characteristics of this patently European concept of style. The text from which the latter piece is excerpted is emblematic of one ideological pole in current disciplinary debates as to the possibility or impossibility of fashioning a 'globalized' discourse on art—regarding which see the more explicit discussions and debates (and recent departures from Eurocentric perspectives) in the final Chapter 8, 'Globalization and its Discontents', which includes excerpts from Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', and which may be contrasted with the characterization of Benjamin's work by Summers in the present chapter.

Two widely influential twentieth-century books both reflect and in many ways go beyond Wölfflin's project and in some ways go beyond certain of its conclusions. The book *The Life of Forms* by the French art historian Henri Focillon (1881–1943) is perhaps the most lucidly consistent outline of the broader implications of a formalist art history. Focillon's work, arising out of a close interest in the technical possibilities of the instruments of artistic practice for defining and determining the development of styles (on which see the discussion of Alois Riegl, Chapter 4), substantially influenced the work of twentieth-century American art historian George Kubler, whose study *The Shape of Time* was a notable synthesis of the entire formalist tradition as seen from the perspective of a mid-century reaction to growing disciplinary emphases on content, social context, and symbolism.<sup>5</sup>

# Principles of Art History

## The Most General Representational Forms

This volume is occupied with the discussion of these universal forms of representation. It does not analyse the beauty of Leonardo but the element in which that beauty became manifest. It does not analyse the representation of nature according to its imitational content, and how, for instance, the naturalism of the sixteenth century may be distinguished from that of the seventeenth, but the mode of perception which lies at the root of the representative arts in the various centuries.

Let us try to sift out these basic forms in the domain of more modern art. We denote the series of periods with the names Early Renaissance, High Renaissance, and Baroque, names which mean little and must lead to misunderstanding in their application to south and north, but are hardly to be ousted now. Unfortunately, the symbolic analogy bud, bloom, decay, plays a secondary and misleading part. If there is in fact a qualitative difference between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in the sense that the fifteenth had gradually to acquire by labour the insight into effects which was at the free disposal of the sixteenth, the (classic) art of the Cinquecento and the (baroque) art of the Seicento are equal in point of value. The word classic here denotes no judgment of value, for baroque has its classicism too. Baroque (or, let us say, modern art) is neither a rise nor a decline from classic, but a totally different art. The occidental development of modern times cannot simply be reduced to a curve with rise, height, and decline: it has two culminating points. We can turn our sympathy to one or to the other, but we must realise that that is an arbitrary judgment, just as it is an arbitrary judgment to say that the rose-bush lives its supreme moment in the formation of the flower, the apple-tree in that of the fruit.

For the sake of simplicity, we must speak of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as units of style, although these periods signify no homogeneous production, and, in particular, the features of the Seicento had begun to take shape long before the year 1600, just as, on the other hand, they long continued to affect the appearance of the eighteenth century. Our object is to compare type with type, the finished with the finished. Of course, in the strictest sense of the word, there is nothing 'finished': all historical material is subject to continual transformation; but we must make up our minds to establish the distinctions at a fruitful point, and there to let them speak as contrasts, if we are not to let the whole development slip through our fingers. The preliminary stages of the High Renaissance are not to be ignored, but they represent an archaic form of art, an art of primitives, for whom established pictorial form does not yet exist. But to expose the individual differences which lead from the style of the sixteenth century to that of the seventeenth must be left

to a detailed historical survey which will, to tell the truth, only do justice to its task when it has the determining concepts at its disposal.

If we are not mistaken, the development can be reduced, as a provisional formulation, to the following five pairs of concepts:

(1) The development from the linear to the painterly,<sup>1</sup> i.e. the development of line as the path of vision and guide of the eye, and the gradual depreciation of line: in more general terms, the perception of the object by its tangible character—in outline and surfaces—on the one hand, and on the other, a perception which is by way of surrendering itself to the mere visual appearance and can abandon 'tangible' design. In the former case the stress is laid on the limits of things; in the other the work tends to look limitless. Seeing by volumes and outlines isolates objects: for the painterly eye, they merge. In the one case interest lies more in the perception of individual material objects as solid, tangible bodies; in the other, in the apprehension of the world as a shifting semblance.

(2) The development from plan to recession:<sup>2</sup> Classic<sup>3</sup> art reduces the parts of a total form to a sequence of planes, the baroque emphasises depth. Plane is the element of line, extension in one plane the form of the greatest explicitness: with the discounting of the contour comes the discounting of the plane, and the eye relates objects essentially in the direction of forwards and backwards. This is no qualitative difference: with a greater power of representing spatial depths, the innovation has nothing directly to do: it signifies rather a radically different mode of representation, just as 'plane style' in our sense is not the style of primitive art, but makes its appearance only at the moment at which foreshortening and spatial illusion are completely mastered.

(3) The development from closed to open form.<sup>4</sup> Every work of art must be a finite whole, and it is a defect if we do not feel that it is self-contained, but the interpretation of this demand in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is so different that, in comparison with the loose form of the baroque, classic design may be taken as the form of closed composition. The relaxation of rules, the yielding of tectonic strength, or whatever name we may give to the process, does not merely signify an enhancement of interest, but is a new mode of representation consistently carried out, and hence this factor is to be adopted among the basic forms of representation.

(4) The development from multiplicity to unity.<sup>5</sup> In the system of a classic composition, the single parts, however firmly they may be rooted in the whole, maintain a certain independence. It is not the anarchy of primitive art: the part is conditioned by the whole, and yet does not cease to have its own life. For the spectator, that presupposes an articulation, a progress from part to part, which is a very different operation from perception as a whole, such as the seventeenth century applies and demands. In both styles unity is the chief aim (in contrast to the pre-classic period which did not yet understand the idea in its true sense), but in the one case unity is achieved by a harmony of free parts, in the other, by a union of parts in a single theme, or by the subordination, to one unconditioned dominant, of all other elements.

(5) The absolute and the relative clarity of the subject.<sup>6</sup> This is a contrast which at first borders on the contrast between linear and painterly. The representation of things as they are, taken singly and accessible to plastic feeling, and the representation of things as they look, seen as a whole, and rather

by their non-plastic qualities. But it is a special feature of the classic age that it developed an ideal of perfect clarity which the fifteenth century only vaguely suspected, and which the seventeenth voluntarily sacrificed. Not that artistic form had become confused, for that always produces an unpleasing effect, but the explicitness of the subject is no longer the sole purpose of the presentiment. Composition, light, and colour no longer merely serve to define form, but have their own life. There are cases in which absolute clarity has been partly abandoned merely to enhance effect, but 'relative' clarity, as a great all-embracing mode of representation, first entered the history of art at the moment at which reality is beheld with an eye to other effects. Even here it is not a difference of quality if the baroque departed from the ideals of the age of Dürer and Raphael, but, as we have said, a different attitude to the world.

### **Imitation and Decoration**

The representational forms here described are of such general significance that even widely divergent natures such as Terborch and Bernini can find room within one and the same type. The community of style in these two painters rests on what, for people of the seventeenth century, was a matter of course—certain basic conditions to which the impression of living form is bound without a more special expressional value being attached to them.

They can be treated as forms of representation or forms of beholding: in these forms nature is seen, and in these forms art manifests its contents. But it is dangerous to speak only of certain 'states of the eye' by which conception is determined: every artistic conception is, of its very nature, organised according to certain notions of pleasure. Hence our five pairs of concepts have an imitative and a decorative significance. Every kind of reproduction of nature moves within a definite decorative schema. Linear vision is permanently bound up with a certain idea of beauty and so is painterly vision. If an advanced type of art dissolves the line and replaces it by the restless mass, that happens not only in the interests of a new verisimilitude, but in the interests of a new beauty too. And in the same way we must say that representation in a plane type certainly corresponds to a certain stage of observation, but even here the schema has obviously a decorative side. The schema certainly yields nothing of itself, but it contains the possibility of developing beauties in the arrangement of planes which the recessional style no longer possesses and can no longer possess. And we can continue in the same way with the whole series.

But then, if these more general concepts also envisage a special type of beauty, do we not come back to the beginning, where style was conceived as the direct expression of temperament, be it the temperament of a time, of a people, or of an individual? And in that case, would not the only new factor be that the section was cut lower down, the phenomena, to a certain extent, reduced to a greater common denominator?

In speaking thus, we should fail to realise that the second terms of our pairs of concepts belong of their very nature to a different species, in so far as these concepts, in their transformations, obey an inward necessity. They represent a rational psychological process. The transition from tangible, plastic, to purely visual, painterly perception follows a natural logic, and could not be reversed. Nor could the transition from tectonic to a-tectonic, from the rigid to the free conformity to law.



To use a parable. The stone, rolling down the mountain side, can assume quite different motions according to the gradient of the slope, the hardness or softness of the ground, etc., but all these possibilities are subject to one and the same law of gravity. So, in human psychology, there are certain developments which can be regarded as subject to natural law in the same way as physical growth. They can undergo the most manifold variations, they can be totally or partially checked, but, once the rolling has started, the operation of certain laws may be observed throughout.

Nobody is going to maintain that the 'eye' passes through developments on its own account. Conditioned and conditioning, it always impinges on other spiritual spheres.<sup>7</sup> There is certainly no visual schema which, arising only from its own premises, could be imposed on the world as a stereotyped pattern. But although men have at all times seen what they wanted to see, that does not exclude the possibility that a law remains operative throughout all change. To determine this law would be a central problem, the central problem of a history of art.

### **Multiplicity and Unity**

The principle of closed form of itself presumes the conception of the picture as a unity. Only when the sum of the forms is felt as one whole can this whole be thought as ordered by law, and it is then indifferent whether a tectonic middle is worked out or a freer order reigns.

This feeling for unity develops only gradually. There is not a definite moment in the history of art at which we could say—now it has come: here too we must reckon with purely relative values.

A head is a total form which the Florentine Quattrocentists, like the early Dutch artists, felt as such—that is, as a whole. If, however, we take as comparison a head by Raphael or Quentin Massys, we feel we are confronted by another attitude, and if we seek to comprehend the contrast, it is ultimately the contrast of seeing in detail and seeing as a whole. Not that the former could mean that sorry accumulation of details over which the reiterated corrections of the art master try to help the pupil—such qualitative comparisons do not even come into consideration here—yet the fact remains that, in comparison with the classics of the sixteenth century, these old heads always preoccupy us more in the detail and seem to possess a lesser degree of coherence, while in the other case, in any detail, we at once become aware of the whole. We cannot see the eye without realising the larger form of the socket, the way it is set between forehead, nose, and cheekbone, and to the horizontal of the pair of eyes and of the mouth the vertical of the nose at once responds: the form has a power to awaken vision and to compel us to a united perception of the manifold which must affect even a dense spectator. He wakes up and suddenly feels quite a new fellow.

And the same difference obtains between a pictorial composition of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the former, the dispersed; in the latter, the unified: in the former, now the poverty of the isolated, now the inextricable confusion of the too much; in the latter, an organized whole, in which every part speaks for itself and is comprehensible, yet makes itself felt in its coherence with the whole as a member of a total form.

In establishing these differences between the classic and the pre-classic period, we first obtain the basis for our real subject. Yet here we at once feel the painful lack of distinguishing vocabulary: at the very moment at which we name unity of composition as an essential feature of Cinquecento art, we have to say that it is precisely the epoch of Raphael which we wish to oppose as an age of multiplicity to later art and its tendency to unity. And this time we have no progress from the poorer to the richer form, but two different types which each represent an ultimate form. The sixteenth century is not discredited by the seventeenth, for it is not here a question of a qualitative difference but of something totally new.

A head by Rubens is not better, seen as a whole, than a head by Dürer or Massys, but that independent working-out of the separate parts is abolished which, in the latter case, makes the total form appear as a (relative) multiplicity. The Seicentists envisage a definite main motive, to which they subordinate everything else. No longer do the separate elements of the organism, conditioning each other and holding each other in harmony, take effect in the picture, but out of the whole, reduced to a unified stream, individual forms arise as the absolute dominants, yet in such a way that even these dominant forms signify for the eye nothing separable, nothing that could be isolated.

The relationship can be elucidated most satisfactorily in the composite sacred picture.

One of the richest motives of the biblical picture-cycle is the *Descent from the Cross*, an event which sets many hands in movement and contains powerful psychological contrasts. We have the classic version of the theme in Daniele da Volterra's picture in the Trinità dei Monti in Rome. This has always been admired for the way in which the figures are developed as absolutely independent parts, and yet so work together that each seems governed by the whole. That is precisely renaissance articulation. When later Rubens, as spokesman of the baroque, treats the same subject in an early work, the first point in which he departs from the classic type is the welding of the figures into a homogeneous mass, from which the individual figure can hardly be detached. He makes a mighty stream, reinforced by devices of lighting, pass slanting through the picture from the top. It sets in with the white cloth falling from the transverse beam; the body of Christ lies in the same course, and the movement pours into the bay of many figures which crowd round to receive the falling body. No longer, as in Daniele da Volterra, is the fainting Virgin a secondary centre of interest detached from the main event. She stands, and is completely absorbed, in the mass round the Cross. If we wish to denote the change in the other figures by a general expression, we can only say that each has abdicated part of its independence to the general interest. On principle, the baroque no longer reckons with a multiplicity of co-ordinate units, harmoniously interdependent, but with an absolute unity in which the individual part has lost its individual rights. But thereby the main motive is stressed with a hitherto unprecedented force.

It must not be objected that these are less differences of development than differences of national taste. Certainly, Italy has always had a preference for the clear component part, but the difference persists too in any comparison of the Italian Seicento with the Italian Cinquecento or in the compari-

son between Rembrandt and Dürer in the north. Although the northern imagination, as contrasted with Italy, aimed rather at the interweaving of the members, a *Deposition* by Dürer, compared with Rembrandt provides the absolutely pronounced opposition of a composition with independent figures to a composition with dependent figures. Rembrandt focusses the story on the motive of two lights—a strong, steep one at the top left-hand corner, and a weak, horizontal one at the bottom right. With that, everything that matters is indicated. The corpse, only partially visible, is being let down, and is to be laid out on the winding-sheet lying on the ground. The ‘down’ of the deposition is reduced to its briefest expression.

Thus there stand opposed the multiple unity of the sixteenth century and the unified unity of the seventeenth: in other words, the articulated system of forms of classic art and the (endless) flow of the baroque. And, as is evident from previous examples, two elements interact in this baroque unity—the cessation of the independent functioning of the individual forms and the development of a dominating total motive. This can be achieved plastically, as in Rubens, or by means of more painterly values, as in Rembrandt. The example of the *Deposition* is only characteristic of an isolated case: unity fulfils itself in many ways. There is a unity of colour as well as of lighting, and a unity of the composition of figures as of the conception of form in a single head or body.

That is the most interesting point: the decorative schema becomes a mode of apprehension of nature. It is not only that Rembrandt’s pictures are built up on a different system from Dürer’s, things are seen differently. Multiplicity and unity are, so to speak, vessels in which the content of reality is caught and takes form. We must not assume that just any decorative system was clapped over the world’s eyes: matter plays its part too. People not only see differently, they see *different things*. But all the so-called imitation of nature has only an artistic significance when it is inspired by decorative instincts and produces in its turn decorative works. That the concept of a multiple beauty and of a unified beauty also exists, apart from any imitative content, is borne out by architecture.

The two types stand side by side as independent values, and it does not meet the case if we conceive the later form only as an enhancement of the former. It goes without saying that baroque art was convinced that it had first found truth and that renaissance art had only been a preliminary form, but the historian judges otherwise. Nature can be interpreted in more than one way. And therefore it came about that it was just in the name of nature that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the baroque formula was ousted and again replaced by the classic.

### The Principal Motives

The subject of this chapter, therefore, is the relation of the part to the whole—namely, that classic art achieves its unity by making the parts independent as free members, and that the baroque abolishes the uniform independence of the parts in favour of a more unified total motive. In the former case, co-ordination of the accents; in the latter, subordination.

All our previous categories have led up to this unity. The painterly is the deliverance of the forms from their isolation; the principle of recession is no other than the replacement of the sequence of separate planes by a uniform recessional movement, and a tectonic taste dissolves the rigid structure of

geometric relations into flux. We cannot avoid partly repeating familiar matter: the essential viewpoint of the consideration is all the same new.

It does not happen of itself and from the outset that the parts function as free members of an organism. Among the primitives, the impression is checked because the component parts either remain too dispersed or look confused and unclear. Only where the single detail seems a necessary part of the whole do we speak of organic articulation, and only where the component part, bound up in the whole, is still felt as an independently functioning member, has the notion of freedom and independence a sense. That is the classic system of forms of the sixteenth century, and it makes no difference, as we have said, whether we understand by a whole a single head or a composite sacred picture.

Dürer's impressive woodcut of the *Virgin's Death* outstrips all previous work in that the parts form a system in which each in its place appears determined by the whole and yet looks perfectly independent. The picture is an excellent example of a tectonic composition—the whole reduced to clear geometric oppositions—but, beside that, this relationship of (relative) co-ordination of independent values should always be regarded as something new. We call it the principle of multiple unity.

The baroque would have avoided or concealed the meeting of pure horizontals and verticals. We should no longer have the impression of an *articulated* whole: the component parts, whether the bed canopy or one of the apostles, would have been fused into a total movement dominating the picture. If we recall the example of Rembrandt's etching of the *Virgin's Death*, we shall realise how very welcome to the baroque was the motive of the upward streaming clouds. The play of contrasts does not cease, but it keeps more hidden. The arrangement of obvious side-by-side and clear opposite is replaced by a single weft. Pure oppositions are broken. The finite, the isolable, disappear. From form to form, paths and bridges open over which the movement hastens on unchecked. But from such a stream, unified in the baroque sense, there arises here and there a motive so strongly stressed that it focusses the eye upon it as the lens does the light rays. Of this kind, in drawing, are those spots of most expressive form which, similarly to the culminating points of light and colour, of which we shall speak presently, fundamentally separate baroque from classic art. In classic art, even accentuation: in the baroque, one main effect. These motives which bear the main accent are not pieces which could be broken out of the whole, but only the final surges of a general movement.

The characteristic examples of unified movement in the composite figure picture are given by Rubens. At all points, the transposition of the style of multiplicity and separation into the assembled and flowing with the suppression of independent separate values. The *Assumption* is not only a baroque work because Titian's classic system—the main figure opposed as vertical to the horizontal form of the group of the apostles—has been transformed into a general diagonal movement, but because the parts can no longer be isolated. The circle of light and angels which fills the centre of Titian's *Assunta* still re-echoes in Rubens, but it only receives an aesthetic sense in the context of the whole. However regrettable it is that copyists should offer Titian's central figure alone for sale, a certain possibility of doing so still exists: with Rubens, such an idea could present itself to nobody. In Titian's picture, the apostle

motives to left and right mutually balance—the one looking up and the other with upstretched arms. In Rubens, only one side speaks, the other is, as far as content is concerned, reduced to insignificance, a suppression which makes the unilateral right-hand accent much more intense.

A second case—Rubens' *Bearing of the Cross*, which has already been compared with Raphael's *Spasimo*. An example of the transposition of plane into recession, but also an example of the transposition of articulated multiplicity into unarticulated unity. In the *Spasimo*, the soldier, Christ, and the women—three separate, equally accented motives; in Rubens, the same, as regards subject matter, but the motives kneaded together, and foreground and background carried into each other in a uniform drift of movement, without caesura. Tree and mountain work together with the figures and the lighting completes the effect. Everything is one. But out of the stream the wave rises here and therewith surpassing force. Where the herculean soldier rams his shoulder under the cross, so much strength is concentrated that the balance of the picture might seem menaced—not the man as a separate motive, but the whole complex of form and light determines the effect—these are the characteristic nodal points of the new style.

To give unified movement, art need not necessarily have at its disposal plastic resources such as are contained in these compositions of Rubens. It needs no procession of moving human figures: unity can be enforced merely by lighting.

The sixteenth century also distinguishes between main and secondary light, but—we refer to the impression of a black and white plate such as Dürer's *Virgin's Death*—it is still an even weft which is created by the lights adhering to the plastic form. Pictures of the seventeenth century, on the other hand, readily cast their light on one point, or, at any rate, concentrate it in a few spots of highest light which then form an easily apprehended configuration between them. But that is only half the matter. The highest light or the highest lights of baroque art proceed from a general unification of the light-movement. Quite otherwise than previously, the lights and darks roll on in a common stream, and where the light swells to a final height, just there it emerges from the great total movement. This focussing on individual points is only a derivative of the primary tendency to unity, in contrast to which classic lighting will always be felt as multiple and separating.

It must be a pre-eminently baroque theme if, in a closed space, the light flows from one source only. Ostade's *Studio* gives a clear example of this. Yet the baroque character is not merely a question of subject: in his *St. Jerome* engraving, Dürer, as we know, drew quite different conclusions from a similar situation. But we will leave such special cases out of the question and base our analysis on a plate with a less salient quality of lighting. Let us take Rembrandt's etching of *Christ Preaching*.

The most striking visual fact here is that a whole mass of conglomerated highest light lies on the wall at Christ's feet. This dominating light stands in the closest relation to the other lights. It cannot be isolated as an individual thing, as is possible with Dürer, nor does it coincide with a plastic form: on the contrary, the light glides over the form, it plays with the objects. All the tectonic elements thereby become less obvious and the figures on the stage are, in the strangest way, dragged apart and reassembled as if not they

but the light were the element of reality in the picture. A diagonal of light passes from the left foreground over the middle through the archway into the background, yet what meaning does such a statement have beside the subtle quiver of light and dark throughout the whole space, that rhythm by means of which Rembrandt, more than any other, imparts to his scenes a compelling unity of life?

Other unifying factors are, of course, at work here too. We disregard what does not belong to the subject. An essential reason why the story is presented with such impressive emphasis lies in the fact that the style also uses distinctness and indistinctness to intensify the effect, that it does not speak with uniform clearness at all points, but makes places of most speaking form emerge from a groundwork of mute or less speaking form.

The development of colour offers an analogous spectacle. In place of the 'bright' colouring of the primitives with their juxtaposition of colour without systematic connection, there comes in the sixteenth [-century] selection and unity, that is, a harmony in which the colours mutually balance in pure oppositions. The system is perfectly obvious. Every colour plays its part with reference to the whole. We can feel how, like an indispensable pillar, it bears and holds together the building. The principle may be developed with more or less consistency, the fact remains that the classic epoch, as an epoch of fundamentally multiple colouring, is very clearly to be distinguished from the following period with its aiming at tonal relations. Whenever we pass from the Cinquecentist room in a gallery to the baroque, the surprise we feel is that clear, obvious juxtaposition ceases and that colours seem to rest on a common ground in which they sometimes sink into almost complete monochrome, in which, however, if they stand out clearly, they remain mysteriously moored. We can, even in the sixteenth century, denote single artists as masters of tone and attribute to individual schools a generally tonal style; that does not hinder the fact that, even in such cases, the 'painterly' century introduces an enhancement which should be distinguished by a word of its own.

Tonal monochrome is only a transitional form. Artists soon learned to use tonality and colour simultaneously, and in so doing, to intensify individual colours in such a way that, similarly to the highest lights, as spots of strongest colouring they radically reshape the whole physiognomy of painting in the seventeenth century. Instead of uniformly distributed colour, we now have the single spot of colour—it can be a chord of two or three colours—which unconditionally dominates the picture. The picture is, as we say, pitched in a definite hue. With that is connected a partial negation of colouring. Just as the drawing abandons uniform clearness, so it promotes the focussing of colour effect to make the pure colour proceed from the dullness of half or no colour. It breaks out, not as a thing which happens once, or can be isolated, but as one long prepared. The colourists of the seventeenth century handled this 'becoming' of colour in various ways, but there is always this distinction from the classic system of coloured composition, that the classic age to a certain extent builds with finished units, while in the baroque the colour comes and goes and comes again, there louder, here lower, and the whole is not to be apprehended save through the idea of an all-pervading general movement. In this sense, the foreword to the great Berlin picture catalogue states that the mode of description of colour tried to adapt itself to the course of the devel-



opment. 'From the detailed notation of colour, there was a gradual transition to a description envisaging the whole of the colouristic impression.'<sup>8</sup>

But it is a further consequence of baroque unity that a single colour can stand out as a solitary accent. The classic system does not know the possibility of casting an isolated red into the scene as Rembrandt does in his *Susanna in Berlin*. The complementary green is not absent, but works only softly, from the depths. Co-ordination and balance are no longer aimed at, the colour is meant to look solitary. We have the parallel in design: baroque art first found room for the interest of the solitary form—a tree, a tower, a human being.

And so, from the consideration of detail, we come back to the general principle. The theory of variable accents, which we have here developed, would be inconceivable unless art could show the same differences of type as regards content. A characteristic of the multiple unity of the sixteenth century is that the separate things in the picture are felt to be relatively equal in material value. The narrative certainly distinguishes between main and secondary figures. We can see—in contrast to the narration of the primitives—from far off where the crucial point of the event lies, but for all that, what have come into being are creations of that relative unity which to the baroque looked like multiplicity. All the accessory figures still have their own existence. The spectator will not forget the whole in the details, but the detail can be seen for itself. This can be well demonstrated by Dirk Vellert's drawing (1524), showing the child Saul coming to the High Priest. The man who created this work was not one of the pioneer spirits of the sixteenth century, but he was not a backward one either. On the contrary, the representation, articulated through and through, is purely classic in style. Yet every figure has its own centre of interest. The main motive certainly stands out, yet not so that the secondary figures find no room to live their own lives. The architectonic element too is so handled that it must claim some interest for itself. It is still classic art, and not to be confused with the scattered multiplicity of the primitives: everything has its clear relation to the whole, but how ruthlessly would an artist of the seventeenth century have cut down the scene to the points of vital interest! We do not speak of qualitative differences, but even the conception of the main motive lacks, for modern taste, the character of a real event.

The sixteenth century, even where it is quite unified, renders the situation broadly, the seventeenth concentrates it on the moment. But only in this way does the historical picture really speak. We make the same experience in the portrait. For Holbein, the cloak is as valuable as the man. The psychic situation is not timeless, yet cannot be understood as the fixation of a moment of freely flowing life.

Classic art does not know the notion of the momentary, the poignant, or of the climax in the most general sense: it has a leisurely, broad quality. And though its point of departure is absolutely the whole, it does not reckon with first impressions. The baroque conception has shifted in both directions.

# Style

Style is any distinctive, and therefore recognizable, way in which an act is performed or an artifact made or ought to be performed and made. The wide range of applications implied in this definition is reflected in the variety of usages of the word in current English. (Definitions and illustrations in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* take up almost three columns.) They may be conveniently grouped into descriptive and normative usages. Descriptions may classify the various ways of doing or making, according to the groups or countries or periods where these were or are habitual—for example, the gypsy style of music, the French style of cookery, or the eighteenth-century style of dress; it may take its name from a particular person, as in ‘Ciceronian style,’ or even denote one individual’s manner of doing something (‘This is not my style.’). In a similar way institutions or firms may have a distinctive way of procedure or production, publishers have a ‘house style’ and provide authors with a ‘style sheet’ indicating how to quote titles of books, etc.

Often styles are described by some characteristic quality that is experienced as expressive of psychological states—a ‘passionate style,’ a ‘humorous style’; frequently, also, these characterizations shade over into intrasensory (synesthetic) descriptions, as in a ‘sparkling,’ a ‘drab,’ or a ‘smooth’ style of writing or playing. Equally often, the distinctive quality to be described is derived from a particular mode of performance or production and transferred to others of similar character, as in a ‘theatrical’ style of behavior, a ‘jazzy’ style of ornament, a ‘hieratic’ style of painting. Finally, there are the terms now reserved for categories of style, such as the ‘Romanesque’ or the ‘Baroque’ style, which have sometimes been extended in their application from the descriptions of architectural procedures to the manner of performance in other arts and beyond to all utterances of the societies concerned during the periods covered (Baroque music, Baroque philosophy, Baroque diplomacy, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

As in most terms describing distinctions—including the very words ‘distinction’ and ‘distinguished’—the term ‘style’ stripped of any qualifying adjective can also be used in a normative sense, as a laudatory term denoting a desirable consistency and conspicuousness that makes a performance or artifact stand out from a mass of ‘undistinguished’ events or objects: ‘He received him in style’; ‘This acrobat has style’; ‘This building lacks style.’ Huckleberry Finn, describing a ‘monstrous raft that was as long going by as a procession’ remarked, ‘There was a power of style about her. It *amounts* to something being a raftsmen on such a raft as that’ (Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, chapter 16). To the anthropologist, perhaps, every raft has a ‘style’ if he chooses to use this term for the way of producing any such craft habitual in any society. But to Mark Twain’s hero the term connotes a raft with a difference, one sufficiently elaborate to impress. This connotation is illustrated in Winston Churchill’s reply to a barber who had asked him what ‘style of haircut he desired’: ‘A man

of my limited resources cannot presume to have a hair *style*—get on and cut it' (*News Chronicle*, London, December 19, 1958).

**Intention and description.** It might have saved critics and social scientists a good deal of trouble and confusion if Churchill's distinction had been applied in the usage of the term—that is, if the word 'style' had been confined to cases where there is a choice between ways of performance or procedure. Historically, this is clear. Thus, the word 'style' was adopted for the alternative forms of dating in use during the period between the introduction and acceptance of the Gregorian calendar in England. When the 'old style' gradually fell out of use, nobody continued to speak of the 'style' of dating a letter.

But usage apart, the indiscriminate application of the word 'style' to any type of performance or production which the user, rather than the performer or producer, is able to distinguish has had grave methodological consequences. It may be argued (and will be argued in this article) that only against the background of alternative choices can the distinctive way also be seen as expressive. The girl who chooses a certain style of dress will in this very act express her intention of appearing in a certain character or social role at a given occasion. The board of directors that chooses a contemporary style for a new office building may equally be concerned with the firm's image. The laborer who puts on his overalls or the builder who erects a bicycle shed is not aware of any act of choice, and although the outside observer may realize that there are alternative forms of working outfits or sheds, their characterization as 'styles' may invite psychological interpretations that can lead him astray. To quote the formulation of a linguist, 'The pivot of the whole theory of expressiveness is the concept of *choice*. There can be no question of style unless the speaker or writer has the possibility of choosing between alternative forms of expression. Synonymy, in the widest sense of the term, lies at the root of the whole problem of style'.<sup>2</sup>

If the term 'style' is thus used descriptively for alternative ways of doing things, the term 'fashion' can be reserved for the fluctuating preferences which carry social prestige. A hostess may set the fashion in a smaller or wider section of the community for a given style of decoration or entertainment. Yet the two terms may overlap in their application. A fashionable preference can become so general and so lasting that it affects the style of a whole society. Moreover, since considerations of prestige sometimes carry with them the suspicion of insincerity and snobbery, the same movement may be described as a fashion by its critics and as a style by its well-wishers.

**Etymology.** The word 'style' derives from Latin *stilus*, the writing instrument of the Romans. It could be used to characterize an author's manner of writing (Cicero, *Brutus*, 100), although the more frequent term for literary style was *genus dicendi*, 'mode of speech'.<sup>3</sup> The writings of Greek and Roman teachers of rhetoric still provide the most subtle analyses ever attempted of the various potentialities and categories of style. The effect of words depends on the right choice of the noble or humble term, with all the social and psychological connotations that go with these stratifications. Equal attention should be paid to the flavor of archaic or current usages.<sup>4</sup> Either usage can be correct if the topic so demands it. This is the doctrine of *decorum*, of the appropriateness of style to the occasion. To use the grand manner for trivial subjects is as ridiculous as to use colloquialisms for solemn occasions (Cicero, *Orator*, 26). Oratory, in this view, is a skill that slowly developed until it could be used

with assurance to sway the jury. But corruption lurks close to perfection. An overdose of effects produces a hollow and affected style that lacks virility. Only a constant study of the greatest models of style (the 'classical' authors) will preserve the style pure.<sup>5</sup>

These doctrines, which also have an application to music, architecture, and the visual arts, form the foundation of critical theory up to the eighteenth century. In the Renaissance, Giorgio Vasari discussed the various manners of art and their progress toward perfection in normative terms. The word 'style' came only slowly into usage as applied to the visual arts, although instances multiply in the late sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> It became established as a term of art history in the eighteenth century, largely through J. J. Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* (1764). His treatment of Greek style as an expression of the Greek way of life encouraged Herder and others to do the same for the medieval Gothic and, thus, paved the way for a history of art in terms of succeeding period styles. It is worth noting that the names for styles used in art history derive from normative contexts. They denote either the (desirable) dependence on a classical norm or the (condemned) deviations from it.<sup>7</sup> Thus, 'Gothic' originated from the idea that it was the 'barbaric' style of the destroyers of the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> 'Baroque' is a conflation of various words meaning 'bizarre' and 'absurd'.<sup>9</sup> 'Rococo' was coined as a term of derision about 1797 by J. L. David's pupils for the meretricious taste of the age of Pompadour.<sup>10</sup> Even 'Romanesque' started its career about 1819 as a term denoting 'the corruption of the Roman style,' and 'mannerism,' equally, signified the affectation that corrupted the purity of the Renaissance.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the sequence of classical, postclassical, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, mannerist, baroque, rococo, and neoclassical originally recorded the successive triumphs and defeats of the classical ideal of perfection.<sup>12</sup> While the eighteenth-century Gothic revival brought the first challenge to this view, it was only in the nineteenth century that the whole repertory of 'historical styles' was available for the architect, a state of affairs which made the century increasingly style-conscious and led to the insistent question, 'What is the style *of our age*?'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the concepts of style developed by critics and historians reacted back on the artists themselves. In the course of these debates the relation between style and the progress of technology came increasingly to the fore.

### Technology and fashion

The distinctive way an act is performed or an artifact made is likely to remain constant as long as it meets the needs of the social group. In static groups the forces of conservatism are, therefore, likely to be strong and the style of pottery, basketry, or warfare may not change over long periods.<sup>14</sup> Two main forces will make for change: technological improvements and social rivalry. Technological progress is a subject extending far beyond the scope of this article, but it must be mentioned because of its effect on choice situations. Knowledge of better methods might be expected to change the style of artifacts irresistibly, and indeed, where the technical aim is paramount—as in warfare, athletics, or transport—the demonstrably better method is likely to change the style of procedure as soon as it is known and mastered.

What is relevant here for the student of style is that the older method may yet be retained within certain limited contexts of ritual and ceremony.

The queen still drives to Parliament in a coach, not in an automobile, and is guarded by men with swords and lances, not with Tommy guns. The Torah is still in scroll form, while the world has adopted the more convenient codex. It is clear that the expressive value of the archaic style will tend to increase with the distance between the normal technological usages and the methods reserved for these distinctive occasions. The more rapid technical progress becomes, the wider will be the gap between adoption and rejection. In our technological society, even the retention of the 'vintage car' is symptomatic of a 'style of life.'

We are here touching on the second factor making for change—the element of social rivalry and prestige. In the slogan 'Bigger and better,' 'better' stands for technological improvement with reference to a storable purpose, 'bigger' for the element of display that is such a driving force in competitive groups. In medieval Italian cities rival families vied with each other in building those high towers that still mark the city of San Gimignano. Sometimes civic authority asserted its symbolic rights by forbidding any of these towers to rise higher than the tower of the town hall. Cities, in their turn, might vie with each other to have the biggest cathedral, just as princes would outdo each other in the size of their parks, the splendor of their operas, or the equipment of their stables. It is not always easy to see why competition suddenly fastens on one element rather than another, but once the possession of a high tower, a large orchestra, or a fast motorcycle has become a status symbol within a given society, competition is likely to lead to excesses far beyond the need of the technological purpose.

It might be argued that these developments belong to the realm of fashion rather than of style, just as the improvement of method belongs to technology. But an analysis of stability and change in style will always have to take into account these two influences. The pressures of fashion, like those of technology, provide an additional dimension of choice for those who refuse to go with the fashion and, thus, desire to assert their independence. Clearly, this independence is only relative. Even a refusal to join in the latest social game is a way of taking up a position toward it. Indeed, it might make those who adopt this course willy-nilly more conspicuous than the followers of fashion. If they have sufficient social prestige, they might even find themselves to be creators of a non-conformist fashion which will ultimately lead to a new style of behavior.

The above distinction between technical and social superiority is of necessity artificial, for technological progress tends to create prestige for the society in which it originated, which will carry over into other fields. Admiration for Roman power and for the ruins of Rome led to the fashion for all things Roman in the Renaissance, and the admiration of Peter the Great and Kemal Pasha for Western superiority even led to a forced change to Western dress and hairstyles in their countries. The fashions for American jazz or American slang so much deplored by conservative Europeans on both sides of the Iron Curtain are reminders of the legendary prestige of American technology and power, just as the rush to learn the Russian language can be traced back to the success of the first Sputnik. Here, as always, however, the reaction of the non-conformist provides the best gauge for the potential attractions of the style. Leaders of underdeveloped nations, such as Gandhi, have defiantly resisted

Westernization in their style of dress and behavior and exalted the virtues of uncorrupted technological primitivity.

Style in art has rarely been analyzed in terms of these pressures, but such an analysis might yield worthwhile results, for the various activities which, since the eighteenth century, have gradually become grouped together under the name of art<sup>15</sup> once served a variety of practical purposes in addition to increasing prestige. In architecture both aspects interacted from the very beginning, the erection of the Egyptian pyramids, for example, displaying both technological and organizational skills and competitive pride. Opinions tend to differ about the relative proportions of technological and prestige elements in the succession of medieval architectural styles; the technology of stone vaulting offered a clear advantage in view of fire risks, but it is still an open question whether the introduction of the Gothic rib and the subsequent competition in light and high structures was motivated principally by technical considerations. Clearly, considerations of prestige, of outdoing a rival city or a rival prince, have always played a part in architectural display. At the same time, architectural history exhibits many reactions away from these dual pressures, toward simpler styles or more intimate effects. The rejection of ornament in neoclassical architecture, the conspicuous simplicity of Le Petit Trianon—not to speak of Marie Antoinette's *hameau* at Versailles—are cases in point. The Gothic revival drew its strength from the associations of that style with a preindustrial age. Indeed, the history of architecture provides perhaps the most interesting conflict of motives. When, in the nineteenth century, technology and engineering improved the use of iron constructions, architects adopted, for a time, the ritualistic attitude that this new material was essentially inartistic: the Eiffel Tower was a display of engineering, not of art. But ultimately, it was the prestige of technology within our industrial society that assured the embodiment of the new methods in a new technological 'functional' style.<sup>16</sup> Now even functionalism, the conspicuous look of technological efficiency, has become a formal element of expression in architecture and, as such, sometimes influences design at least as much as genuine adaptation to a purpose. The best example for this interaction of technology and fashion in the visual arts is the adoption of 'streamline' patterns to designs not intended to function in rapid currents.

Even the development of painting and sculpture could be seen in the light of these dual influences if it is accepted that image making usually serves a definite function within society. In tribal societies the production of ritual masks, totem poles, or ancestral figures is usually governed by the same conservative traditions of skill as is the production of other artifacts. When the existing forms serve their purpose, there is no need for change and the craftsman's apprentice can learn the procedures from his master. However, foreign contacts or playful inventions may lead to the discovery of 'better' methods of creating images—better, at least, from the point of view of naturalistic plausibility. Whether these methods are accepted, ignored, or deliberately rejected will depend largely on the function assigned to images within a given society. Where the image functions mainly in a ritualistic context, changes will be discouraged even though they cannot be entirely prevented. The conservative styles of Egypt and Byzantium are cases in point. On the other hand, when the principal function of painting and sculpture lies in their capacity to evoke



a story or event before the eyes of the spectator,<sup>17</sup> demonstrable improvements in this capacity will tend to gain ready acceptance and displace earlier methods, which may then only linger on in confined, sacred contexts. This prestige of improved methods can be observed at least twice in the history of art: in the development of Greek art from the sixth to the fourth century B.C. and in the succession of styles in Europe from the twelfth to the nineteenth century.

The invention of such illusionistic devices as foreshortening, in the fifth century B.C., or of perspective, in the fifteenth century A.D., gave to the arts of Greece and Florence a lead which is expressed in the prestige and the diffusion of these styles over the whole of the civilized world. It took centuries until the momentum of such spectacular superiority was spent and a reaction set in.

Even in this realm of artistic styles, however, the introduction of better illusionistic devices could and did lead to tensions where rejection was as powerful a means of expression as was acceptance. This reaction became particularly important after the method of achieving the then main purpose of art—convincing illustration—had been mastered in fourth-century Greece and sixteenth-century Italy. It was felt that technical progress was no longer needed once the means had been perfected to suit the ends, as in the (lost) paintings by Apelles or in the masterpieces by Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Subsequent innovations in the dramatic use of light and shade (Caravaggio and Rembrandt) or in the rendering of movement (Bernini) were rejected by critics as obscuring rather than helping the essential purpose of art and were considered an illicit display of technical virtuosity at the expense of clarity. Here lie the roots of that philosophy of style that is essential to the whole development of criticism in the Western tradition. The perfect harmony between means and ends marks the classical style,<sup>18</sup> periods in which the means are not yet quite sufficient to realize the ends are experienced as primitive or archaic, and those in which the means are said to obtrude themselves in an empty display are considered corrupt. To evaluate this criticism, we would have to ask whether display could not and did not develop into an alternative function of art with its own conventions and code.

### **Evolution and disintegration of styles**

It is clear that from the normative point of view there is an intrinsic destiny which artistic styles are likely to follow and that this will overtake different activities at different points in time. The classic moment in epic poetry may have been achieved in Homer; that of tragedy, in Sophocles; that of oratory, in Demosthenes; that of sculpture, in Praxiteles; and that of painting in Apelles or Raphael. Symphonic music may have reached its perfect balance between ends and means, its classic moment, in Mozart, three hundred years after Raphael's paintings.

It has indeed been argued that such phenomena as mannerism or the baroque, however they may be valued, occur in the development of any art which has reached maturity and, perhaps, overripeness. In that 'late' phase, the increasingly hectic search for fresh complexities may lead to an 'exhaustion' of the style when all permutations have been tried.<sup>19</sup> Although there

is a certain superficial plausibility in this interpretation, which accounts for some stretches of historical development, it must never be forgotten that terms such as 'complexity' and 'elements' do not here refer to measurable entities and that even the relationship of means to ends is open to contrasting interpretations. What may appear to one critic as the classic moment of an art may carry, for another, the seeds of corruption, and what looks like the final stage of exhaustion of a style to one interpreter may be seen from another point of view as the groping beginnings of a new style. Cézanne, the complexity of whose art is beyond doubt, saw himself as the primitive of a new age of art, and this ambiguity adheres to any great artist, who can always be described as representing the culmination of a preceding evolution, a new beginning, or (by his adversaries) an archcorruptor. Thus, the naturalism of Jan van Eyck can be seen as the climax of late Gothic tendencies in the descriptive accumulation of minute details<sup>20</sup> or as the primitive start of a new era. The style of J. S. Bach can be experienced as late complexity or as archaic grandeur. For the same reasons almost any style can be convincingly described as transitional.

It is evident, moreover, that the units, or styles, by which the evolution is traced will always be rather arbitrarily chosen. Aristotle gave the lead in his famous sketch of the evolution of tragedy (*Poetics* 1448b3–1449a) but to do so, he had first to set off tragedy from comedy or mime. In a similar way, we may either describe the evolution of painting or of one of its branches, and we may find, for instance, that what was a late phase for portrait painting (e.g., mannerism) was an early one for landscape painting.

If the analysis of styles in terms of the inner logic of their evolution has, nevertheless, yielded illuminating results, this must be attributed less to the validity of alleged historical laws than to the sensitivity of critics. Heinrich Wölfflin,<sup>21</sup> for example, used this framework in order to draw attention to the artistic means available to a given master and developed a vocabulary for a debate, which, however inconclusive it is bound to be, will increase our awareness of the traditions within which the masters concerned operated. By placing an *oeuvre* into a continuous chain of developments, we become alerted to what its creator had learned from predecessors, what he transformed, and how he was used, in his turn, by later generations. We must only guard against the temptation of hindsight to regard this outcome as inevitable. For every one of the masters concerned, the future was open, and although each may have been restricted in his choice by certain characteristics of the situation, the directions the development might have taken are still beyond computation. Ackerman has provided a fuller criticism of this type of stylistic determinism.<sup>22</sup> But these strictures do not invalidate the search for a morphology of style that should underpin the intuitions of the connoisseur.

**Style and period.** The analysis of stylistic traditions in terms of the means peculiar to individual arts cuts across another approach, which is less interested in the 'longitudinal' study of evolution than in the synchronic characterization of all activities of a particular group, nation, or period. This approach to style as an expression of a collective spirit can be traced back to romantic philosophy, notably to Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837). Seeing history as the manifestation of the Absolute in its growing self-awareness, Hegel

conceived of each stage of this process as a step in the dialectical process embodied in one particular nation. A nation's art, no less than its philosophy, religion, law, mores, science, and technology, will always reflect the stage in the evolution of the Spirit, and each of these facets will thus point to the one common center, the essence of the age. Thus, the historian's task is not to find out what connections there may be between aspects of a society's life, for this connection is assumed on metaphysical grounds.<sup>23</sup> There is no question, for instance, whether the Gothic style of architecture expresses the same essential attitude as scholastic philosophy or medieval feudalism. What is expected of the historian is only to demonstrate this unitary principle.

It matters little in this context whether the historian concerned thinks of this unitary principle as the 'Hegelian spirit' or whether he looks for some other central cause from which all the characteristics of a period can be deduced. In fact, the history of nineteenth-century historiography of art (and its twentieth-century aftermath) can largely be described as a series of attempts to get rid of the more embarrassing features of Hegel's metaphysics without sacrificing his unitary vision. It is well known that Marx and his disciples claimed to do precisely this when they turned Hegel's principle upside down and claimed that material conditions are not the manifestation of the spirit, but rather the spirit is an outflow or superstructure of the material conditions of production. It was these conditions (to remain with our previous example) which led to medieval feudalism and which are reflected in scholastic philosophy no less than in Gothic architecture.

What distinguishes all these theories from a genuinely scientific search for causal connections is their a priori character. The question is not whether, and in what form, feudalism may have influenced the conditions under which cathedrals were constructed, but how to find a verbal formula that makes the assumed interdependence of style and society immediately apparent. In this conviction the various holistic schools of historiography agreed, regardless of whether they belonged to the materialist Hegelian left-wing or to the right-wing of *Geistesgeschichte*. As Wölfflin, one of the most subtle and sophisticated analysts of style, formulated his program in his youth, in 1888: 'To *explain* a style then can mean nothing other than to place it in its general historical context and to verify that it speaks in harmony with the other organs of its age'.<sup>24</sup> What matters in the present context is that this holistic conviction became widely accepted by historians and artists alike. As Adolf Loos, the pioneer of modern architecture in Austria, put it: 'If nothing were left of an extinct race but a single button, I would be able to infer, from the shape of that button, how these people dressed, built their houses, how they lived, what was their religion, their art, and their mentality'.<sup>25</sup>

It is the old classical tag *Ex ungue leonem* ('The claw shows the lion') applied to the study of culture. By and large, historians and anthropologists have preferred to display their skill for interpretation where the results were foreknown rather than risk being proved wrong by fresh evidence.

### **Stylistic physiognomies**

Seductive as the holistic theory of style has proved to be, it is still open to criticism on methodological grounds. It is true that both individuals and groups exhibit to our mind some elusive unitary physiognomy. The way a

person speaks, writes, dresses, and looks merges for us into the image of his personality. We therefore say that all these are expressions of his personality, and we can sometimes rationalize our conviction by pointing out supposed connections.<sup>26</sup> But the psychologist knows that it is extremely hazardous to make inferences from one such manifestation to all the others even when we know the context and conventions extremely well. Where this knowledge is lacking, nobody would venture such a diagnosis. Yet, it is this paradoxically which the diagnosticians of group styles claim to be able to do.<sup>27</sup> More often than not, they are simply arguing in a circle and inferring from the static or rigid style of a tribe that its mentality must also be static or rigid. The less collateral evidence there is, the more easily will this kind of diagnosis be accepted—particularly if it is part of a system of polarities in which, for instance, dynamic cultures are opposed to static ones or intuitive mentalities to rational ones.

The weaknesses of this kind of procedure in both history and anthropology are obvious. The logical claims of cultural holism have been subjected to dissection and refutation in K. R. Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957). There is no necessary connection between any one aspect of a group's activities and any other.

This does not mean, however, that style cannot sometimes provide a fruitful starting point for a hypothesis about certain habits and traditions of a group. One of these possibilities has been mentioned already. There certainly are conservative groups or societies which will tend to resist change in all fields, and other societies (like ours) in which prestige attaches to experimentation as such.<sup>28</sup> It might be argued that contrasting characteristics of style may flow from these contrasting attitudes. The static societies may tend to value solid craftsmanship and the refinements of skill, while the dynamic groups may favor the untried even where it is the unskilled. But such generalizations are subject to the same qualifications as the ones criticized in the preceding section. There is no real common gauge by which to compare the skill of Picasso with that of a conservative Chinese master. Once more, therefore, the evaluation of expressiveness will largely depend on a knowledge of choice situations. In such a situation the twentieth-century art lover may indeed prefer originality to skill, while the Chinese would select the skillful, rather than the novel, painting. The same applies to such dominant values of a society as love of luxury or its rejection. What constitutes luxury may change, but it may still be true to say that at the fashionable courts of Europe, around 1400, the more precious and shiny artifact or painting would have been preferred, while a Calvinist paterfamilias would have thrown the same gaudy bauble out of the window. Such basic attitudes may, indeed, color the style of several arts at the same time.

It might even be argued that social values such as the traditional English love of understatement will influence the choice of means and styles in various fields and favor the rejection of display in architecture, of 'loud' colors in painting, and of emotionalism in music. But, although there is an intuitive truth in such connections, it is only too easy to point to opposite features in the grandiloquent vulgarity of English Victorian town halls, the shrill colors of pre-Raphaelite paintings, or the emotionalism of Carlyle's tirades.

What is true of national character as allegedly 'expressed' in art is even more conspicuously true of the spirit of the age. The baroque pomp and display of the *Roi soleil* at Versailles is contemporaneous with the classical restraint of Racine. The functionalist rationalism of twentieth-century architecture goes hand in hand with the irrationalism of Bergson's philosophy, Rilke's poetry, and Picasso's painting. Needless to say, it is always possible to reinterpret the evidence in such a way that one characteristic points to the alleged 'essence' of a period, while other manifestations are 'inessential' survivals or anticipations, but such *ad hoc* explanations invalidate rather than strengthen the unitary hypothesis.

### The diagnostics of artistic choice

To escape from the physiognomic fallacy, the student of style might do worse than return to the lessons of ancient rhetoric. There, the alternative vocabularies provided by social and chronological stratifications provided the instrument of style. We are familiar with similar stratifications in the styles of speech, dress, furnishings, and taste which allow us to size up a person's status and allegiance with reasonable confidence. Taste in art is now similarly structured between the cheap and the highbrow, the conservative and the advanced. No wonder that artistic choices offer themselves as another badge of allegiance. But what is true today need not always have been true.<sup>29</sup> The temptation to overrate the diagnostic value of artistic style stems partly from an illicit extension of our experience in modern society.

It is possible that this situation in art did not fully arise before the French Revolution, which polarized European political life into right-wing reactionaries and left-wing progressives. While the champions of reason clung to the neoclassical style, its opponents became medievalizers in architecture, painting, and even dress to proclaim their allegiance to the age of faith. From then on, it was not exceptional for an artistic movement to be identified with a political creed. Courbet's choice of working-class models and subjects was felt to be an act of defiance that stamped him as a socialist. In vain did some artists protest that their radicalism in painting or music did not imply radical political views.<sup>30</sup> The fusion and confusion of the two was strengthened by the critics' jargon, which spoke of the *avant-garde*<sup>31</sup> and revolutionaries in art, and by the artists who copied the politicians in issuing manifestoes.

But, although the divisions of our societies are possibly reflected in the range of our art, it would be rash to conclude that the allegiance can be read off the badge, as it were. There was a time, in the early 1920s, when abstract painting was practiced in revolutionary Russia and when opposition to these experiments could rally the opponents of 'cultural Bolshevism.' Now abstract art is denounced in Russia, where 'social realism' is extolled as the healthy art of the new age. This change of front, in its turn, has made it possible for abstract art to be used as a subsidiary weapon in the cold war, in which it now has come to stand for freedom of expression. The toleration of this style of painting in Poland, for instance, is indeed a social symptom of no minor importance.

There are perhaps two lessons which the student of style can learn from this example. The first concerns the 'feedback' character of social theories. Soviet Russia, having adopted the Marxist version of Hegelianism as its official creed, could not look at any artistic utterance but as a necessary expres-

sion of a social situation. Deviation and nonconformity in art were therefore bound to be interpreted as symptoms of potential disloyalty, and a monolithic style appealing to the majority became a theoretical necessity. We in the West, happily, do not suffer from the same state religion, but the Hegelian conviction is still sufficiently widespread among critics and politicians to encourage a political interpretation of stylistic changes—our newspapers prefer to ask of every new movement in art or architecture what it stands for, rather than what its artistic potentialities may be. The second lesson suggested by this contemporary experience in East and West is that one cannot opt out of this game. Once an issue has been raised in this form, once a badge has been adopted and a flag hoisted, it becomes hard, if not impossible, to ignore this social aspect. One might pity the anticommunist Pole who would like to paint a brawny, happy tractor driver, but one would have to tell him that this subject and style has been pre-empted by his political opponents. The harmless subject has become charged with political significance, and one person alone cannot break this spell.

These two observations underline the responsibility of the social scientist in his discussion of style. Here, as always, the observer is likely to interfere with what he observes.

### **Morphology and connoisseurship**

The distinctive character of styles clearly rests on the adoption of certain conventions which are learned and absorbed by those who carry on the tradition. These may be codified in the movements learned by the craftsman taught to carve a ritual mask, in the way a painter learns to prime his canvas and arrange his palette, or in the rules of harmony, which the composer is asked to observe. While certain of these features are easily recognizable (e.g., the Gothic pointed arch, the cubist facet, Wagnerian chromaticism), others are more elusive, since they are found to consist not in the presence of individual, specifiable elements but in the regular occurrence of certain clusters of features and in the exclusion of certain elements.

We become aware of these hidden taboos when we encounter an instance of their infringement in a bad imitation. We then say with conviction that Cicero would never have ended a sentence in that fashion, that Beethoven would never have made this modulation, or that Monet would never have used that color combination. Such apodictic statements seem to restrict severely the artist's freedom of choice. Indeed, one approach to the problem of style is to observe the limitations within which the artist or craftsman works. The style forbids certain moves and recommends others as effective, but the degree of latitude left to the individual within this system varies at least as much as it does in games. Attempts have been made to study and formulate these implicit rules of style in terms of probabilities. The listener who is familiar with the style of a piece of music will be aware at any moment of certain possible or probable moves, and the interaction between these expectations and their fulfillment or evasion is a necessary part of the musical experience. Not surprisingly, this intuition is confirmed by mathematical analysis, which shows the relative frequency of certain sequences within a given style of composition.<sup>32</sup> Music, with its limited number of permutations of discrete elements, is, however, a rather isolated case, which cannot be readily general-



ized. Even so, the analysis of literary style in terms of word order, sentence length, and other identifiable features has also yielded promising results for statistical morphology.<sup>33</sup> No systematic attempt to extend this method to the analysis of style in the visual arts is known to the present writer. Certainly, methods of prediction and completion could even be applied in these cases. We would not expect the hidden corner of a brownish Rembrandt painting to be light blue, but it may well be asked if observations of this kind stand in need of statistical confirmation.

The limitations of scientific morphology are perhaps all the more galling when we realize that a style, like a language, can be learned to perfection by those who could never point to its rules.<sup>34</sup> This is true not only of contemporaries who grow into the use of their styles and procedures in learning the craft of building or gardening but also of the most skillful forger, mimic, or parodist, who may learn to understand a style from within, as it were, and reproduce it to perfection without bothering about its syntax. Optimists like to state that no forgery can be successful for a long time, because the style of the forger's own period is bound to tell and tell increasingly with distance, but it must be recognized that this argument is circular and that any forgeries of the past which were sufficiently successful simply have not been detected. The possibility exists, for instance, that certain busts of Roman emperors which are universally held to date from antiquity were in fact made in the Renaissance, and it is equally likely that many Tanagra figures and Tang horses in our collections are modern. Some forgeries, moreover, were unmasked only on external evidence such as the use of materials or of tools unknown in the alleged period of their origin.<sup>35</sup> It is true that this achievement of the successful forger also suggests that the understanding of style is not beyond the reach of the intuitively minded and that the great connoisseur who is pitted against the forger has at least as much chance as has his opponent.

Confronted with a painting, a piece of music, or a page of prose attributed to a particular author or age, the connoisseur can also say with conviction that this does not look or sound right. There is no reason to doubt the authority of such statements, though it would be incautious to consider them infallible. It has happened that an essay published under Diderot's name was deleted from the author's canon on stylistic grounds but had to be restored to it when the original draft in his hand was found. If such independent evidence came more frequently to light, the fame of the connoisseur would probably suffer, but he would still be sure to score quite an impressive number of hits. For the time being, at any rate, the intuitive grasp of underlying *Gestalten* that makes the connoisseur is still far ahead of the morphological analysis of styles in terms of enumerable features.

# 'Form', Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description

In the next section I am going to examine materialist art history, argue that it also is ultimately unsatisfactory as a kind of essentialism, and close by offering some alternatives outside the bounds of these nineteenth-century metaphysical categories.

I wish to begin by examining certain arguments from Benjamin's brief 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' which seem to me to provide a paradigmatic and influential treatment of what Benjamin himself calls 'materialistic historiography'.<sup>1</sup> His arguments are set in terms closely related in one or another aspect to those we have been considering. Benjamin also wrote about 'historicism,' but used the term in a special sense, as we have seen. Benjamin understood the word to refer to the presumption of a kind of Newtonian continuous time into which all events can be placed. The method of historicist history is 'additive,' which is to say that what we call 'contributions' can be assumed all to have a place in the same great but abstract narrative. The historicist historian need not worry about more than setting events in their proper order, and so, beyond the presumption of underlying time, what Benjamin calls 'universal' (that is, historicist) history 'has no theoretical armature'.<sup>2</sup> Benjamin opposes all of this to his 'materialistic historiography.' He considers it imperative that historicist history be rejected because historicism, by making the present seem to be the cumulative progressive consequence of what has gone before, can be seen to justify the status quo. Human history, Benjamin wants to say, is neither neutral nor is it positive progress; it is instead endless carnage and suffering, Hegel's slaughterbench. The very assumption of the absolute continuity of history is acquiescence in oppression and murder.

'Materialistic historiography,' in short, sees the terrible confluence of history with momentary victory, and Benjamin wants to eliminate the political and moral anesthesia of historicism once and for all by denying its assumption of underlying continuity. Events are not continuous with one another, they are disjunctive; and materialistic historiography embraces this disjunctiveness, making it a part of the historian's own procedure, which cannot simply be justified by what needs to be done in some subscientific sense. The past may inevitably be at hand, but if it is alive it is made alive in the present. The rejection of continuity thus implies a willfully violent hermeneutics in which the past is appropriated to the purposes of the present. The historian,

Benjamin says, seizes the past with virile force in a revolutionary transformative act. I linger over these ideas because such ideas are widely diffused; but to keep to Benjamin's arguments, they are based on an extreme dichotomy corresponding to extreme circumstances. Benjamin was trying to cut away the intellectual underpinnings of fascism and to do so rejected the entire tradition of what he called universal history. To do that he juxtaposed absolute continuity and absolute discontinuity.

Both Benjamin and Gombrich formulated their arguments under the immediate pressure of the cataclysmic threat of the rise of Nazism and both rejected what they called 'historicism.' However different their understanding of this word may have been, for both writers the rejection of historicism meant the rejection of negative principles of continuity that had to be given up not least because of their horrible moral and political consequences. The solutions to the problem of discontinuity offered by the two writers point in two quite different directions, raising an alternative that will guide much of the remainder of this essay.

If discontinuity is materialist, then continuity is (at least by implication) idealist. If Benjamin does not in fact say this, it is a tack taken by other 'materialist' writers and has a place among the issues of this discussion. Historicism as Benjamin understood it is essentialist if not idealist because it implies that time itself is a progressive principle of change. As such it misplaces the locus of significant historical transformation from class conflict to a metaphysical (or physical) principle.

Since it is based on the rejection of continuity, practitioners of materialistic historiography might be expected to favor synchronic over diachronic explanation. This again gives a more specific definition to 'context,' which is not only economic and political, but is structurally rather than causally related to whatever is to be interpreted. Art is not to be explained primarily in relation to previous art, and this position may easily be translated into terms of the earlier argument. 'Form' was said to be a principle of continuity, expressive of the culture to which it belonged. Form thus had a kind of built-in historical cogency, but at the same time it made it difficult (if not impossible) to explain anything but evolutionary change and relations to broader 'spiritual' factors. This difficulty was acknowledged in the conclusion of one of the greatest and best-known formalist essays in the literature of the history of art. At the end of his *Principles of Art History* Wölfflin acknowledged that his formal principles, which had been used to describe a development from Renaissance through baroque art, could not explain why the same development should end and begin again. He regarded this recommencement (that is, the return to a linear style in art around 1800) as 'unnatural' and attributed it to 'profound changes in the spiritual world,' to 'a revaluation of being in all spheres'. Meyer Schapiro defined a similar problem in more general terms in his essay on style, this time suggesting social rather than spiritual historical context as a solution.<sup>3</sup>

The principles by which are explained the broad similarities in development are of a different order from those by which the singular facts are explained. The normal motion and the motion due to supposedly perturbing factors belong to different worlds; the first is inherent in the morphology of styles, the second has a psychological or social origin. It is as if mechanics had two different sets of laws.

This paradoxical state of affairs has by no means ended; rather the pendulum has swung now to one, now to the other side. The availability of the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic (which Ferdinand de Saussure formulated in reaction to a developmental linguistics) has only served to harden the opposition, as we have seen; but again, this opposition is perfectly consistent with the general distinction between materialist discontinuity and idealist continuity.

To the degree that it can be called formalist at all, materialist art history might be expected to take a weak formalist posture, that is, to assume that the means of representation are vehicles of content and are historical only insofar as they are vehicles of content, which is determined by social and economic context.[...]

Why do such contradictory patterns of explanation occur? I believe it is because both 'idealism' and 'materialism' as a priori bases of historical investigation demand the suppression of one or another kind of historical evidence. Idealism and materialism are alternative principles of the highest generality. This is not to say that they are simply different ways of describing the same thing since each involves the relative deepness or priority of one or another principle, that is, the generality means that one kind of thing is *always* able to be explained in terms of the other ('mind is the highest form of matter'; 'matter is something about mind'). The whole question thus revolves around the point of which principle is explanatory relative to the other, and if we turn these distinctions to history, it means that some kinds of evidence are always explanatory relative to others. I observed above that a most basic task of the history of art is the explanation of why works of art look the way they look. This is not a trivial statement; it provides a criterion according to which both idealist and materialist art history are of limited explanatory usefulness. Either alternative must exclude kinds of evidence that bear on the explanation of the appearance and change in the appearance of series of works of art. Idealist art historians tend to be unconcerned with the patronage, use, and reception of images, which are manifestly part of their legitimate history, and materialist art historians tend to avoid any reference to cultural history or the technical history of art traditions themselves because they are assumed to bear merely a 'superstructural' relationship to a deeper, 'truer' historical principle.

How is this dilemma to be resolved? We might consider the following. When Marx inverted Hegel's scheme of history, he retained one essential thing, namely its absolute totality. This totality followed inevitably from the continued reduction of all historical process to a single metaphysical principle, but it also retained a vision of something like overarching providential purpose in history and in human action. In the terms of this argument, however, totality is based on a most general kind of essentialism, which is finally disabling for historical interpretation. [...]

# Style

Through millennia on millennia, hominids and then modern humans made stone tools by striking one stone with another, and the technological horizon within which stone toolmakers worked is as evident in the objects they made as it is in the more complex patterns left by later makers. Pattern, in fact, seems evident in the earliest stone tools only in that successive blows have been struck side by side to multiply the length of the cutting edge. Real configurations came later, accompanied by more sophisticated means of flaking using bone and wood as well as stone. Like configuration, the properly *technological* definition of stone tools is general—all are the results of transforming the same material by similar means—and, although technology thus bears closely and essentially on the appearance of these tools, it should be distinguished from *technique*, which parallels arbitrariness in that it follows from the local adaptation of the overall technology in one craft tradition or another. Later stone tools have much more patterned and specialized configurations, and are also much more developed technically, the obvious results of many more motions and kinds of motions.

In general, technology might be defined as the whole available range of means of transformation, and tools themselves are both the results and the means of transformation. In these terms, a hierarchy of materials might have emerged. It might be supposed, for example, that early makers of stone tools also used wood or bone as tools, and also *shaped* tools of wood or bone, as later Palaeolithic toolmakers did. These do not survive, but since stone is harder than wood or bone, stone tools would have been primary in the sense that tools of wood or bone could not have been made without stone tools. But stone technology might then be said to embrace more than one *medium*, that is, more than one means by which similar ends are achieved (even if one medium or another might have advantages over the others, or might demand technical adjustments to achieve a comparable end).

To illustrate the reach of the idea of medium by taking another example much closer in time, most painters in Europe were oil painters by the sixteenth century, but they might also work in the technically highly developed medium of tempera, or they might combine the two media. But within the general consensus that pigments mixed in oil best achieved desired results, different 'schools' of painting—that is, different craft traditions of painting—developed techniques around possibilities in the medium of oil painting—the transparent glazes of the Flemish, the *impasto* of the Venetians, the thinner linearity of the Florentines.

In this example, pigments prepared and mixed in one or another vehicle represent available *technology*, which is general. The choice to mix pigments in oil or egg is a choice of *medium*. The more or less local development of the possibilities of medium is the specific development of *technique*. This brings us

back to the category of *style*, and to the simple but essential point that artifacts, although they always belong to longer or shorter traditions of technology, medium and technique, are just as they are as a consequence of arbitrariness and authority within the limits set by technology, medium and technique.

I will use the word 'style' sparingly in the following chapters, and I will use the word mostly to refer to personal rather than period style. Since, however, the history of art makes considerable use of classifications by period based on style it will be difficult to avoid them altogether and, when I use them, it should be clear that they are being used for the sake of convenience. I have been arguing that there are better ways to explain evident similarities and resemblances among artifacts than uniting them by style, which suggests that style itself is some overarching entity in which all artifacts participate. People always have the option of making more kinds of art than they in fact make, or, to look at the matter in another way, people are always doing more than the idea of a unified collective 'style' lets us see them to be doing, at the same time that there are many continuities among their activities. By and large, objects made by groups look more or less alike because, in order to articulate certain purposes, some persons are taught or trained in similar techniques to make similar objects, much as some are taught or trained in traditions of poetry or music to make certain kinds of poetry or music.

The word 'style' itself is from the Latin *stilus*, a writing implement, as we might refer to the 'pen' of a writer as a characteristic way of writing. The origin of the term thus points to *personal* style, and when art historians speak of the 'Roman Baroque style of the seventeenth century' (or, more popularly, when we speak of the 'style of the '60s'), personal style is being expanded metaphorically, as if times and places themselves had marked those who lived in them, or the objects made in them, and did so in distinct ways that can be recognized and imitated.

An author's 'style', or characteristic way of writing, might refer to a general 'touch', but also to an individual preference for themes and ways of treating themes. But however much we may value the manuscripts of poems or novels, we do not expect to find any close relation between an author's handwriting and literary style. In art, on the other hand—and especially in painting, the example that has dominated discussions of style—we are inclined to think of *autographic* style as inseparable from presentation taken altogether. In formalist terms, the autographic character of works of art constitutes much of their 'expressive' character, recording and conveying the artist's 'vision', so that we might learn to distinguish the work of Jan van Eyck from Rogier van der Weyden among the Flemish painters or Titian from Sebastiano del Piombo among the Venetians. As we make these distinctions, we also isolate and reflect upon artistic 'personalities'.

As is often pointed out, Western art history attaches important values to individual style. The matter of style, however, is not so simple, and the very fact that deep values of selfhood and authenticity have been attached to it should suggest that it may also be valued differently, that attitudes toward style are historically and culturally variable.

An adjustment in our notion of style is necessary to describe European art itself if personal style is always developed within technological limits and is always based upon choices of medium and technique on the part of artists



and those who have preceded them. Having been trained to do so, and being expected to do so, a Venetian painter might paint on canvas in oil with heavy impasto, but might also paint over a ground of one or another colour, favour one or another palette from the pigments available, and use one or another mixture of oil and varnish, with results that—although characteristically ‘Venetian’—are as individual as the ‘touch’ or ‘hand’ evident in the paintings themselves. To nest personal style in this way is not to deny that personal style exists; it is rather to say that the specific synthesis of the conditions of presentation of which autographic style is part can only be explained as it stands by considering other more impersonal factors as well.

The ability to discern characteristic differences among the artifacts of a culture is largely a matter of familiarity. If we know European painting well, then we might readily distinguish the styles of two Venetian painters; on the other hand, we might only recognize less familiar Chinese landscape paintings as ‘Chinese’—even though they are evidently and expressly autographic—and it requires years of study to distinguish one painter from another, to understand the meanings of the autographic itself, and to appreciate the various adaptations made by one or another painter to the technical possibilities of the medium of brush and ink in coming to an autographic style. To return to my simpler, earlier examples, it is not unlikely that one arrowhead maker in a group might have been able to recognize arrowheads made by others in the same group even though we might never be able to make such a discrimination, that is, never be able to make judgements beyond the level of common technique. But, however difficult it may be to make such discriminations, it is important to recognize and preserve this range of possible judgement, both because such judgements ultimately involve the particular character of works of art and because the universality of this dimension of particularity means that it is always present in one way or degree in any cultural example.

Because the history of European art is so deeply shaped around the discrimination of individual, autographic styles, it might seem only appropriate to attempt to ‘isolate hands’ in the art of other traditions. In many cases this is appropriate, but not to the point of excluding the possibility of more collective styles, in which individual ‘hands’ are subordinated to prescribed technique and to the authority of prior artifacts, and in which this subordination is understood to have positive value. Styles might also be *calligraphic*, not simply in being associated with writing (which I shall discuss presently) but in being primarily concerned with using line, colour and arrangement to enhance or elaborate in ways appropriate to image, subject, use or users. Styles may also be collaborative. It might be that in time we will be able to distinguish ‘hands’ in the painted tripod vessels of Teotihuacan; but it is also possible that the uniformity of the images on so many of these vessels was positively desirable and actively sought.

Western art since the early modern Renaissance has become more and more identified with manner and individual ‘expression’—that is, with a high degree of evidence of personal vision and style; and, as I shall describe in Chapter 7, later modern art has also been concerned with characteristic selection and arrangement of things already at hand, a significant variant of the same idea. The situation in Western art, however, is also much more complex than this statement suggests. There are many examples from the fourteenth

century to the twentieth of artists working in shops in the style of a 'master', so that one personal style is subordinated to another, or the master's style is actually executed by others. To take another example, Expressionist artists, however distinguishable their works may be, do not make their own canvases, pigments or brushes, and sculptors welding sheets of steel do not make the steel or the welding equipment.

Technological differences have provided a criterion for the classification of periods of human history altogether—the Old and New Stone Ages, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Atomic Age—but the history of art, while it stands in the closest possible relation to the history of technology, is not simply defined by technology, and there are many possible relations between the two. The history of human making, and, perhaps most strikingly, its early history, consistently displays a struggle against the limitations imposed by technology, a refusal simply to come to accommodation with what technology makes possible, in the pursuit of purposes evidently considered more pressing than practical limitations. This is partly the result of play, and art may work with and against the limitations of technology, technique and medium much as dancers work with and against human conditionality. There are other considerations. The Olmecs who brought volcanic boulders weighing many tons over scores of miles of difficult terrain without wheels or draft animals in order to carve them into the colossal ruler portrait-guardian heads of their ritual centres were doing what was apparently impossible, a value in addition to any intrinsic significance of the material. These colossal heads would have empowered the precinct they bounded, and at the same time marked the organization of work for the purpose of sanctioning and animating sacred places. No more simply determined by technology were those who carved these colossal images with stone tools, or those who set about to destroy them by patiently grinding away their features or devising ways of dropping stones to fracture them. Although it is important to solve the problems posed by such feats of transportation and manufacture, thus to see how existing technology was adapted, it is also necessary to understand how it came to be regarded as imperative to put those images at that size made of a certain specific stone in that place. Then it might be possible to understand why existing technology was stretched far beyond its ordinary limits, or why the making of certain images or structures might even have spurred technological invention.

There are many examples of macrolithic art—we need only remember the erection and subsequent movement to Rome and much later Western capitals of Egyptian obelisks, or the transportation for the World's Fair of 1964 of one of the colossal Olmec heads to Seagram's Plaza in New York City to stand beneath soaring steel structures, themselves visibly defying the limits of traditional construction in stone. Colossal works perennially fascinate because they are apparent overcomings of the limitations of technology and technique, a victory that induces wonder long after any association with religious and political power has been forgotten. Again, the display of virtuosity in many traditions has consisted precisely in denying the limits of both technology and technique, as I shall discuss in the sections to come on facture.

Whether they are accommodated or challenged, the technological conditions of a work of art are in one way or another essential to its under-

standing. For example, a late twentieth-century stainless steel sculpture by David Smith, a personal variant of Cubism, its surfaces marked by a kind of autographic grinding, is also in important respects an extrapersonal work, the appearance of which is determined by technology and techniques other than those used by Smith himself. It is not simply that modern materials have been exploited aesthetically, it is rather that modern metallurgy, chemistry, industry and transportation have made available already transformed materials with definite characteristics (and associations) as well as definite techniques for working with them. These things, as much as period or personal style, stamp the sculpture as 'modern'. The cutting and joining of the steel, the grinding of the gestural textures of the surfaces, as well as the characteristic theme and arrangement of forms, make the sculpture a 'David Smith'; but these autographic characteristics are complementary to materials and processes that came to hand, and all together permit something to stand in the light in the modern world as nothing has stood before.

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# Anthropology and/as Art History

## Introduction

Art history in the Hegelian tradition—whether of an explicitly theological orientation or in more ‘secular’ versions devoted to charting the progressive evolution of national, ethnic, or racial character, ‘spirit’, intelligence, or mentality—was grounded in the hypothesis that stylistic change over time and place was symptomatic of broader or deeper (and, generally, pre-existing) changes in meaning or significance; changes in individual or collective mentality or will. Art historically, an object is meaningful as a sign or mark of its *difference* from other objects: it signifies its (presumably unique) place relative to objects occupying other places or chronological positions. In an ensemble of artefacts any individual object can be made to be seen as symbolizing a people or place; as expressing or representing the totality of a society, nation, or culture.

In this regard, the nineteenth-century academic disciplines of art history and anthropology shared fundamental epistemological assumptions regarding the meaningfulness of artefacts with respect to the individuals or groups who produced them. Art history provided a particular temporal, evolutionary perspective on the significance of the differences amongst artefacts with its focus on the historical characteristics claimed to be manifested in works: whatever its particular qualities, each art object was also a sign of its temporal or chronological place in the evolutionary development or progress of an individual, group, or society.<sup>1</sup> This legibility was heightened and enhanced by its narrative cohesion and its dramatically and rhetorically persuasive organization. The enterprise of Wölfflin considered above, for example, was a case in point of an analytic focus on (pre-selected) features of the artistic production of two (simultaneously fabricated) ‘historical periods’ woven into a chronological narrative, illustrative of an evolutionary progression in artistic style, taste, facture, mentality, or even ‘spirit’. At the same time, art history itself evolved as a rhetorical art of instilling secure belief in pre-given realities—those taken as underlying the character or soul of a nation, place, period, or time—which are moreover staged as pre-existing their analysis; as that which analysis and interpretation uncover or decipher.

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the majority of art historians continued to confront the contradictory implications of the Hegelian theodicy. In addition to Wölfflin and Focillon, the great French historian and theorist of art, culture, and history Hippolyte Taine (1828–93),<sup>2</sup> and the



Viennese museum curator of decorative art Alois Riegl (1858–1905), wrestled with the problem of relating individual and collective factors affecting the formation of artefacts.

In attempting to understand the factors that determined the form of art objects, the work of Riegl was notable in its departure from the forward-progressive aspect of the Hegelian dialectic of an unfolding ‘world spirit’. In his *Stilfragen* of 1893,<sup>3</sup> and in his monumental *Late Roman Art Industry*,<sup>4</sup> Riegl postulated that whereas a ‘Geist’ or spirit might be said to inform individual artefacts and sequences of development (he termed this the cultural or social ‘Will to Form’ or *Kunstwollen*), changes came about primarily as a result of the unfolding logic or trajectory of the system of forms itself. Each object thereby represented a step or a moment in a continuum of aesthetic ‘solutions’ to common cultural and artistic problems.

This was a perspective that in one sense was not dissimilar to that of Vasari (see Chapter 1 above) but without Vasari’s progressive movement toward some ideal solution in the most recent art. For Riegl, the ‘history’ of art was a set of linked solutions whose trajectory and direction may be predetermined and inevitable (given the inner logic of forms and designs), but which can in principle be altered by changes in the social or cultural Will. In this regard, his work stood in opposition to histories of art organized as genealogies of great individual artists. The particular maker’s individuality and originality are submerged in a large collective movement of stylistic change, composed of minute and largely anonymous developments. The artist or producer is as much the product of the unfolding system of formal choices, options, and artistic and technical constraints as he or she is the instigator or initiator of style.<sup>5</sup>

Riegl’s *Late Roman Art Industry*, much of which appeared after his death, caused substantial problems for the older evolutionary models of artistic change, and in particular for the cyclical and organicist models common to previous scholarship. Rather than seeing late Roman Imperial and early Christian art as facets of a late classicism ‘in decline’, Riegl argued that they represented above all moments in a logical unfolding of formal technique, or of a language of form. They were neither inferior nor superior to what preceded them, but were rather the apt expressions of an artistic will to form or *Kunstwollen*; links in a chain or trajectory of art practice. The first selection below is taken from the introduction to *Late Roman Art Industry*, and outlines his perspective on the nature of late Roman style.

The remainder of the readings in this chapter are devoted to the work of the early twentieth-century scholar Aby Warburg (1866–1929).<sup>6</sup> His interdisciplinary pursuit of understanding the history and subsequent fates of the classical tradition in European art, and of non-European forms of expression in the face of their annihilation and transformation by Western cultural practices, set him apart from much of his generation, on several counts. With regard to the former, his articulation of the classical tradition was closer to that of the late nineteenth-century philosopher Nietzsche than to the classical doctrines of Winckelmann and of Enlightenment rationalism, in his portrayal of enduring and fundamentally unreconciled tensions between contradictory emotions and attitudes towards reason.<sup>7</sup>

With respect to the latter, Warburg’s perspective on the relentless march of Western culture and civilization around the globe over the past half-

millennium was anti-triumphalist, and he viewed its progress as ultimately self-destructive. Warburg's interest in style was in one sense the obverse of Riegl's, in that he understood style in art as *continuous with* rather than as a 'reflection of' other aspects of social and cultural practice. This was at the same time a result of his resolutely interdisciplinary approach to art, and of his attempt to encourage diversity and heterogeneity in scholarship. It also reflected his wide-ranging researches into cultural forms, collective memory, and symbolism across cultures, which found its paradigmatic expression in the organization of the library he created in Hamburg, designed so as to help the user to elude what he called the 'border police' of disciplinary specialization<sup>8</sup> and parochial and fragmented knowledge.

In the years just before his death, Warburg's unfinished *Bilderatlas* or picture-book project, entitled *Mnemosyne* (alternatively called by him 'A Picture Book for a Critique of Pure Unreason'), was a non-discursive and non-linear composition of images of diverse types and origins, continually being changed, and resembling a Dadaist performance piece. It was in fact a performance of his method and his vision of the complex interrelatedness of things—a perspective which was to become more familiar in the work of Walter Benjamin (on which see below, Chapter 8).

In addition to Warburg's 1923 lecture on images from the Hopi Indian region (excerpted here) which he observed in his travels to the American south-west in 1896, two texts below, by Edgar Wind and Claire Farago, analyse different aspects of Warburg's work and life. In the first piece, by Wind (1930), the author examines Warburg's notion of an all-inclusive *Kulturwissenschaft* or science of culture, as well as his opposition to the 'autonomous' art histories of Wölfflin and Riegl.

In the second essay, published in 2002, Claire Farago puts Warburg's work into a contemporary critical perspective, placing his observations on south-western 'American Indian' art and culture into a more historically and theoretically nuanced understanding of his place in the evolution of ethnography and ethnographic portraiture than modern art historical discourse had hitherto admitted. In so doing, she foregrounds the unavoidably racist subtexts of Warburg's deeply problematic studies of Hopi ritual, glossed over in recent hagiographic rereadings of his contributions to and appropriations by twentieth-century art history in Europe and America. Farago views the construction of the *ethnographic subject* as central to the historical formations of art history and anthropology alike, in effect problematizing early twenty-first-century revivals of a 1970s 'visual anthropology' detached from its historical and rhetorical foundations, as evidenced by the controversies surrounding the 2001 publication of Hans Belting's collection of essays *Bild-Anthropologie* ('Anthropology of the Image'). The latter was written in response to the reception of his writings on the 'end' of art history two decades ago<sup>9</sup> and its (then-imminent) replacement by seemingly more fruitful and less Eurocentric alternatives such as 'visual culture' studies.

Among several excellent studies of Riegl and Warburg in print, see Kurt Forster, 'Aby Warburg's History of Art: Collective Memory and the Social Mediation of Images', *Daedalus*, 305 (1976); Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Margaret Olin, 'Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness', *Art Bulletin*, 71 (1989),

285–99; Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park, Pa., 1992); Henri Zerner, 'Alois Riegl: Art, Value, Historicism', *Daedalus*, 305 (1976), 177–89; Matthew Rampley, *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesbaden, 2000); Matthew Rampley, 'From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art', *Art Bulletin*, 79 (1997), 41–55; for a critique of the latter, see Claire Farago, 'Re(f)using Art: Aby Warburg and the Ethics of Scholarship', *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-between Worlds* (University Park, Pa., 2006), 259–73.

# Leading Characteristics of the Late Roman *Kunstwollen*

The late Roman *Kunstwollen* has in common with the *Kunstwollen* of all previous antiquity that it was still oriented toward the pure perception of the individual shape with its immediately evident material appearance, while modern art is less concerned with the sharp separation of the individual appearances and more than with a connection of collective appearances, or especially with a demonstration of an independence of seemingly individual elements. The essential artistic medium which late Roman art used in the same way as antiquity in order to reach this artistic goal was rhythm. With rhythm, that is the sequential repetition of the same appearances, the coalition of the parts to an individual entity became immediately obvious and convincing to the beholder; and where there were several individual elements it was rhythm again which was able to create a higher unity. Rhythm, however, as long as it appears to be evident for the beholder is necessarily bound to the plane. Rhythm exists from elements beside and above one another, but not behind one another; in the latter case, individual shapes and parts would overlap and thus withdraw themselves from the immediate visual perception of the beholder. Hence, an art which wants to present units in a rhythmic composition is forced to compose on the plane and to avoid deep space. As all ancient art, so also late Roman art strove for the representation of individual unifying shapes via a rhythmic composition on the plane.

Late Roman *Kunstwollen* differs from previous art periods in antiquity—the more the further apart it is from them, and less harsh the closer it is to them—in that it was not satisfied with looking at the individual shape in its two-dimensional expansion, but it wanted to see it in its three-dimensional, fully spatial boundaries. Consequently, connected with this was the separation of the individual shape out of the universal visual plane (ground) and its isolation from the ground level and from other individual shapes. Yet the individual shape here was not only free, but free are also the individual intervals of ground lying in between, which prior to that were bound on a common ground level (visual plane); following the complete isolation of the individual shape there was thus at the same time an emancipation of intervals, the elevation of the hitherto neutral shapeless ground to an artistic one, that is, to an individual unity of a finished powerful shape. The medium for it remained still rhythm, which results in the fact that now the interval also had to be shaped rhythmically.

While the intervals were now like the individual shapes, separated three-dimensionally from depths, they produced also a free spatial niche of a particular depth. Even though this depth was never considerable, it would question an effect of a rhythm bound to the plane. It sufficed, however, to fill the intervals thus treated more or less with dark shadows, which, together with the projecting bright individual shapes in between, created a colorful rhythm between light and shadow, black and white. This color rhythm, which belonged especially to the middle Roman works, but also to the fourth century (sarcophagi of the City of Rome), remained particularly dominant for a long time in architecture and in the crafts, it ceased a bit on essentially late Roman figurative reliefs (sarcophagi from Ravenna), which again reveals an inclination toward the return to a tactile perception in order to attribute to the linear rhythm an even greater unlimited dominance. Besides those we find even in the advanced late Roman period figurative reliefs which in the middle Roman tradition observe color rhythm as well as linear rhythm.

The levelling of the ground and the individual shapes led in the cases where one wanted to emphasize the individual shape, still effectively to the mass composition: an even more unheard phenomenon within ancient art since it obviously constitutes also the preliminary step to the modern perception of the collective character of seemingly individual shapes.

The isolation of the individual shape has also had its influence on the expression of the rhythm in that the rhythm was now no longer concerned only with articulation and change, which always had a combining effect, but also with simplification and creation of massiveness. While classical rhythm was one of contrast (contrapposto, triangular composition), late Roman rhythm as such became the one of a series with equal shapes (quadrangular composition). As soon, however, as the individual shapes dissolved their connection with one another, they were represented in their objective appearance separated from a momentary relation to other individual shapes whenever possible. Hence, there develops the striving for objectivity of the appearance of the typical character, and the anonymity of late Roman art, which is always inseparably connected with such an anti-individualistic artistic creation.

We know of these main leading characteristics of late Roman art from a thorough investigation of the monuments of the four types of art. Yet there exists a medium hitherto unused with which we may test the correctness of our results. This medium is the comparative use of literary sources by the late Romans concerning *Kunstwollen* in artistic creation.

I would like to bring herewith to the attention of the scholars an art historical source, which has been to date neglected to the same degree as the literary sources were, which contain external, local and time data that have been the object of greatest appreciation and diligent studies. Yet a time which liked to perceive the work of art as a mechanistic product of raw material, technique and the immediate external reason of purpose, could in the utterances of authors concerning the *Kunstwollen* of their time, see nothing else than speculative fantasies: in the eyes of the art materialists there exists no conscious *Kunstwollen* and what was said about it in earlier times could in the best case be just a worthless self-deception, not to say, intended deception. But whoever realized that mankind meant to see the visual appearances according to outlines and color on the plane or in space at different times in

a different manner, will without hesitation, be familiar with the thought that the utterances of studious and learned men about what they expected from the work of art of their time deserve full attention from art historical research. This can be seen as a medium which might help us test whether ideas reached by us with our subjective observation about the leading *Kunstabsichten* of a certain period were indeed the ideas of those belonging to the period. In other words, if at that time one indeed wanted from the visual arts what we imagine it to have been based on our investigation of the monuments, then this obviously will be the true and only reliable proof for our results of research.

The material which is available for such purposes from the time between the third and the fifth centuries is extremely rich and would permit a most thorough proof. For the late pagans, we have mainly the neo-platonic philosophers and among them above all, Plotinus. It would be no less enlightening to look at the Christian authors. At this place the teaching of St Augustine about beauty and its relation to late Roman art may be sketched—not so much to describe the subject and not at all to exhaust it, but rather to offer proof that it is possible to solve this future problem of art historical research.<sup>1</sup>

According to Augustine, essential beauty lies only with God; yet, on the other side there is no object in nature that would not contain traces (*vestigia*) of beauty: even ugly objects are not excluded from this.<sup>2</sup> The visual arts have the responsibility during the imitation (*imitatio*) of natural objects to emphasize those traces of beauty one-sidedly.<sup>3</sup> Hence, everything points to the question of what Augustine would have understood under the generally dispersed ‘traces’ of beauty. These are, to say it right away, the principal goals of all ancient artistic creation: unity (isolated perception of the individual shape) and rhythm.

The individual completeness of the shape is understood also by Augustine (as by all his ancient predecessors) to be as much a precondition for all existence as it was a seat and manner of expression for beauty in all objects from nature.<sup>4</sup> His ideas differ from the ancient Near Eastern and the early Greek ones through dualistic perception, according to which in each object besides the materialistic unity of shape there exists also a spiritual one, which is of higher value than the first one: a perception, which, by the way, in its very roots goes back, as is generally known, to the pre-Alexandrian Greeks.<sup>5</sup> Hence, Augustine concludes that the responsibility of the artist is nothing other than to produce as much as he can in his art work, all which seems to make the individual formal entity of the shape of a natural object really evident.

Even more valuable for us is the following: in individual cases Augustine explains with clear words how he sees unity as the expression of beauty in particular types of art. So, for example, during the dialogue with an architect with whom he agrees that he should not strive for anything but unity in his buildings and that he should try to reach this mainly with symmetrical and proportional composition of the individual parts of the building when compared with the entire building.<sup>6</sup>

Symmetry and proportion, however, are special forms of appearances of a higher universal medium in the visual arts: rhythm. The medium through which unity, that is the individual completion of the shape of the natural object within a work of art, is expressed is also according to Augustine rhythm (*numerus*).<sup>7</sup> Its importance is so much emphasized and placed in the foreground by Augustine that Berthaud even believed it to be the actual principle

of beauty according to the ideas of Augustine; he, therefore, presented unity as a form of expression of the rhythm, while obviously the true relationship can just be the opposite one. All other characteristics of beauty in the works of the visual arts (to the symmetry and proportion already mentioned) come as a third organization and there exist special forms of expression for rhythm. There are also pertinent utterances by Augustine concerning individual remarks for certain works of art. For example, he demands that the windows of a building be either equal (rhythm of equal series) or that they, if uneven, be treated in such a manner that the window of medium size is by the same degree larger than the smaller, as it was surpassed by the largest.<sup>8</sup> Since such an increasing line is accompanied also by a decreasing one, to be imagined on the same plane, we have thus as a result a rhythm of contrast, as it can, for example, be observed in the windows of the semi-circular lunettes of the large middle Roman halls (such as the Baths of Diocletian and the Basilica of Maxentius).

This example warrants two additional remarks. First, it is remarkable that Augustine chooses his concrete examples of works of art from architecture; the figurative arts (sculpture and painting) are not entirely left out, but stand in the background. This reluctance of Augustine in regard to the figurative arts gains a deeper importance as soon as one recalls that the development of figurative art during the following centuries was generally not a favorable one; the Semitic Near East had done away with it forever and the Greek Near East threatened it at least for a century with iconoclasm; and even in the West, the large pioneering achievements at least until the twelfth century belonged not to sculpture or painting but to architecture (and to the crafts).

Secondly, I would like to state most emphatically how the choice of the perforated (*perforatis*) windows in buildings reveals the change which took place in late antiquity. Aristotle would have chosen as analogous examples columns or any other material positive individual shape: Augustine, however, uses for this a de-materialized perforation. This leads now to the question how far with the doctrine of beauty Augustine, besides a general ancient basic characteristic of the visual arts of his time, also expressed the specific one for late antiquity (middle and late Roman).

This difference follows, as we showed in the monuments, the treatment of unity and rhythm. The common ancient tendency toward the perception of the individual shape is still dominant, yet, one saw through the increased spaces of the individual shape now clearer that also this needed an interval as precondition: hence, derives the emancipation of the interval, ground, and space.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore rhythm still dominates with its linear composition on the plane; but because now, besides the individual shapes, the intervals also are respected, rhythm is used also for those spacious intervals. Hence the role of art in late antiquity, in contrast to the one of classical antiquity, as well as in contrast to modern art, is clearly defined: space was emancipated (different from classical antiquity which tended to refuse space) but it was formed into rhythmic intervals (in opposition to modern art which emphasizes shapeless infinite deep space).

The emancipation of the intervals is now again one of the basic principles in Augustine's ethics and aesthetics, which is repeated at numerous places and helped him particularly in his fight against the Manichaeans.<sup>10</sup> It is here



where among other things he demonstrated not just the right of existence, but even the necessity of ugliness and shapelessness. Evil is just a *privatio* of the good, the ugly is merely intervals of beauty; they are as necessary as the intervals between words in language and between tones in music. We are used to seeing evil and ugly from nearby, when it appears to us naturally evil and ugly. But when we see it all from a *Fernsicht* we will observe that beauty would not be possible without its complementary ugly shape, and that both together present a picture of perfect harmony.<sup>11</sup>

Among the numerous pertinent places one may be chosen here which Berthaud missed, but which is for us of special importance, because it is one of the few where Augustine uses a concrete example from the figurative arts, especially from painting: 'Sicut pictura cum colore nigro, loco suo posita, ita universitas rerum, si quis possit intueri, etiam cum peccatoribus pulchra est, quamvis per se ipsos consideratos sua deformitas turpet'.<sup>12</sup>

According to this, black color is in the painted picture the same as evil is in entire mankind. Individual shapes which appear in clear materiality, that is in bright colors, are beautiful; opposite to this, black color represents shadow that is the untouchable, immaterial, the shapeless, the empty, the nonexistent element. However, if the black is put within the picture at the right place, then it has in a *fern-sichtig* observation together with the brightly painted material individual shapes the effect of beauty. According to the doctrine of Augustine the function of placing it in the right place is done through the *ordo* which, according to what was said earlier, is nothing but the form of expression for the rhythm; hence, Augustine had also in painting the rhythmic distribution between black and light and shadow and light as the aim of art in mind. Augustine expects thus from painting exactly that coloristic treatment, which we have known through monuments to be an important character trait of the art of late antiquity.<sup>13</sup>

To obtain an understanding of the nature of late antique art (that is the art of the middle and late Roman period) we may study individual monuments or the surviving literary sources. In either case, we obtain an insight of the same basic proposition: that there was in general at that time only one direction for the *Kunstwollen* to take. This force dominated all four divisions of the visual arts equally, appropriated every purpose and material to its artistic meaning (*Kunstszweck*) and with fixed independence chose in every case the appropriate technique for the envisioned work of art. There is support for this interpretation of the nature of late antique art in the fact that the *Kunstwollen* of antiquity, especially in the final phase, is practically identical with other major forms of expression of the human *Wollen* during the same period.

All such human *Wollen* is directed towards self-satisfaction in relation to the surrounding environment (in the widest sense of the word, as it relates to the human being externally and internally). Creative *Kunstwollen* regulates the relation between man and objects as we perceive them with our sense; this is how we always give shape and color to things (just as we visualize things with the *Kunstwollen* in poetry). Yet man is not just a being perceiving exclusively with his sense (passive), but also a longing (active) being. Consequently, man wants to interpret the world as it can most easily be done in accordance with his inner drive (which may change with nation, location and time). The

character of this *Wollen* is always determined by what may be termed the conception of the world at a given time [*Weltanschauung*] (again in the widest sense of the term), not only in religion, philosophy, science, but also in government and law, where one or the other form of expression mentioned above usually dominates.

Obviously, an inner relation exists between a *Wollen*, which is directed toward a pleasurable visualization of things through the visual arts, and that other *Wollen* which wants to interpret them as much as possible according to its own inner drive. In antiquity this relationship can be traced everywhere. We can only sketch it now in very general terms, but this may suffice to identify another basis for our investigation of the meaning of late Roman art within the general history of civilization.

The development of the ancients' conception of the world [*Weltanschauung*] took place in three clearly distinguishable phases, which are completely parallel to the three periods of development of ancient art as outlined in the beginning. The common factor here as well is a notion of the world as composed of tactile (plastic), self-contained, individual shapes. In the earliest period, the idea prevailed that the existence and the forms of life of these individual shapes were ruled by arbitrary forces. This conception of the world was therefore necessarily aimed at a religious frame of reference in which man undertook personal and benign propitiation of those forces by persuasion. In the second period, which runs parallel with the classical art of the Greeks, men now developed (together with a gradual change in religion toward philosophy and science) concepts of binding and logical relationships among individual phenomena. In the postulated relationship we can immediately recognize the same inclination toward establishing a relation between individual shapes shown by the art of classical antiquity.

In the surrounding world ancient man saw only individual self-contained shapes. Therefore, he conceived their interrelationship only on a mechanical level (that is the level of forces and impact). Both ancient idealistic and materialistic philosophy (atomism) are fully agreed on this point. Consequently, for these thinkers there must be a chain-like connection (leading from one individual to the next) which corresponds exactly to the rhythmic composition of the individual shapes in the contemporary plastic arts. So art was charged with selecting a few individual shapes from the infinite confusion of phenomena and connecting them in a new, clearly defined unity by arrangement in a sequence on a flat surface. In the same way, ancient science had to disentangle the knot of phenomena and to arrange them in a coherent sequence of individual shapes according to the law of causality.

The third period of antiquity deserves our special interest. Not only was the classic attempt to erect a mechanistic system of causality between individual phenomena no longer valued, but one went so far as to bring externally, individual shapes in reciprocal isolation from each other. In no way did this mean a return to a primitive disconnectedness. Instead, a mechanistic theory of connection between individual shapes no longer seemed satisfactory and was replaced with a different kind of connection—magic. The latter found expression in the entire late-pagan, early Christian world in neoplatonism and in syncretic cults as well as in the beliefs of the early Christian church.

A correspondence of this process with the isolation of individual shapes on the visual plane is obvious in contemporary art. As done before, we must now raise the question whether this change, as conceived, is progress or decline.

The answer is the same: the change in the late antique conception of the world was a necessary transition made by the human mind in order to take it from the concept of a purely mechanistic and sequential relationship of things (as if they were projected on a plane) to one of a general chemical connection, including, as it were, space in all directions.<sup>14</sup> Anyone who wishes to perceive the change in late antiquity as decline has the presumption to dictate today the route the human mind should have taken in order to move from the ancient to the modern concept of nature. Indeed, the late antique tendency toward magic was a detour. However, the necessity of this detour becomes clear as soon as one realizes that it was not the product of a specific scientific theory, but came from the abolition of a thousand-year-old notion which all antiquity held in common and which conceived the world composed of mechanistic self-contained and individual shapes. The necessary preconditions of this change were the erosion of faith in a purely mechanistic structure as much as the rise of a new, positive faith in the relationship of objects, which went beyond mechanics, but was still based on individual shapes and in that sense magic. Just when this new faith was bearing permanent fruits, the idea of a mechanistic connection (never completely forgotten by the inhabitants of the West) regained its rightful status (in the visual arts just as much as in the conception of the world). There was no longer a danger of falling back on the notion of an exclusively mechanistic connection and of unchangeable individual shapes. The notion of an extra-mechanistic connection among all things of creation had meanwhile become firmly rooted in the mind of the West, as had, to be the basic elements in art, the perception of mass composition (in place of the individuality of material shapes) and deep space (in place of a plane on which is disposed a sequence of individual shapes). The development of European culture, which occupies a leading place in the world, owes both concepts to the late Roman period.<sup>15</sup>

# Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America

Es ist ein altes Buch zu blättern, Athen-Oraibi, alles Vettern.

It is a lesson from an old book: the kinship of Athens and Oraibi.

If I am to show you images, most of which I photographed myself, from a journey undertaken some twenty-seven years in the past, and to accompany them with words, then it behooves me to preface my attempt with an explanation. The few weeks I have had at my disposal have not given me the chance to revive and to work through my old memories in such a way that I might offer you a solid introduction into the psychic life of the Indians. Moreover, even at the time, I was unable to give depth to my impressions, as I had not mastered the Indian language. And here in fact is the reason why it is so difficult to work on these pueblos: Nearby as they live to each other, the Pueblo Indians speak so many and such varied languages that even American scholars have the greatest difficulty penetrating even one of them. In addition, a journey limited to several weeks could not impart truly profound impressions. If these impressions are now more blurred than they were, I can only assure you that, in sharing my distant memories, aided by the immediacy of the photographs, what I have to say will offer an impression both of a world whose culture is dying out and of a problem of decisive importance in the general writing of cultural history: In what ways can we perceive essential character traits of primitive pagan humanity?

The Pueblo Indians derive their name from their sedentary lives in villages (Spanish: *pueblos*) as opposed to the nomadic lives of the tribes who until several decades ago warred and hunted in the same areas of New Mexico and Arizona where the Pueblos now live.

What interested me as a cultural historian was that in the midst of a country that had made technological culture into an admirable precision weapon in the hands of intellectual man, an enclave of primitive pagan humanity was able to maintain itself and—an entirely sober struggle for existence notwithstanding—to engage in hunting and agriculture with an unshakable adherence to magical practices that we are accustomed to condemning as a mere symptom of a completely backward humanity. Here, however, what we would call superstition goes hand in hand with livelihood. It consists of a religious devotion to natural phenomena, to animals and plants, to which the Indians attribute active souls, which they believe they can influence primarily through their masked dances. To us, this synchrony of fantastic magic and sober purposiveness appears as a

symptom of a cleavage; for the Indian this is not schizoid but, rather, a liberating experience of the boundless communicability between man and environment.

At the same time, one aspect of the Pueblo Indians' religious psychology requires that our analysis proceed with the greatest caution. The material is contaminated: it has been layered over twice. From the end of the sixteenth century, the Native American foundation was overlaid by a stratum of Spanish Catholic Church education, which suffered a violent setback at the end of the seventeenth century, to return thereafter but never officially to reinstate itself in the Moki villages. And then came the third stratum: North American education.

Yet closer study of Pueblo pagan religious formation and practice reveals an objective geographic constant, and that is the scarcity of water. For so long as the railways remained unable to reach the settlements, drought and desire for water led to the same magical practices toward the binding of hostile natural forces as they did in primitive, pretechnological cultures all over the world. Drought teaches magic and prayer.

The specific issue of religious symbolism is revealed in the ornamentation of pottery. A drawing I obtained personally from an Indian will show how apparently purely decorative ornaments must in fact be interpreted symbolically and cosmologically and how alongside one basic element in cosmologic imagery—the universe conceived in the form of a house—an irrational animal figure appears as a mysterious and fearsome demon: the serpent. But the most drastic form of the animistic (i.e., nature-inspiring) Indian cult is the masked dance, which I shall show first in the form of a pure animal dance, second in the form of a tree-worshipping dance, and finally as a dance with live serpents. A glance at similar phenomena in pagan Europe will bring us, finally, to the following question: To what extent does this pagan world view, as it persists among the Indians, give us a yardstick for the development from primitive paganism, through the paganism of classical antiquity, to modern man?

All in all it is a piece of earth only barely equipped by nature, which the prehistoric and historic inhabitants of the region have chosen to call their home. Apart from the narrow, furrowing valley in the northeast, through which the Rio Grande del Norte flows to the Gulf of Mexico, the landscape here consists essentially of plateaus: extensive, horizontally situated masses of limestone and tertiary rock, which soon form higher plateaus with steep edges and smooth surfaces. (The term *mesa* compares them with tables.) These are often pierced by flowing waters, ... by ravines and canyons sometimes a thousand feet deep and more, with walls that from their highest points plummet almost vertically, as if they had been sliced with a saw.... For the greater part of the year the plateau landscape remains entirely without precipitation and the vast majority of the canyons are completely dried up; only at the time that snow melts and during the brief rainy periods do powerful water masses roar through the bald ravines.<sup>1</sup>

In this region of the Colorado plateau of the Rocky Mountains, where the states of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona meet, the ruined sites of prehistoric communities survive alongside the currently inhabited Indian villages. In the northwestern part of the plateau, in the state of Colorado, are the now abandoned cliff-dwellings: houses built into clefts of rock. The eastern group consists of approximately eighteen villages, all relatively accessible from Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The especially important villages of the Zuñi lie more to the southwest and can be reached in a day's journey from Fort Wingate. The hardest to reach—and therefore the most undisturbed in

the preservation of ancient ways—are the villages of the Moki (Hopi), six in all, rising out of three parallel ridges of rock.

In the midst, in the plains, lies the Mexican settlement of Santa Fe, now the capital of New Mexico, having come under the dominion of the United States after a hard struggle, which lasted into the last century. From here, and from the neighboring town of Albuquerque, one can reach the majority of the eastern Pueblo villages without great difficulty.

Near Albuquerque is the village of Laguna, which, though it does not lie quite so high as the others, provides a very good example of a Pueblo settlement. The actual village lies on the far side of the Atchison—Topeka—Santa Fe railway line. The European settlement, below in the plain, abuts on the station. The indigenous village consists of two-storied houses. The entrance is from the top: one climbs up a ladder, as there is no door at the bottom. The original reason for this type of house was its superior defensibility against enemy attack. In this way the Pueblo Indians developed a cross between a house and a fortification which is characteristic of their civilization and probably reminiscent of prehistoric American times. It is a terraced structure of houses whose ground floors sit on second houses which can sit on yet third ones and thus form a conglomeration of rectangular living quarters.

In the interior of such a house, small dolls are suspended from the ceiling—not mere toy dolls but rather like the figures of saints that hang in Catholic farmhouses [6]. They are the so-called kachina dolls: faithful representations

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6

Interior of a house in Oraibi with dolls and broom.

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of the masked dancers, the demoniac mediators between man and nature at the periodic festivals that accompany the annual harvest cycle and who constitute some of the most remarkable and unique expressions of this farmers' and hunters' religion. On the wall, in contradistinction to these dolls, hangs the symbol of intruding American culture: the broom.

But the most essential product of the applied arts, with both practical and religious purposes, is the earthenware pot, in which water is carried in all its urgency and scarcity. The characteristic style for the drawings on these pots is a skeletal heraldic image. A bird, for example, may be dissected into its essential component parts to form a heraldic abstraction. It becomes a hieroglyph, not simply to be looked at but, rather, to be read [7]. We have here an intermediary stage between a naturalistic image and a sign, between a realistic mirror image and writing. From the ornamental treatment of such animals, one can immediately see how this manner of seeing and thinking can lead to symbolic pictographic writing.

The bird plays an important part in Indian mythical perception, as anyone familiar with the *Leatherstocking Tales* knows. Apart from the devotion it receives, like every other animal, as a totem, as an imaginary ancestor, the bird commands a special devotion in the context of the burial cult. It seems even that a thieving bird-spirit belonged to the fundamental representations of the mythical fantasies of the prehistoric *Sikyatki*. The bird has a place in idolatrous cults for its feathers. The Indians have made a special prayer instrument out of small sticks—*babos*; tied with feathers, they are placed on fetish altars and planted on graves. According to the authoritative explanations of



the Indians, the feathers act as winged entities bearing the Indians' wishes and prayers to their demoniac essences in nature.

There is no doubt that contemporary Pueblo pottery shows the influence of medieval Spanish technique, as it was brought to the Indians by the Jesuits in the eighteenth century. The excavations of Fewkes have established incontrovertibly, however, that an older potting technique existed, autonomous from the Spanish.<sup>2</sup> It bears the same heraldic bird motives together with the *serpent*, which for the Moki—as in all pagan religious practice—commands cultic devotion as the most vital symbol. This serpent still appears on the base of contemporary vessels exactly as Fewkes found it on prehistoric ones: coiled, with a feathered head. On the rims, four terrace-shaped attachments carry small representations of animals. We know from work on Indian mysteries that these animals—for example, the frog and the spider—represent the points of the compass and that these vessels are placed in front of the fetishes in the subterranean prayer room known as the *kiva*. In the *kiva*, at the core of devotional practice, the serpent appears as the symbol of lightning [8].

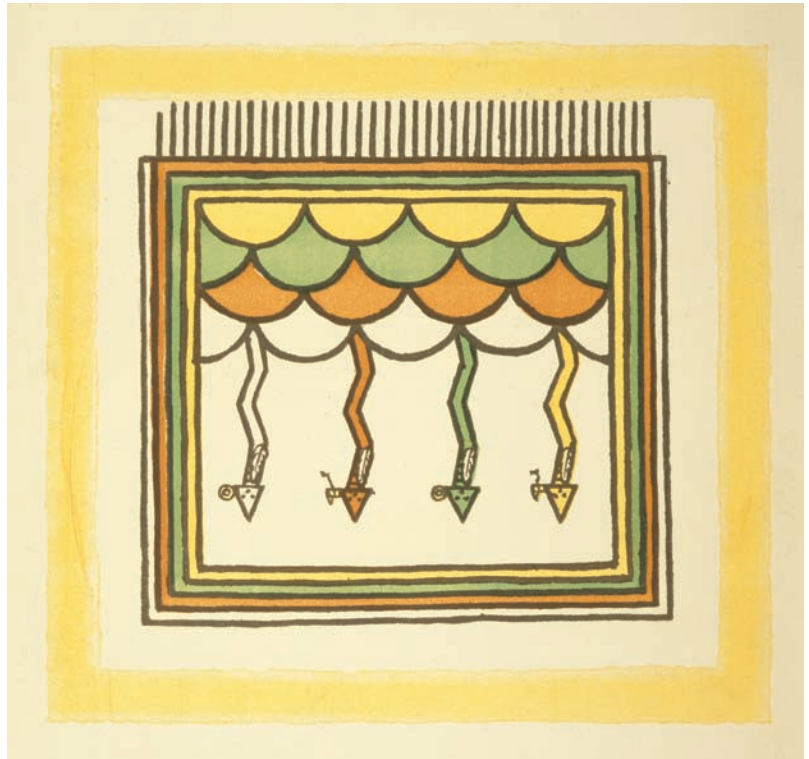
In my hotel in Santa Fe, I received from an Indian, Cleo Jurino, and his son, Anacleto Jurino, original drawings that, after some resistance, they made before my eyes and in which they outlined their cosmologic world view with colored pencils [9]. The father, Cleo, was one of the priests and painter of the *kiva* in Cochiti. The drawing showed the serpent as a weather deity, as it happens, unfeathered but otherwise portrayed exactly as it appears in the image on the vase, with an arrow-pointed tongue. The roof of the worldhouse bears a stair-shaped gable. Above the walls spans a rainbow, and from massed clouds

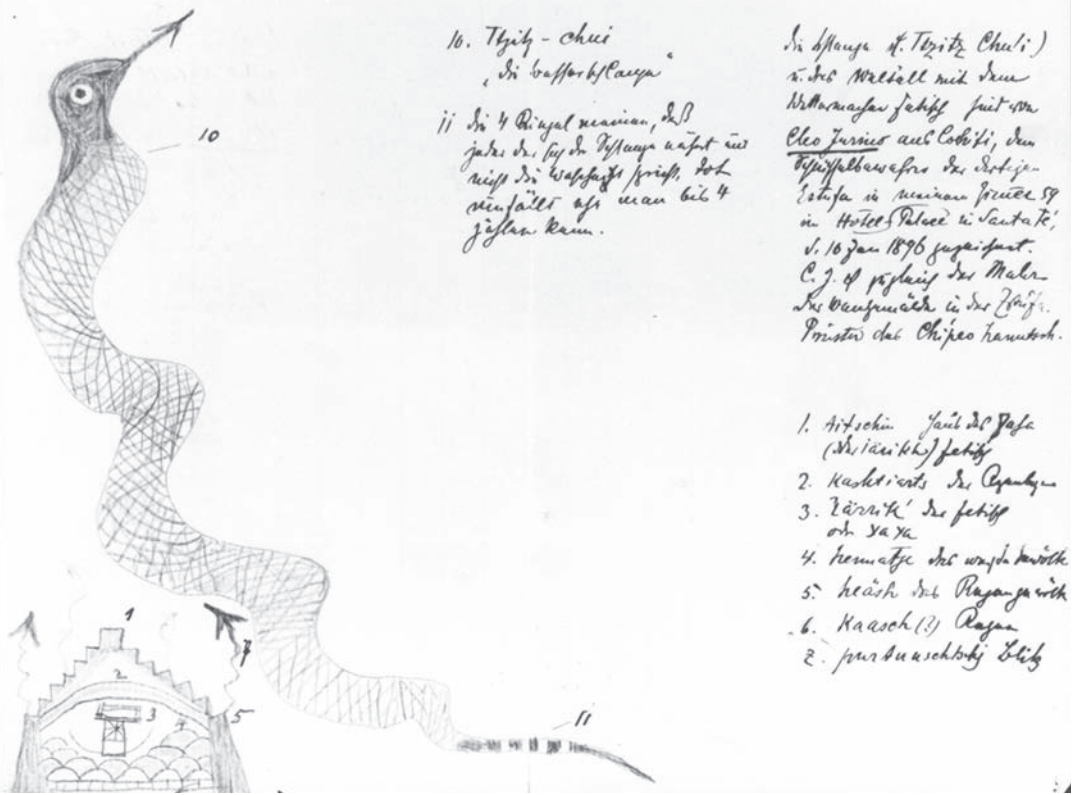
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8

Serpent as lightning.  
Reproduction of an altar  
floor, *kiva* ornamentation.

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**9 Cleo Jurino**

Drawing of serpent and 'worldhouse' with Warburg's annotations.

below flows the rain, represented by short strokes. In the middle, as the true master of the stormy worldhouse, appears the fetish (not a serpent figure): Yaya or Yerrick.

In the presence of such paintings the pious Indian invokes the storm with all its blessings through magical practices, of which to us the most astonishing is the handling of live, poisonous serpents. As we saw in Jurino's drawing, the serpent in its lightning shape is magically linked to lightning.

The stair-shaped roof of the worldhouse and the serpent-arrowhead, along with the serpent itself, are constitutive elements in the Indians' symbolic language of images. I would suggest without any doubt that the stairs contain at least a Pan-American and perhaps a worldwide symbol of the cosmos.

A photograph of the underground kiva of Sia, after Mrs. Stevenson, shows the organization of a carved lightning altar as the focal point of sacrificial ceremony, with the lightning serpent in the company of other sky-oriented symbols. It is an altar for lightning from all points of the compass. The Indians crouching before it have placed their sacrificial offerings on the altar and hold in their hand the symbol of mediating prayer: the feather [10].

My wish to observe the Indians directly under the influence of official Catholicism was favored by circumstance. I was able to accompany the Catholic priest Père Juillard, whom I had met on New Year's Day 1895 [sic] while watching a Mexican Matachina dance, on an inspection tour that took him to the romantically situated village of Acoma.



We traveled through this gorse-grown wilderness for about six hours, until we could see the village emerging from the sea of rock, like a Heligoland in a sea of sand. Before we had reached the foot of the rock, bells began to ring in honor of the priest. A squad of brightly clad redskins [*Rothhäute*] came running with lightning speed down the path to carry up our luggage. The carriages remained below, a necessity that proved ill fated: the Indians stole a cask of wine the priest had received as a gift from the nuns of Bernalillo. Once on top, we were immediately received with all the trappings of honor by the Governador—Spanish names for the ruling village chiefs are still in use. He put the priest's hand to his lips with a slurping noise, inhaling, as it were, the greeted person's aura in a gesture of reverential welcome. We were housed in his large main room together with the coachmen, and on the priest's request, I promised him that I would attend mass the following morning.

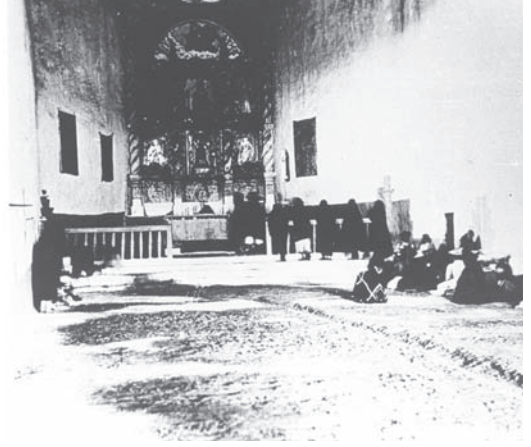
Indians are standing before the church door [11]. They are not easily led inside. This requires a loud call by the chief from the three parallel village streets. At last they assembled in the church. They are wrapped in colorful woolen cloths, woven in the open by nomadic Navajo women but produced also by the Pueblos themselves. They are ornamented in white, red, or blue and make a most picturesque impression.

The interior of the church has a genuine little baroque altar with figures of saints [12]. The priest, who understood not a word of the Indian language, had to employ an interpreter who translated the mass sentence by sentence and may well have said whatever he pleased.

It occurred to me during the service that the wall was covered with pagan cosmologic symbols, exactly in the style drawn for me by Cleo Jurino. The church of Laguna is also covered with such painting, symbolizing the cosmos with a stair-shaped roof [13]. The jagged ornament symbolizes a stair, and



**11**  
In front of the Acoma church door.



**12**  
Interior of the church of Acoma.

indeed not a perpendicular, square stair but rather a much more primitive form of a stair, carved from a tree, which still exists among the Pueblos [14].

In the representation of the evolution, ascents, and descents of nature, steps and ladders embody the primal experiences of humanity. They are the symbol for upward and downward struggle in space, just as the circle—the coiled serpent—is the symbol for the rhythm of time. Man, who no longer moves on four limbs but walks upright and is therefore in need of a prop in order to overcome gravity as he looks upward, invented the stair as a means to dignify what in relation to animals are his inferior gifts. Man, who learns to stand upright in his second year, perceives the felicity of the step because, as a creature that has to learn how to walk, he thereby receives the grace of holding his head aloft. Standing upright is the human act par excellence, the striving of the earthbound toward heaven, the uniquely symbolic act that gives to walking man the nobility of the erect and upward-turned head.

Contemplation of the sky is the grace and curse of humanity.

Thus the Indian creates the rational element in his cosmology through his equation of the worldhouse with his own staired house, which is entered by way of a ladder. But we must be careful not to regard this worldhouse as a simple expression of a spiritually tranquil cosmology; for the mistress of the worldhouse remains the uncanniest of creatures: the serpent.

**13**  
Acoma. Stair-shaped roof ornamenting.

**14**  
Stair ornament carved from a tree.





The Pueblo Indian is a hunter as well as a tiller of the soil—if not to the same extent as the savage tribes that once lived in the region. He depends for his subsistence on meat as well as on corn. The masked dances, which at first seem to us like festive accessories to everyday life, are in fact magical practices for the social provision of food. The masked dance, upon which we might ordinarily look as a form of play, is in its essence an earnest, indeed warlike, measure in the fight for existence. Although the exclusion of bloody and sadistic practices makes these dances fundamentally different from the war dances of the nomadic Indians, the Pueblos' worst enemies, we must not forget that these remain, in their origin and inner tendency, dances of plunder and sacrifice. When the hunter or tiller of the soil masks himself, transforms himself into an imitation of his booty—be that animal or corn—he believes that through mysterious, mimic transformation he will be able to procure in advance what he coterminously strives to achieve through his sober, vigilant work as tiller and hunter. The dances are expressions of applied magic. The social provision of food is schizoid: magic and technology work together.

The synchrony [*Nebeneinander*] of logical civilization and fantastic, magical causation shows the Pueblo Indians' peculiar condition of hybridity and transition. They are clearly no longer primitives dependent on their senses, for whom no action directed toward the future can exist; but neither are they technologically secure Europeans, for whom future events are expected to be organically or mechanically determined. They stand on middle ground between magic and logos, and their instrument of orientation is the symbol. Between a culture of touch and a culture of thought is the culture of symbolic connection. And for this stage of symbolic thought and conduct, the dances of the Pueblo Indians are exemplary.

When I first saw the antelope dance in San Ildefonso, it struck me as quite harmless and almost comical. But for the folklorist interested in a biologic understanding of the roots of human cultural expression, there is no moment more dangerous than when he is moved to laugh at popular practices that strike him as comical. To laugh at the comical element in ethnology is wrong, because it instantly shuts off insight into the tragic element.

At San Ildefonso—a pueblo near Santa Fe which has long been under American influence—the Indians assembled for the dance. The musicians gathered first, armed with a large drum. (You can see them standing, in **15**, in front of the Mexicans on horseback.) Then the dancers arranged themselves into two parallel rows and assumed the character of the antelope in mask and posture. The two rows moved in two different ways. Either they imitated the animal's way of walking, or they supported themselves on their front legs—small stilts wound with feathers—making movements with them while standing in place. At the head of each row stood a female figure and a hunter. With regard to the female figure, I was able to learn only that she was called the 'mother of all animals'.<sup>3</sup> To her the animal mime addresses his invocations.

The insinuation into the animal mask allows the hunting dance to simulate the actual hunt through an anticipatory capture of the animal. This measure is not to be regarded as mere play. In their bonding with the extrapersonal, the masked dances signify for primitive man the most thorough subordination to some alien being. When the Indian in his mimetic costume imitates, for instance, the expressions and movements of an animal, he insinuates himself



into an animal form not out of fun but, rather, to wrest something magical from nature through the transformation of his person, something he cannot attain by means of his unextended and unchanged personality.

The simulated pantomimic animal dance is thus a cultic act of the highest devotion and self-abandon to an alien being. The masked dance of so-called primitive peoples is in its original essence a document of social piety. The Indian's inner attitude to the animal is entirely different from that of the European. He regards the animal as a higher being, as the integrity of its animal nature makes it a much more gifted creature than man, its weaker counterpart.

My initiation into the psychology of the will to animal metamorphosis came, just before my departure, from Frank Hamilton Cushing, the pioneering and veteran explorer of the Indian psyche. I found his insights personally overwhelming. This pockmarked man with sparse reddish hair and of inscrutable age, smoking a cigarette, said to me that an Indian had once told him, why should man stand taller than animals? 'Take a good look at the antelope, she is all running, and runs so much better than man—or the bear, who is all strength. Men can only *do* in part what the animal *is*, totally.' This fairy-tale way of thinking, no matter how odd it may sound, is the preliminary to our scientific, genetic explanation of the world. These Indian pagans, like pagans all over the world, form an attachment out of reverential awe—what is known as totemism—to the animal world, by believing in animals of all kinds as the mythical ancestors of their tribes. Their explanation of the world as inorganically coherent is not so far removed from Darwinism; for whereas



we impute natural law to the autonomous process of evolution in nature, the pagans attempt to explain it through arbitrary identification with the animal world. It is, one might say, a Darwinism of mythical elective affinity which determines the lives of these so-called primitive people.

The formal survival of the hunting dance in San Ildefonso is obvious. But when we consider that the antelope has been extinct there for more than three generations, then it may well be that we have in the antelope dance a transition to the purely demoniac kachina dances, the chief task of which is to pray for a good crop harvest. In Oraibi, for example, there exists still today an antelope clan, whose chief task is weather magic.

Whereas the imitative animal dance must be understood in terms of the mimic magic of hunting culture, the kachina dances, corresponding to cyclic peasant festivals, have a character entirely of their own which, however, is revealed only at sites far removed from European culture. This cultic, magical masked dance, with its entreaties focused on inanimate nature, can be observed in its more or less original form only where the railroads have yet to penetrate and where—as in the Moki villages—even the veneer of official Catholicism no longer exists.

The children are taught to regard the kachinas with a deep religious awe. Every child takes the kachinas for supernatural, terrifying creatures, and the moment of the child's initiation into the nature of the kachinas, into the society of masked dancers itself, represents the most important turning point in the education of the Indian child.

On the market square of the rock village of Oraibi, the most remote westerly point, I was lucky enough to observe a so-called humiskachina dance. Here I saw the living originals of the masked dancers I had already seen in puppet form in a room of this same village of Oraibi.

To reach Oraibi, I had to travel for two days from the railway station of Holbrook in a small carriage. This is a so-called buggy with four light wheels, capable of advancing through desert sands where only gorse can grow. The driver throughout my stay in the region was Frank Allen, a Mormon. We experienced a very strong sandstorm, which completely obliterated the wagon tracks—the only navigational aid in this roadless steppe. We had the good luck nevertheless to arrive after our two days' journey in Keams Canyon, where we were greeted by Mr Keam, a most hospitable Irishman.

From this spot I was able to make the actual excursions to the cliff villages, which extend from north to south on three parallel rock formations. I arrived first at the remarkable village of Walpi. It is romantically perched on the rock crest, its stair-shaped houses rising in stone masses like towers from the rock. A narrow path on the high rock leads past the masses of houses. The illustration shows the desolation and severity of this rock and its houses, as they project themselves into the world [16, 17].

Very similar in its overall impression to Walpi is Oraibi, where I was able to observe the humiskachina dance. Up on top, on the marketplace of the cliff village, where an old blind man sits with his goat, a dancing area was being prepared [18]. This humiskachina dance is the dance of the growing corn. On the evening before the actual dance, I was inside the kiva, where secret ceremonies take place. It contained no fetish altar. The Indians simply sat and



**16**  
Walpi.

**17**  
Walpi village street.

**18**  
Blind man at dancing area,  
Oraibi.

**19**  
Humiskachina dancers,  
Oraibi.

smoked ceremonially. Every now and then a pair of brown legs descended from above on the ladder, followed by the whole man attached to them.

The young men were busy painting their masks for the following day. They use their big leather helmets again and again, as new ones would be too costly. The painting process involves taking water into the mouth and then spraying it onto the leather mask as the colors are rubbed in.

By the following morning, the entire audience, including two groups of children, had assembled on the wall [19]. The Indians' relationship to their children is extraordinarily appealing. Children are brought up gently but with discipline and are very obliging, once one has earned their trust. Now the children had assembled, with earnest anticipation, on the marketplace. These humiskachina figures with artificial heads move them to real terror, all the more so as they have learned from the kachina dolls of the inflexible and fearsome qualities of the masks. Who knows whether our dolls did not also originate as such demons?

The dance was performed by about twenty-to-thirty male and about ten female dancers—the latter meaning men representing female figures. Five men form the vanguard of the two-row dance configuration. Although the dance is performed on the market square, the dancers have an architectonic





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20–23

Humiskachina dancers,  
Oraibi.

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focus, and that is the stone structure in which a small dwarf pine has been placed, adorned with feathers. This is a small temple where the prayers and chants accompanying the masked dances are offered. Devotion flows from this little temple in the most striking manner.

The dancers' masks are green and red, traversed diagonally by a white stripe punctuated by three dots [20, 21]. These, I was told, are raindrops, and the symbolic representations on the helmet also show the stair-shaped cosmos with the source of rain identified again by semicircular clouds and short strokes emanating from them. These symbols appear as well on the woven wraps the dancers wind around their bodies: red and green ornaments gracefully woven on a white background [22]. In one hand, each male dancer holds a rattle carved from a hollow gourd and filled with stones. And at each knee he wears a tortoise shell hung with pebbles, so that the rattle noises issue from the knees as well [23].

The chorus performs two different acts. Either the girls sit in front of the men and make music with a rattle and a piece of wood, while the men's dance






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**24**  
Humiskachina dancers,  
Oraibi.

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**25-26**  
'Anemone' hairdos.

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**27**  
Dancers at rest, Oraibi.

configuration consists of one after another turning, in solitary rotation; or, alternately, the women rise and accompany the rotating movements of the men. Throughout the dance, two priests sprinkle consecrated flour on the dancers [24].

The women's dance costume consists of a cloth covering the entire body, so as not to show that these are, in fact, men. The mask is adorned, on either side at the top, with the curious anemone-like hairdo that is the specific hair adornment of the Pueblo girls [25, 26]. Red-dyed horsehair hanging from the masks symbolizes rain, and rain ornamentation appears as well on the shawls and other wrappings.

During the dance, the dancers are sprinkled by a priest with holy flour, and all the while the dance configuration remains connected at the head of the line to the little temple. The dance lasts from morning till evening. In the intervals the Indians leave the village and go to a rocky ledge to rest for a moment [27]. Whoever sees a dancer without his mask, will die.

The little temple is the actual focal point of the dance configuration. It is a little tree, adorned with feathers. These are the so-called *Nakwakwocis*. I was struck by the fact that the tree was so small. I went to the old chief, who was sitting at the edge of the square, and asked him why the tree was so small. He answered: we once had a large tree, but now we have chosen a small one, because the soul of a child is small.

We are here in the realm of the perfect animistic and tree cult, which the work of Mannhardt has shown to belong to the universal religious patrimony of primitive peoples, and it has survived from European paganism down to the harvest customs of the present day. It is here a question of establishing a bond between natural forces and man, of creating a symbol as the connecting agent, indeed as the magical rite that achieves integration by sending out a mediator, in this case a tree, more closely bound to the earth than man, because it grows from the earth. This tree is the nature-given mediator, opening the way to the subterranean element.

The next day the feathers are carried down to a certain spring in the valley and either planted there or else hung as votive offerings. These are to put into effect the prayer for fertilization, resulting in a plentiful and healthy crop of corn.

Late in the afternoon the dancers resume their indefatigable, earnest ceremonial and continue to perform their unchanging dance movements. As the sun was about to sink, we were presented with an astonishing spectacle, one which showed with overwhelming clarity how solemn and silent composure draws its magical religious forms from the very depths of elemental humanity. In this light, our tendency to view the spiritual element alone in such ceremonies must be rejected as a one-sided and paltry mode of explanation.

Six figures appeared. Three almost completely naked men smeared with yellow clay, their hair wound into horn shapes, were dressed only in loin cloths. Then came three men in women's clothes. And while the chorus and its priests proceeded with their dance movements, undisturbed and with unbroken devotion, these figures launched into a thoroughly vulgar and disrespectful parody of the chorus movements. And no one laughed. The vulgar parody was regarded not as comic mockery but, rather, as a kind of peripheral contribution by the revellers, in the effort to ensure a fruitful corn year. Anyone familiar with ancient tragedy will see here the duality of tragic chorus and satyr play, 'grafted onto a single stem'. The ebb and flow of nature appears in anthropomorphic symbols: not in a drawing but in the dramatic magical dance, actually returned to life.

The essence of magical insinuation into the divine, into a share of its superhuman power, is revealed in the terrifyingly dramatic aspect of Mexican religious devotion. In one festival a woman is worshipped for forty days as a corn goddess and then sacrificed, and then the priest slips into the skin of the poor creature. Compared to this most elementary and frenzied attempt to approach the divinity, what we observed among the Pueblos is indeed related but infinitely more refined. Yet there is no guarantee that the sap does not still rise in secret from such blood-soaked cultic roots. After all, the same soil that bears the Pueblos has also witnessed the war dances of the wild, nomadic Indians, with their atrocities culminating in the martyrdom of the enemy.

The most extreme approximation of this magical desire for unity with nature via the animal world can be observed among the Moki Indians, in their dance with live serpents at Oraibi and Walpi. I did not myself observe this dance, but a few photographs will give an idea of this most pagan of all the ceremonies of Walpi. This dance is at once an animal dance and a religious, seasonal dance. In it, the individual animal dance of San Ildefonso and the individual fertility ritual of the Oraibi humiskachina dance converge in an intense expressive effort. For in August, when the critical moment in the tilling of the soil arrives to render the entire crop harvest contingent on rainstorms, these redemptive storms are invoked through a dance with live serpents, celebrated alternately in Oraibi and Walpi. Whereas in San Ildefonso only a simulated version of antelope is visible—at least to the uninitiated—and the corn dance achieves the demoniac representation of corn demons only with masks, we find here in Walpi a far more primeval aspect of the magic dance.

Here the dancers and the live animal form a magical unity, and the surprising thing is that the Indians have found in these dance ceremonies a way of handling the most dangerous of all animals, the rattlesnake, so that it can be tamed without violence, so that the creature will participate willingly—or at least without making use of its aggressive abilities, unless provoked—in ceremonies lasting for days. This would surely lead to catastrophe in the hands of Europeans.

Two Moki clans provide the participants in the serpent ceremony: the antelope and the serpent clans, both of whom are folklorically and totemistically linked with the two animals. That totemism can be taken seriously even today is proved here, as humans not only appear masked as animals but enter into cultic exchange with the most dangerous beast, the live serpent. The serpent ceremony at Walpi thus stands between simulated, mimic empathy and bloody sacrifice. It involves not the imitation of the animal but the bluntest engagement with it as a ritual participant—and that not as sacrificial victim but, like the *babo*, as fellow rainmaker.

For the snakes themselves, the serpent dance at Walpi is an enforced entreaty. They are caught live in the desert in August, when the storms are imminent, and in a sixteen-day ceremony in Walpi they are attended to in the underground kiva by the chiefs of the serpent and antelope clans in a series of unique ceremonies, of which the most significant and the most astonishing for white observers is the washing of the snakes. The snake is treated like a novice of the mysteries, and notwithstanding its resistance, its head is dipped in consecrated, medicated water. Then it is thrown onto a sand painting done on the kiva floor and representing four lightning snakes with a quadruped in the middle. In another kiva a sand painting depicts a mass of clouds from which emerge four differently colored lightning streaks, corresponding to the points of the compass, in the form of serpents. Onto the first sand painting, each snake is hurled with great force, so that the drawing is obliterated and the serpent is absorbed into the sand. I am convinced that this magic throw is intended to force the serpent to invoke lightning or produce rain. That is clearly the significance of the entire ceremony, and the ceremonies that follow prove that these consecrated serpents join the Indians in the starkest manner as provokers and petitioners of rain. They are living rain serpent—saints in animal form.



The serpents—numbering about a hundred and including a distinct number of genuine rattlesnakes with, as has been ascertained, their poisonous fangs left intact—are guarded in the kiva, and on the festival's final day they are imprisoned in a bush with a band wound around it. The ceremony culminates as follows: approach to the bush, seizing and carrying of the live serpents, dispatching of the snakes to the plains as messengers. American researchers describe the clutching of the snake as an unbelievably exciting act. It is carried out in the following way.

A group of three approaches the serpent bush. The high priest of the serpent clan pulls a snake from the bush as another Indian with painted face and tattoos, wearing a fox skin on his back, clutches the snake and places it in his mouth. A companion, holding him by the shoulders, distracts the attention of the serpent by waving a feathered stick. The third figure is the guard and the snake catcher, in case the serpent should slip out of the second man's mouth. The dance is played out in just over half an hour on the small square at Walpi. When all the snakes have thus been carried for a while to the sound of rattles—produced by the Indians who wear rattles and stone-filled tortoise shells on their knees—they are borne by the dancers with lightning speed into the plain, where they disappear.

From what we know of Walpi mythology, this form of devotion certainly goes back to ancestral, cosmologic legend. One saga tells the story of the hero Ti-yo, who undertakes a subterranean journey to discover the source of the longed-for water. He passes the various kivas of the princes of the underworld, always accompanied by a female spider who sits invisibly on his right ear—an Indian Virgil, Dante's guide to the underworld—and eventually guides him past the two sun houses of the West and East into the great serpent kiva, where he receives the magic *baho* that will invoke the weather. According to the saga, Ti-yo returns from the underworld with the *baho* and two serpent-maidens, who bear him serpentine children—very dangerous creatures who ultimately force the tribes to change their dwelling place. The serpents are woven into this myth both as weather deities and as totems that bring about the migration of the clans.

In this snake dance the serpent is therefore not sacrificed but rather, through consecration and suggestive dance mimicry, transformed into a messenger and dispatched, so that, returned to the souls of the dead, it may in the form of lightning produce storms from the heavens. We have here an insight into the pervasiveness of myth and magical practice among primitive humanity.

The elementary form of emotional release through Indian magical practice may strike the layman as a characteristic unique to primitive wildness, of which Europe knows nothing. And yet two thousand years ago in the very cradle of our own European culture, in Greece, cultic habits were in vogue which in crudeness and perversity far surpass what we have seen among the Indians.

In the orgiastic cult of Dionysus, for example, the Maenads danced with snakes in one hand and wore live serpents as diadems in their hair, holding in the other hand the animal that was to be ripped to pieces in the ascetic sacrificial dance in honor of the god. In contrast to the dance of the Moki Indians of today, blood sacrifice in a state of frenzy is the culmination and fundamental significance of this religious dance [28].



The deliverance from blood sacrifice as the innermost ideal of purification pervades the history of religious evolution from east to west. The serpent shares in this process of religious sublimation. Its role can be considered a yardstick for the changing nature of faith from fetishism to the pure religion of redemption. In the Old Testament, as in the case of the primal serpent Tiamat in Babylon, the serpent is the spirit of evil and of temptation. In Greece, as well, it is the merciless, devouring creature of the underworld: the Erinyes are encircled by snakes, and when the gods mete out punishment they send a serpent as their executioner.

This idea of the serpent as a destroying force from the underworld has found its most powerful and tragic symbol in the myth and in the sculpted group of Laocoon. The vengeance of the gods, wrought on their priest and on his two sons by means of a strangler serpent, becomes in this renowned sculpture of antiquity the manifest incarnation of extreme human suffering. The soothsaying priest who wanted to come to the aid of his people by warning them of the wiles of the Greeks falls victim to the revenge of the partial gods. Thus the death of the father and his sons becomes a symbol of ancient suffering: death at the hands of vengeful demons, without justice and without hope of redemption. That is the hopeless, tragic pessimism of antiquity (see [3]).

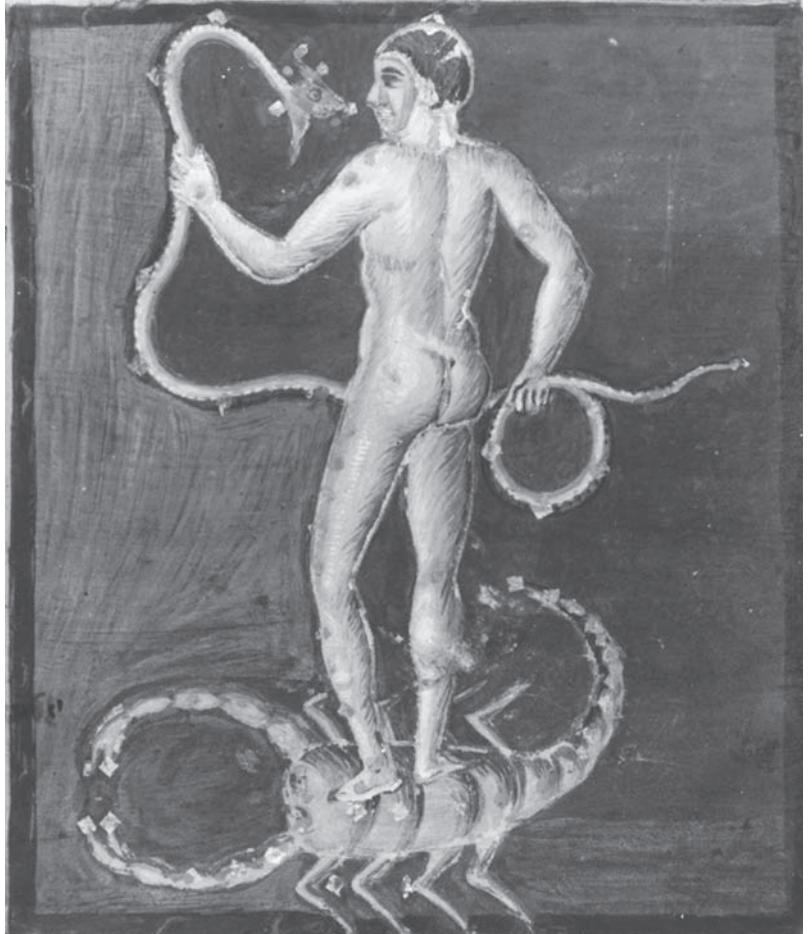
The serpent as the demon in the pessimistic world view of antiquity has a counterpart in a serpent-deity in which we can at last recognize the humane, transfigured beauty of the classical age. Asclepius, the ancient god of healing, carries a serpent coiling around his healing staff as a symbol [29]. His features are the features carried by the world savior in the plastic art of antiquity. And this most exalted and serene god of departed souls has his roots in the subterranean realm, where the serpent makes its home. It is in the form of a serpent that he is accorded his earliest devotion. It is he himself who winds around his staff: namely, the departed soul of the deceased, which survives and reappears in the form of the serpent. For the snake is not only, as Cushing's



Indians would say, the fatal bite in readiness or fulfillment, destroying without mercy; the snake also reveals by its own ability to cast off its slough, slipping, as it were, out of its own mortal remains, how a body can leave its skin and yet continue to live. It can slither into the earth and re-emerge. The return from within the earth, from where the dead rest, along with the capacity for bodily renewal, makes the snake the most natural symbol of immortality and of rebirth from sickness and mortal anguish.<sup>4</sup>

In the temple of Asclepius at Kos in Asia Minor the god stood transfigured in human form, a statue holding in his hand the staff with the serpent coiled around it. But his truest and most powerful essence was not revealed in this lifeless mask of stone but lived instead in the form of a serpent in the temple's innermost sanctum: fed, cared for, and attended in cultic devotion as only the Mokus are able to care for their serpents.

On a Spanish calendar leaf from the thirteenth century, which I found in a Vatican manuscript, representing Asclepius as the ruler of the month in the sign of Scorpio, significant aspects of the Asclepian serpent cult are revealed in their coarseness as well as their refinement [30]. We can see here, hieroglyphically indicated, ritual acts from the cult of Kos in thirty sections, all identical to the crude, magical desire of the Indians to enter the realm of the



serpent. We see the rite of incubation and the serpent as it is carried by human hands and worshipped as a deity of the springs.

This medieval manuscript is astrological. In other words, it shows these ritual forms not as prescriptions for devotional practices, as had previously been the case; rather, these figures have become hieroglyphs for those born under the heavenly sign of Asclepius. For Asclepius has become precisely a star-deity, undergoing a transformation through an act of cosmologic imagination which has completely deprived him of the real, the direct susceptibility to influence, the subterranean, the lowly. As a fixed star he stands over Scorpio in the zodiac. He is surrounded by serpents and is now regarded only as a heavenly body under whose influence prophets and physicians are born. Through this elevation to the stars, the serpent-god becomes a transfigured totem. He is the cosmic father of those born in the month when his visibility is highest. In ancient astrology, mathematics and magic converge. The serpent figure in the heavens, found also in the constellation of the Great Serpent, is used as a mathematical outline; the points of luminosity are linked together by way of an earthly image, in order to render comprehensible an infinity we cannot comprehend at all without some such outline of orientation. So Asclepius is at once a mathematical border sign and a fetish bearer. The evolution of culture toward the age of reason is marked in the same measure as the tangible, coarse texture of life, fading into mathematical abstraction.

About twenty years ago in the north of Germany, on the Elbe, I found a strange example of the elementary indestructibility of the memory of the serpent cult, despite all efforts of religious enlightenment; an example that shows the path on which the pagan serpent wanders, linking us to the past. On an excursion to the Vierlande [near Hamburg], in a Protestant church in Lüdingworth, I discovered, adorning the so-called rood screen, Bible illustrations that clearly originated in an Italian illustrated Bible and that had found their way here through the hands of a strolling painter.

And here I suddenly spotted Laocoon with his two sons in the terrible grasp of the serpent. How did he come to be in this church? But this Laocoon found his salvation. How? Looming in front of him was the staff of Asclepius and on it a holy serpent, corresponding to what we read in the fourth book of the Pentateuch: that Moses had commanded the Israelites in the wilderness to heal snakebites by setting up a brazen serpent for devotion.

We have here a remnant of idolatry in the Old Testament. We know, however, that this can only be a subsequent insertion, intended to account retroactively for the existence of such an idol in Jerusalem. For the principal fact remains that a brazen serpent idol was destroyed by King Hezekiah under the influence of the prophet Isaiah. The prophets fought most bitterly against idolatrous cults that engaged in human sacrifice and worshipped animals, and this struggle forms the crux of Oriental and of Christian reform movements down to the most recent times. Clearly the setting up of the serpent is in starkest contradiction to the Ten Commandments, in sharpest opposition to the hostility to images that essentially motivates the reforming prophets.

But there is another reason why every student of the Bible should consider the serpent the most provocative symbol of hostility: the serpent on the tree in Paradise dominates the biblical narrative of the order of the world as the cause of evil and of sin. In the Old and New Testaments alike, the serpent



**31 Giulio Romano**

Vendor of Antidote against Snake Bites.



clutches the tree of Paradise as the satanic power that summons the entire tragedy of sinning humanity as well as its hope for redemption.

In the battle against pagan idolatry, early Christianity was more uncompromising in its view of the serpent cult. In the eyes of the pagans, Paul was an impervious emissary when he hurled the viper that had bitten him into the fire without dying of the bite. (The poisonous viper belongs in the fire!) So durable was the impression of Paul's invulnerability to the vipers of Malta that as late as the sixteenth century, jugglers wound snakes around themselves at festivals and fairgrounds, representing themselves as men of the house of Saint Paul and selling soil from Malta as an antidote to snakebites. Here the principle of the immunity of the strong in faith ends up again in superstitious magical practice [31].

In medieval theology we find the miracle of the brazen serpent curiously retained as a part of legitimate religious devotion. Nothing attests to the indestructibility of the animal cult as does the survival of the miracle of the brazen serpent into the medieval Christian world view. So lasting in medieval theological memory was the serpent cult and the need to overcome it that, on the basis of a completely isolated passage inconsistent with the spirit and the theology of the Old Testament, the image of serpent devotion became para-





digmatic in typological representations for the Crucifixion itself [32]. The animal image and the staff of Asclepius as reverential objects for the kneeling multitude are treated and represented as a stage, albeit to be overcome, in humanity's quest for salvation. In the attempt at a tripartite scheme of evolution and of the ages—that is, of Nature, Ancient Law, and Grace—an even earlier stage in this process is the representation of the impeded sacrifice of Isaac as an analogue to the Crucifixion. This tripartite scheme is still evident in the imagery adorning the minster of Salem.

In the church of Kreuzlingen itself, this evolutionary idea has generated an astonishing parallelism, which cannot make ready sense to the theologically uninitiated. Here, on the ceiling of the famous Mount of Olives chapel, immediately above the Crucifixion, we find an adoration of this most pagan idol with a degree of pathos that does not suffer in comparison with the Laocoon group. And under the reference to the Tables of the Law, which, as the Bible recounts, Moses destroyed because of the worship of the golden calf, we find Moses himself, forced into service as shield bearer to the serpent.

I shall be satisfied if these images from the everyday and festive lives of the Pueblo Indians have convinced you that their masked dances are not child's play, but rather the primary pagan mode of answering the largest and most pressing questions of the *Why* of things. In this way the Indian confronts the incomprehensibility of natural processes with his will to comprehension, transforming himself personally into a prime causal agent in the order of things. For the unexplained effect, he instinctively substitutes the cause in its most tangible and visible form. The masked dance is danced causality.

If religion signifies bonding,<sup>5</sup> then the symptom of evolution away from this primal state is the spiritualization of the bond between humans and alien beings, so that man no longer identifies directly with the masked symbol but, rather, generates that bond through thought alone, progressing to a systematic linguistic mythology. The will to devotional zeal is an ennobled form of the donning of a mask. In the process that we call cultural progress, the being exacting this devotion gradually loses its monstrous concreteness and, in the end, becomes a spiritualized, invisible symbol.

What does this mean? In the realm of mythology the law of the smallest unit does not hold; there is no search for the smallest agent of rationality in the course of natural phenomena; rather, a being saturated with as much demoniac power as possible is postulated for the sake of a true grasp of the causes of mysterious occurrences. What we have seen this evening of the symbolism of the serpent should give us at least a cursory indication of the passage from a symbolism whose efficacy proceeds directly from the body and the hand to one that unfolds only in thought. The Indians actually clutch their serpents and treat them as living agents that generate lightning at the same time that they represent lightning. The Indian takes the serpent in his mouth to bring about an actual union of the serpent with the masked figure, or at least with the figure painted as a serpent.

In the Bible the serpent is the cause of all evil and as such is punished with banishment from Paradise. Nevertheless, the serpent slithers back into a chapter of the Bible itself as an indestructible pagan symbol—as a god of healing.

In antiquity the serpent likewise represents the quintessence of the most profound suffering in the death of Laocoon. But antiquity is capable also of transmuting the inconceivable fertility of the serpent-deity, representing Asclepius as a savior and as the lord of the serpent, ultimately placing him—the serpent-god with the tamed serpent in his hand—as a starry divinity in the heavens.

In medieval theology, the serpent draws from this passage in the Bible the ability to reappear as a symbol of fate. Its elevation—though expressly



considered as an evolutionary stage that has been surpassed—posits it on par with the Crucifixion.

In the end the serpent is an international symbolic answer to the question, Whence come elementary destruction, death, and suffering into the world? We saw in Lüdingworth how christological thought makes use of pagan serpent imagery to express symbolically the quintessence of suffering and redemption. We might say that where helpless human suffering searches for redemption, the serpent as an image and explanation of causality cannot be far away. The serpent deserves its own chapter in the philosophy of 'as if'.

How does humanity free itself from this enforced bonding with a poisonous reptile to which it attributes a power of agency? Our own technological age has no need of the serpent in order to understand and control lightning. Lightning no longer terrifies the city dweller, who no longer craves a benign storm as the only source of water. He has his water supply, and the lightning serpent is diverted straight to the ground by a lightning conductor. Scientific explanation has disposed of mythological causation. We know that the serpent is an animal that must succumb, if humanity wills it to. The replacement of mythological causation by the technological removes the fears felt by primitive humanity. Whether this liberation from the mythological world view is of genuine help in providing adequate answers to the enigmas of existence is quite another matter.

The American government, like the Catholic Church before it, has brought modern schooling to the Indians with remarkable energy. Its intellectual optimism has resulted in the fact that the Indian children go to school in comely suits and pinafores and no longer believe in pagan demons. That also applies to the majority of educational goals. It may well denote progress. But I would be loath to assert that it does justice to the Indians who think in images and to their, let us say, mythologically anchored souls.

I once invited the children of such a school to illustrate the German fairy tale of 'Johnny-Head-in-the-Air' (*Hans-Guck-in-die-Luft*), which they did not know, because a storm is referred to and I wanted to see if the children would draw the lightning realistically or in the form of the serpent. Of the fourteen drawings, all very lively but also under the influence of the American school,

twelve were drawn realistically. But two of them depicted indeed the indestructible symbol of the arrow-tongued serpent, as it is found in the kiva [33].

We, however, do not want our imagination to fall under the spell of the serpent image, which leads to the primitive beings of the underworld. We want to ascend to the roof of the worldhouse, our heads perched upwards in recollection of the words of Goethe:

Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft—  
Die Sonne könnt' es nie erblicken.

If the eye were not of the sun,  
It could not behold the sun.

All humanity stands in devotion to the sun. To claim it as the symbol that guides us upward from nocturnal depths is the right of the savage and the cultivated person alike. Children stand before a cave [34]. To lift them up to the light is the task not only of American schools but of humanity in general.

The relation of the seeker of redemption to the serpent develops, in the cycle of cultic devotion, from coarse, sense-based interaction to its transcendence. It is and has always been, as the cult of the Pueblo Indians has shown, a significant criterion in the evolution from instinctual, magical interaction to a spiritualized taking of distance. The poisonous reptile symbolizes the inner and outer demoniac forces that humanity must overcome. This evening I was able to show you all too cursorily an actual survival of the magical serpent cult, as an example of that primordial condition of which the refinement, transcendence, and replacement are the work of modern culture.







The conqueror of the serpent cult and of the fear of lightning, the inheritor of the indigenous peoples and of the gold seeker who ousted them, is captured in a photograph I took on a street in San Francisco. He is Uncle Sam in a stovepipe hat, strolling in his pride past a neoclassical rotunda. Above his top hat runs an electric wire. In this copper serpent of Edison's, he has wrested lightning from nature [35].

The American of today is no longer afraid of the rattlesnake. He kills it; in any case, he does not worship it. It now faces extermination. The lightning imprisoned in wire—captured electricity—has produced a culture with no use for paganism. What has replaced it? Natural forces are no longer seen in anthropomorphic or biomorphic guise, but rather as infinite waves obedient to the human touch. With these waves, the culture of the machine age destroys what the natural sciences, born of myth, so arduously achieved: the space for devotion, which evolved in turn into the space required for reflection.

The modern Prometheus and the modern Icarus, Franklin and the Wright brothers, who invented the dirigible airplane, are precisely those ominous destroyers of the sense of distance, who threaten to lead the planet back into chaos.

Telegram and telephone destroy the cosmos. Mythical and symbolic thinking strive to form spiritual bonds between humanity and the surrounding world, shaping distance into the space required for devotion and reflection: the distance undone by the instantaneous electric connection.

# Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft* and its Meaning for Aesthetics

My task is to describe to this Congress on Aesthetics the problems of a library which defines its own method as that of *Kulturwissenschaft*.<sup>1</sup> I ought first, therefore, to explain the relationship between aesthetics and *Kulturwissenschaft* as it is understood in this library. With this purpose in mind I shall refer to the changes which the relationship between art history and the history of culture has undergone in recent decades, and explain, with reference to one or two episodes in the history of these changes, how the development of these studies has generated problems which the library seeks to cater for by providing both material and a framework of thought. In explaining this need I shall concentrate on three main points: Warburg's concept of imagery, his theory of symbols, and his psychological theory of expression by imitation and by the use of tools.<sup>2</sup>

## The Concept of Imagery

If we consider the works of Alois Riegl and of Heinrich Wölfflin, which have exercised such a decisive influence in recent years, we see that, despite differences in detail, they are both informed by a polemical concern for the autonomy of art history, by a desire to free it from the history of civilization and thus to break with the tradition associated with the name of Jacob Burckhardt. I will try briefly to summarize the forces behind this struggle and their consequences for the methodology of the subject.

1. This separation of the scholarly methods of art history and those of cultural history was motivated by the artistic sensibility of an age which was convinced that it was of the essence of a pure consideration of a work of art to ignore the nature and meaning of its subject-matter and to confine oneself to 'pure vision'.

2. Within the history of art this tendency was given added impetus by the introduction of critical concepts which shifted the emphasis from the artistic object itself to the manner in which it was depicted, to a point where the two were fully separated. Thus Wölfflin, for example, makes use of the antithesis between subject-matter and form. Since he includes on the side of form only what he calls 'the visual layer of style',<sup>3</sup> everything else, which is not in this radical sense visible, belongs under the heading of matter—not only representational or pictorial motifs, ideas of beauty, types of expression, modulations of tone, but also the differences resulting from the distinct use of tools which



cause gradations in the representation of reality and different artistic genres. It was as though Wölfflin had set himself to discover, in a mathematical manner, the most general characterization of a particular style that it is possible to conceive of. But just as a mathematical logician states in formal terms a propositional function, which only becomes a meaningful proposition when the variables are replaced by words of determinate meaning and names for particular relations, so Wölfflin defines the 'painterly' way of looking at things as a general stylistic function, which can be variously instantiated according to what needs to be expressed, leading now to the style of Bernini, now to the very different style of Terborch.<sup>4</sup> And this general formula, whose logical force undoubtedly lies in its ability to unite such contrasting phenomena under one head, so as to distinguish them as a whole from a differently structured formula, which in turn classifies as 'linear' such contrasting phenomena as Michelangelo and Holbein the Younger—this general formula is now suddenly reified as a perceptible entity with its own history. The logical tendency towards formalization, which lends to the theory of aesthetic form a degree of precision which it cannot justify in its own right, is thus combined with a tendency towards hypostasization which turns the formula, once it has been established, into the living subject of historical development.

3. The antithesis of form and matter thus finds its logical counterpart in the theory of an autonomous<sup>5</sup> development of art, which views the entire developmental process exclusively in terms of form, assuming the latter to be the constant factor at every stage of history, irrespective of differences both of technical production and of expression. This has both positive and negative consequences: it involves treating the various genres of art as parallel with each other—for, as far as the development of form is concerned, no one genre should be any less important than another; it also involves levelling out the differences between them—for no one genre can tell us anything that is not already contained in the others. In this way we attain, not a history of art, which traces the origin and fate of monuments as bearers of significant form, but, as in Riegl, a history of the autonomous formal impulse (*Kunstwollen*),<sup>6</sup> which isolates the element of form from that of meaning, but nevertheless presents change in form in terms of a dialectical development in time—an exact counterpart of Wölfflin's history of vision.<sup>7</sup>

4. Finally, it is not just the various genres within art that are treated as parallel with each other; art itself is treated as evolving in exact parallel to the other achievements within a culture. This, however, only means a further step on the path to formalization; for the same antithesis of form and content, which at its lowest level brought about the rift between the history of art and the history of culture, now serves at this higher level to re-establish the relationship between the two. But the subsequent reconciliation presents just as many problems as the original division; for the concept of form has now become, at the highest level, just as nebulous as that of content, which at the lowest level united the most heterogeneous elements in itself. It has become identical with a general cultural impulse (*Kulturwollen*) which is neither artistic nor social, neither religious nor philosophical, but all of these in one.

There is no doubt that this urge towards generalization gave the art history confined within this scheme grandiose perspectives. Wölfflin brought this out graphically when he declared that one can as easily gain an impression of the

specific form of the Gothic style from a pointed shoe as from a cathedral.<sup>8</sup> However, the more critics learnt in this way to see in a pointed shoe what they were accustomed to seeing in a cathedral, or to see in a cathedral what a shoe could perhaps have told them, the more they lost sight of the elementary fact that a shoe is something one slips on to go outside, whereas a cathedral is a place one goes into to pray. And who would deny that this, so to speak, pre-artistic functional differentiation constituting the essential difference between the two objects, arising from man's use of different tools for distinct purposes, is a factor which plays a decisive part in their artistic formation, giving rise to aesthetic differences in formal content in relation to the observer?

I mention this elementary fact not because I believe it would ever have been completely overlooked, but because by stressing it I can get to grips with the present problem. We must recognize that the refusal to adequately differentiate artistic genres, and the consequent disregard of the fact that art is made by tool-using man, are both derived from the conjunction of the formalist interpretation on the one hand and the 'parallelizing' historical view on the other. This fuses into an indissoluble triad the critical study of individual works of art, aesthetic theory, and the reconstruction of historical situations: any weakness in one of these enterprises is inevitably passed on to the others. We can therefore apply constructive criticism in three ways. First, by reflecting on the nature of history it can be shown that, if the various areas of culture are treated as parallel, we shall fail to take account of those forces which develop in the interaction between them, without which the dynamic march of history becomes unintelligible. Or, secondly, we can approach the problem from the standpoint of psychology and aesthetics, and show that the concept of 'pure vision' is an abstraction which has no counterpart in reality; for every act of seeing is conditioned by our circumstances, so that what might be postulated conceptually as the 'purely visual' can never be completely isolated from the context of the experience in which it occurs. But, thirdly, we can also approach the problem by taking a middle course, and instead of positing *in abstracto* that inter-relationships exist, search for them where they may be grasped historically—in individual objects. In studying this concrete object, as conditioned by the nature of the techniques used to make it, we can develop and test the validity of categories which can then be of use to aesthetics and historical understanding.

This third course is the one Warburg adopted. With the intention of determining the factors conditioning the formation of style more thoroughly than had hitherto been done, he took up Burckhardt's work and extended it in the very direction that Wölfflin, also in the interests of a deeper understanding of the formation of style, had deliberately eschewed. When Wölfflin called for the separation of the study of art and the study of culture, he was able, with a certain amount of justification, to cite the example of Burckhardt.<sup>9</sup> However, if in Burckhardt's *Cicerone* and *Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* there was a separation of the two disciplines, this was not based on principle, but dictated by the demands of the economy of the work. 'He did nothing more', Warburg writes, 'than first of all observe Renaissance man in his most highly developed type and Renaissance art in the form of its finest creations. As he did so he was quite untroubled by whether he would himself ever be able to achieve a comprehensive treatment of the whole civilization.'<sup>10</sup> In Warburg's view, it was the self-abnegation of the pioneer which caused Burckhardt, 'instead

of tackling the problem of the history of Renaissance civilization in all its full and fascinating artistic unity, to divide it up into a number of outwardly disconnected parts, and then with perfect equanimity to study and describe each one separately.<sup>11</sup> But later scholars were not free to imitate Burckhardt's detachment. Hence what for him was simply a practical problem of presentation became for Wölfflin and Warburg a theoretical problem. The concept of pure artistic vision, which Wölfflin developed in reacting to the ideas of Burckhardt, Warburg contrasts with the concept of culture as a whole, within which artistic vision fulfils a necessary function. However, to understand this function—so the argument continues—one should not dissociate it from its connection with the functions of other elements of that culture. One should rather ask the twofold question: what do these other cultural functions (religion and poetry, myth and science, society and the state) mean for the pictorial imagination; and what does the image mean for these other functions?

Characteristically, Wölfflin and Riegl, having explicitly declined to answer the first question, involuntarily overlooked the second. 'To relate everything solely to expression', Wölfflin writes, 'is falsely to presuppose that every state of mind must have had the same means of expression at its disposal.'<sup>12</sup> But what does 'every state of mind' really mean here? Is it that moods have remained the same, while only the means of expressing them have changed? Does the image only depict a state of mind? Does it not at the same time also stimulate it?

A very similar sort of observation can be found in Riegl. 'The visual arts', he says clearly, 'are not concerned with the What of appearance, but with the How. They look to poetry and religion to provide them with a readymade What.'<sup>13</sup> But what does 'provide readymade' mean here? Does the image have no effect on the poet's imagination, or play no part in the formation of religion?

It was one of Warburg's basic convictions that any attempt to detach the image from its relation to religion and poetry, to cult and drama, is like cutting off its lifeblood. Those who, like him, see the image as being indissolubly bound up with culture as a whole must, if they wish to make an image that is no longer directly intelligible communicate its meaning, go about it in a rather different way from those who subscribe to the notion of 'pure vision' in the abstract sense. It is not just a matter of training the eye to follow and enjoy the formal ramifications of an unfamiliar linear style, but of resurrecting the original conceptions implied in a particular mode of vision from the obscurity into which they have fallen. The method used for achieving this can only be an indirect one. By studying all kinds of documents that by methods of historical criticism can be connected with the image in question, one must prove by circumstantial evidence that a whole complex of ideas, which must be individually demonstrated, has contributed to the formation of the image. The scholar who thus brings to light such a complex of associations cannot assume the task of considering an image is simply a matter of contemplating it and of having an immediate empathic sense of it. He has to embark upon a process of recollection, guided by the conception he is trying to understand, through which he can contribute to keeping alive the experience of the past. Warburg was convinced that in his own work, when he was reflecting upon the images he analysed, he was fulfilling an analogous function to that of pictorial memory when, under the compulsive urge to expression, the mind spontaneously synthesizes images, namely the recollection, or more literally, the revival of pre-existing forms. The

word ΜΝΗΜΟΣΥΝΗ, which Warburg had inscribed above the entrance to his research institute, is to be understood in this double sense: as a reminder to the scholar that in interpreting the works of the past he is acting as trustee of a repository of human experience, but at the same time as a reminder that this experience is itself an object of research, that it requires us to use historical material to investigate the way in which 'social memory' functions.

When Warburg was studying the early Florentine Renaissance he came across just such concrete evidence of the operation of 'social memory'—in the revival of imagery from antiquity in the art of later ages. Thereafter, he never ceased to inquire into the significance of the influence of classical antiquity on the artistic culture of the early Renaissance. Because this problem always contained for him another more general one, namely what is involved in our encounter with preexisting images transmitted by memory, and because his personal work was bound up with this more general one, the question of the continuing life of classical antiquity became by a kind of magical process his own. Each discovery regarding the object of his research was at the same time an act of self-discovery. Correspondingly, each shattering experience, which he overcame through self-reflection, became a means of enriching his historical insight. Only thus was he able, in analysing early Renaissance man, to penetrate through to that level at which the most violent contradictions are reconciled, and to develop a psychological theory concerned with the resolution of conflicts (*Ausgleichs-psychologie*), which assigns opposing psychological impulses to different psychological 'loci', and conceives of them as poles of a unifying oscillation—poles whose distance from each other is a measure of the extent of the oscillation. And only thus is it also possible to explain how the answer which he found in this theory of the polarity of psychological behaviour to his fundamental question concerning the nature of the response to the pre-existing forms of ancient art was developed into a general thesis: namely, that in the course of the history of images their pre-existing expressive values undergo a polarization which corresponds to the extent of the psychological oscillation of the creative power which refashions them. It is only by means of this theory of polarity that the role of an image within a culture as a whole is to be determined. [...]

I have tried to convey some idea of the nature of Warburg's method of inquiry, but my words must necessarily remain somewhat abstract and lifeless without concrete illustration. Indeed this lecture is intended as an introduction to the picture display which is set up here in the hall,<sup>14</sup> and also to the library itself which is expressly arranged to bring out the particular problems that were Warburg's concern.

You will there clearly see the great extent to which Warburg, in pursuing his theory of polarity, was obliged to forsake the traditional domains of art history and to enter into fields which even professional art historians have tended on the whole to fight shy of—the history of religious cults, the history of festivals, the history of the book and literary culture, the history of magic and astrology. However, it was just because he was interested in revealing tensions that these intermediate areas were of great importance to him. It is in the nature of festivals to lie between social life and art; astrology and magic lie half-way between religion and science. Warburg, intent on probing further, always chose to study those intermediate fields in precisely the historical periods he considered to be

themselves periods of transition and conflict: for example, the early Florentine Renaissance, the Dutch Baroque, the orientalizing phases of late classical antiquity. Furthermore, within such periods he always tended to apply himself to the study of men who, whether through their profession or their fortune, occupy ambiguous positions: for example, merchants who are at the same time lovers of art, whose aesthetic tastes mingle with their business interests; astrologers who combine religious politics with science and create a 'double truth' of their own; and philosophers whose pictorial imagination is at odds with their desire for logical order. In dealing with the individual work of art, Warburg proceeded in a way which must have seemed somewhat paradoxical to the student of art with a formalist training; his practice of gathering together pictures in groups gave his work its peculiar stamp: he interested himself just as much in the artistically bad picture as in the good, and indeed often more so, for a reason which he himself explicitly acknowledged—because it had more to teach him. In his study of the iconographic meaning of the cycle of frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia—a pictorial enigma which he solved brilliantly<sup>5</sup>—he went first to the master who seemed to him to be the weakest. And why? Because the problem posed by the task with which the artist had to wrestle was easier to see in the flaws of the undistinguished work: the complicated structure of the major work made the problem much harder to pick out, because the artist resolved it with such a display of virtuosity.

The same applies to other branches of learning. Physicists were able to analyse the nature of light by studying its refraction through an inhomogeneous medium. And modern psychology owes its greatest insights into the functioning of the mind to the study of those disorders in which individual functions, instead of harmonizing, are in conflict. To proceed only from great works of art, Warburg tells us, is to fail to see that the forgotten artefact is precisely the one most likely to yield the most valuable insights. If we go straight to the great masters, to Leonardo, Raphael, and Holbein, to works in which the most violent conflicts have been most perfectly resolved, and if we enjoy them aesthetically, that is, in a mood which is itself no more than a momentary harmonious resolution of opposing forces, we shall spend happy hours, but we shall not arrive at a conceptual recognition of the nature of art, which is, after all, the real business of aesthetics.

Warburg adopted the same kind of approach in assembling his remarkable library. Compared with other specialist libraries, it must appear peculiarly fragmentary, for it covers many more areas than a specialist library normally seeks to do. At the same time, its sections on particular fields will not be found to be as complete as one would normally expect of a specialist library. Its strength, in short, lies precisely in the areas that are marginal; and since these are the areas that play a crucial part in the progress of any discipline, the library may fairly claim that its own growth is entirely in keeping with that of the particular field of study it seeks to advance. The more work that is done in those 'marginal' areas classified by the library, the more the corresponding sections in the library will automatically fill up. This means that it depends upon collaborative effort. That is why the library welcomes the opportunity this Congress offers us to learn something of the problems with which aestheticians are concerned: for, in Warburg's own words, it is 'a library eager not only to speak, but also to listen'—*eine Bibliothek die nicht nur reden, sondern auch aufhorchen will.*

# Silent Moves: On Excluding the Ethnographic Subject from the Discourse of Art History

Teleology and hierarchy are prescribed in the envelope of the question.

Jacques Derrida, 'The Parergon'

So, you *studied* us, huh? Were we *interesting*?

Peter Whitley, *Deliberate Acts*, citing 'an older Hopi man, on learning of my prior research'

The perception of ethnography as an innovative, albeit potentially problematic, supplement to other research methods,<sup>1</sup> has a long history in the discourse of institutionalized art history. This chapter, in continuing the current critique of the transparencies once claimed for visual representations of ethnographic subjects, argues that the history of ethnographic illustration masks a complex rhetorical exchange between word and image that has equally informed the practice of art history as such. In particular, it argues that the persuasive combined power of word and image in framing ethnographic subjects played a key role in art history's professionalization in the nineteenth century in assigning subordinate positions to non-Western material culture.

Such a critique cannot be dissociated from the subject positions of contemporary art historians, and my own personal experience as an art historian, along with my research in a complex network of institutionalized forms of power, implicate a very specific set of ethical considerations. Articulating the ways in which one is entangled with the imperatives of one's profession is no easy matter. The format of diachronically organized microstudies has increasingly appeared to offer a cogent and effective way to address the political consequences of religious, political, scientific, and academic institutions.

I'd like to begin by asking how ethnographic illustrations came to be seen as 'natural' in the first place; that is, appearing to require no particular techniques of analysis or feats of self-reflexion to distinguish between representations of ethnographic subjects and direct experience of the same (subjectivized) subjects in the world. My own interest in this topic—and the reason for presenting it in the context of a volume dedicated to the institutions and institutional discourses of art history—developed in the wake of a study of the recent scholarship on Aby Warburg's trip to the American Southwest in 1895/6. Warburg's essay on the Hopi 'serpent ritual' was first published posthumously in 1939 on the basis of his lecture notes of 1923 about events that took place three decades earlier.<sup>2</sup> His study of the Hopi has recently become



something of an art historical cult piece, with amplified versions of his lecture notes also appearing in English, French, German, and Italian over the last decade.<sup>3</sup> It has come to be widely acknowledged that Warburg's youthful adventure was a formative experience for his study of Renaissance art, and in fact it has been argued in recent years that we should emulate his precocious ethnographic interest in material culture by writing an 'anthropology' of the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup>

What has been absent in the present interest in Warburg's brief and belated study of the Hopi has been a corresponding interest in or even knowledge about the complex and highly contested discourse on cultural identity. The current picture of Warburg's actual ideas about the Hopi is a puzzling omission in a body of scholarship that praises the art historian's innovative methodology and the continuing relevance of ethnography to art history. The ongoing reception of the essay in the academic community is significantly different from Gombrich's intellectual biography, which, originally published in 1970, called quite explicit attention to the untenable racist underpinnings of Warburg's study. Gombrich writes:

A convinced evolutionist he [Warburg] saw in the Indians of New Mexico a stage of civilization which corresponded to the phase of paganism ancient Greece left behind with the dawn of rationalism. It was this belief which accounts for the importance of the experience of Indian ritual for Warburg.<sup>5</sup>

As innovative as Warburg's views might have appeared in 1896—and we now have a much clearer understanding of his intellectual development in relation to the emerging fields of the 'psychology of perception' and the 'psychology of religion'—it is difficult to conceive of any cultural anthropologist today upholding his claims about 'primitive' Hopi mentality.<sup>6</sup>

Yet oddly the same is not true for the historians and art historians writing today about Warburg's study of Hopi symbolism, who unanimously seem particularly unconcerned that Warburg equated the 'primitive' mentality of modern Native Americans with both the 'primitive' nature of Man at the dawn of Western civilization and the 'primitive' core of human emotions transhistorically understood. Nor has the instability of the 'primitive' as a signifier in Warburg's thinking been acknowledged. Ongoing historical studies of Warburg's innovative use of ethnographic techniques also ignore the burgeoning literature on the roots of cultural anthropology in the nineteenth-century science of race, to which Warburg's evolutionist views are indebted, nor have any of these recent art historical commentators addressed the contentious nature of identity politics in the Southwest today.

As important as Warburg's essay on the Hopi might seem to the historiography of *Renaissance* art history, the essay is completely unknown in the regional scholarship on the American Southwest. If the essay were known, it would clearly offend even the most traditional anthropologists—not to mention the descendants of the Pueblo Indians who were Warburg's subjects of study. Contemporary European art historical interest in Warburg's ethnography of Hopi ceremony and beliefs, by contrast, focuses on the innovative aspects of his methodology, such as his comparison of two vastly different cultures unrelated in time, and his theoretical interest in the polysemic nature of visual symbolism.<sup>7</sup>

Ethical issues such as contemporary academic insensitivity to the esoteric nature of the beliefs he studied (Warburg's violations of Hopi privacy are considered far more egregious by the Hopi today than records that remain indicate they were in 1896) and his personal contacts with entrepreneurial archaeologists and art dealers who supplied European museums with Native American material culture—depleting the region of its material cultural remains in a matter of decades—have not even been articulated.<sup>8</sup> The tone of current Warburg scholarship can be described, charitably, as apologetic and conflicted. A good example is the following:

Warburg not only violated the tradition that forbade one to look at a bareheaded Kachina: he also wanted to set up a scenario, gathering the dancers' masks and arranging them in a precise order, and placing himself at the centre with the Indian.

*There must have been some valid reasons for violating the Indians' customs in this way. (my emphasis)*<sup>9</sup>

Narratives such as this obscure the very complex ethical issues that arise when ethnographers (whether their base of operation is anthropology, art history, or some other field) violate the decorum and privacy of their subjects of study. Ethical concerns about the ownership of intellectual property are currently on the table elsewhere in Native American studies, notably in the context of repatriating sacred objects, including human remains, housed in museum collections.

Should images, in this case photographs, be treated any differently from the objects and beliefs they document? There is a double impropriety to consider, from the Pueblo point of view: Warburg's original transgressions, and the transgressions of contemporary scholars who promote his ideas.

Ongoing debates about the ownership of cultural property have involved the physical remains of the past and perceptions of the past in equal measure. In New Mexico the role of the critical historian is inscribed in a history of institutional repression of Native belief systems and practices. What, responsible historians need to ask in these circumstances, are the political consequences of our research and publication as scholars inevitably supported by powerful state and private institutions? If we force access to knowledge that intentionally excludes outsiders, we reenact the historical role of the Church and State to police the actions of the community and impose an institution's normative values. In my own practice as an art historian, having recently completed a decade-long study of New Mexican Catholic religious art, it has proven wisest to acknowledge the resiliency of the coerced culture and the essential heterogeneity of a society composed of subgroups seeking their own autonomous goals (to borrow a phrase from sociologist Nestor García Canclini) than to betray the right of individuals and communities to rule over their own visions—as Warburg might be judged in retrospect to have done.

Not that this position has been easy to practice—finding Native Americans willing to contribute to such collaborative efforts is commonly difficult and frequently unsuccessful. At the same time, the dominant culture's institutions (to which I belong), challenged to accommodate dissenting voices without subsuming them into overarching, totalizing structures, have proven equally reticent to give up control over their own visions. For example, the obvious relevance of a critique of *visual ethnography* to a collection dealing

with *art history's* institutions and institutional practices has not been unanimously clear to those unfamiliar with the institutional histories of these fields, including external reviewers. Part of the problem stems from the fact that the connections between foundational critiques of disciplinarity as such and the concrete project of critiquing a given disciplinary practice are often obscure. It may be one thing to critically assess practices that conform to existing disciplinary expectations, but it is often quite another to question the configuration itself. Yet unless the subject position of the critic in the institution is brought into the equation, the most significant epistemological and ethical issues remain obscure.

In a similar fashion, it appears to be one thing to critically engage our modernist practices, institutions, and professions, and quite another to question the configuration of modernity or modernities as such, as the present chapter in fact aims to do by locating the construction of one 'modernity' at least outside the modern period. The objections often still voiced, for example, by anonymous expert readers at leading presses and in leading institutional settings, as seen in what follows, reproduce at the meta-critical level the very same long-standing debates over cultural property that historically produced hierarchical power relations and hegemonic practices in the broad social arena beyond (but not apart from) academia. Misunderstanding such historical and epistemological complexities is not limited to the institutions of art history or ethnography, but endemic to the problems of disciplinarity as such, as other chapters in this volume also address.

At the (not-so-hidden) core of contention in New Mexican identity politics today is a fundamental disagreement between contemporary Western assumptions that knowledge should be accessible to everyone, and the esoteric nature of certain Native American beliefs. According to Joseph Suina, a resident member of Cochiti Pueblo who teaches at the University of New Mexico, Native esoteric traditions account for the unwillingness of contemporary Pueblo people to discuss their sacred beliefs with outsiders:

Misinterpretation of Pueblo secrecy is partly due to differing views of knowledge held by different cultures. In the Anglo world, knowledge is highly regarded and its acquisition is rewarded in a variety of ways, including admiration of knowledge for its own sake . . . But that is not the case in the Pueblo world. Like the Anglos, Pueblo Indians consider knowledge to be of high value. Some types of knowledge, however, are accessible only to the mature and responsible. This is particularly the case with esoteric information that requires a religious commitment.<sup>10</sup>

Many leading Native scholars and community leaders are more extreme than Suina in their rejection of the academic mainstream considered progressive and revisionist elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> 'Westerners' are baffled by their resistance—which, in the final analysis, is not resistance to *ownership*, but rather resistance to the very *idea* of ownership. Some Native scholars, like Suina, express their engagements with society in terms such as 'knowledge' familiar to the dominant culture, but it is important to bear in mind that the translation into the terms of the dominant culture is, unavoidably, only an approximation. Language itself carries a world view and, as Latin Americanists including James Lockhart, Sabine MacCormack, Louise Burkhart, Serge Grusinski, and too many others to name here, have studied in depth, terms such as 'knowledge' and 'religion' are burst-

ing at the seams with culturally determined connotations. Again, it appears to be one thing to weigh critically practices that conform to existing disciplinary expectations, and quite another to question the configuration itself.

The latest generation of Warburg specialists as yet appears unwilling to address the possibility that elements of cultural evolutionary theory linger unrecognized in the master's innovative work. Yet it is patently contradictory to applaud a scholar's innovative approach to art as a form of material culture, while simultaneously extricating his interests in Indians from the popular culture of his own day, where romanticizing notions of 'noble savages' resonate with his own mindset. The question goes to the heart of the contemporary concern with a critical understanding of the institutional origins of art history. In that regard, those aspects of Warburg's work that are no longer tenable need to be scrutinized *alongside* those aspects that still appear to be; anything less would be a mark of profound disrespect to a remarkable scholar.

In terms of the present chapter, it has been my reflection on the lack of an adequate historiographical and epistemological framework in recent Warburg scholarship that has led me to consider the historical sources of the representational conventions that Warburg employed in his photographs of ethnographic subjects. The following is a contribution to articulating the broader historical contexts of the institutionalization of art history.

### Warburg and the 'Wildwest'

Roll film cameras were a very recent invention when Warburg used a hand-held Kodak to document the Hemis katsina dance. The modernity of his technology aside, Warburg also relied on a pictorial genre established in the sixteenth century. His photographs of sacred (and private) Hopi ceremonies and of individual Hopi people are currently praised for the 'spontaneity' of their composition. Yet images such as the famous shot of Warburg posing with an (unnamed!) Hopi 'chief' are far from neutral representations [36].



36

Aby Warburg with  
unidentified Hopi Dancer,  
Oraibi, Arizona, May 1896.

Warburg employed formal conventions with a long history of serving as effective rhetorical strategies. The epistemological assumptions that inform his ethnographic images—in Derridean terms, the ‘teleology and hierarchy ... prescribed in the envelope of the question’—fall into the seams between art history and anthropology. As of this writing, neither profession charges itself with the responsibility of uncovering assumptions embodied in *images* of ethnographic subjects.

Given this history of institutional neglect, perhaps it is not so surprising that Warburg’s debts to popular culture have been overlooked, while his situatedness with respect to elite culture and vanguard ideas have received such thorough attention. There are obvious parallels between Warburg’s fascination with Indians and the contemporaneous popularity of the ‘Wildwest’ in Germany, first in translations of novels by James Fenimore Cooper and painted images by German and American artists that were widely disseminated through prints, but also in other forms of popular material culture, such as the Columbian World’s Fair Exposition of 1893 held in Chicago only three years before Warburg’s American journey. The Exposition featured a scale model of the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, where Warburg began his own real life adventure.<sup>12</sup> German fascination with the American West attained unprecedented popularity through the writings of novelists like Karl May, one of Warburg’s immediate contemporaries, who adopted the literary form of a firsthand report, even though he never set foot in the Southwest, and even promoted his self-fashioned identity visually, dressed as a cowboy in widely distributed photographic postcards. Such romanticizing records of cowboys and ‘noble savages’ provide close contemporary parallels to the surviving photographic records of the German scholar-turned-tourist, dressed as a cowboy posing with an ‘Indian’ [36]. Warburg could not have been unaware of the ongoing German flirtation with the ‘West’ any more than someone living almost anywhere on the planet today could be entirely ignorant of American Westerns.

Warburg’s most uncanny debt to the existing typology of ethnographic portraiture, as the following inquiry into its initiating moment suggests, is his intention to study the ‘primitive’ symbolic structures of ‘noble savages’ in order to critique contemporary ‘civilized’ society. Warburg’s enterprise cannot be adequately understood without considering how his contested photographic images from the territory of New Mexico in fact constituted but one late nineteenth-century echo of a long practice of ethnographic study, one of whose initiating exemplars was the sixteenth-century Calvinist minister-turned-missionary Jean de Léry. Whether or not he was aware of the traces of this history embedded in his photographs is beside the point: what matters is that scholars not mask the actual epistemological, historical and, above all, political issues in our institutional critiques of disciplinary practices. In the second part of this chapter, I hope to show that, even when the epistemological concerns on the table *appear* to be contained within ‘purely’ scientific and philosophical contexts (extricated from racialist thinking, as the current Warburg scholarship would like to believe), they require the same sensitivity to historical alliances between scholars and the institutions that support them as methods of analysis such as ethnography, long recognized within the domains of anthropology and the social sciences, whose ideological implications have received extensive criticism in recent years.

## Delirium

Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (*Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*), first published in 1578, was an instant success.<sup>13</sup> It was Michel de Montaigne's main source of information for that famous critique of European society *Des Cannibales*, which established the noble savage as a utopian theme in modern thought.<sup>14</sup> De Léry's study of the Tupinamba people has recently attracted attention again. Claude Lévi-Strauss remarks in *Tristes Tropiques*, published in 1955, that he carried a copy of 'that masterpiece of anthropological literature' when he arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1934.<sup>15</sup> Michel de Certeau has called *History of a Voyage* the equivalent of a primal scene in the construction of ethnographic discourse.<sup>16</sup> *Tristes Tropiques* is itself a literary landmark because it is one of the first studies to call attention to the expository conventions of anthropological discourse. By 1988, when it was a commonplace in and outside the field of anthropology to study the relationship between systems of interpretation and their historical contexts (the history of the text as text), de Certeau referred to the lasting effect of *History of a Voyage* in negative terms. He argued that its author both preserves and masters alterity. The Calvinist missionary Jean de Léry turned revelation into a scientific concern for upholding the truth of things. Through his act of writing about the Tupinamba, de Léry made them appear fascinating to a European audience, while suppressing the natives' uncanniness.<sup>17</sup> Anthropologist James Clifford doesn't mince words either: ethnography has been a form of representation that establishes the ethnographer in a transcendent and transcendental position, 'over-seeing' and explaining his subject according to his own categories of signification. Writing produces culture.<sup>18</sup>

Given the extent to which de Léry's *Voyage* has been studied, its acknowledged role as a foundational text for the discipline of anthropology, and the great critical interest that has recently fastened onto the history of vision in a number of fields, it is surprising that no one has ever examined de Léry's innovative illustrations. This oversight indicates how writing still exerts its logocentric power in anthropology. Outside the discipline proper, it suggests how the canonical hierarchy of Western art and its attendant distinctions between art and artifact continue to be maintained and reproduced in the scholarship: art historians have stayed away from this exemplary product of material culture, despite de Léry's recognized historical importance—recognized in another field, that is. De Léry informs us that he is personally responsible for the illustrations, and perhaps this unusual circumstance has exacerbated the problem of historical interpretation. Perhaps because he was not a trained artist—he has no oeuvre, no place at all in the historical roster of artists—we are not sure who is responsible for the remarkable woodcuts in the first edition.

In the first illustration of the book [37], we would tend to see a family portrait with a very large pineapple and a hammock in the background. However, as de Certeau and Clifford remind us, it is extremely important to exercise caution, so as not to project twentieth-century assumptions unnecessarily onto the material. The internal evidence of de Léry's text and the scene of European discourse in which I am going to locate his contribution suggest, rather, that this image registers information primarily about the typical forms of the Tupinamba nation—male, female, child, along with typical productions



Jean de Léry, illustration  
for Chapter 8 of *Histoire  
d'un voyage fait en la terre  
du Brésil autrement dite  
Amerique*, Geneva, 1578.



of nature and of human ingenuity. 'Family' is a category that de Léry inherited, most immediately from sixteenth-century cosmographers like Johann Boem and Jean Bodin, who regarded it as the cornerstone of society.<sup>19</sup> In de Léry's narrative, discussion of customs different from our own predominate. De Léry confronted the problem of cultural difference, but his perceptions were filtered through inherited categories. His open-mindedness toward his subject, given that he was working with culturally determined and textually sanctioned categories like 'family,' 'religious rites,' 'marriage customs,' 'food habits,' and 'burial practices,' earned him his position at the foundation of modern ethnographic study. De Léry ennobled a people who were previously known only for their sensational habit of cannibalism, but this is not the focus of the following discussion. On the contrary, I am interested in the rhetorical conventions that contribute to the credibility of de Léry's account—why did his original readers believe him? Why do we still view his illustrations and others like it as 'scientific,' without artifice, completely objective?

Before addressing these issues, let me note that I have used the words 'nation' and 'people' intentionally. The modern concept of 'race' is applied completely anachronistically to this period. As a category, racial thinking emerged fully only in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> In sixteenth-century Europe, the unity of all humankind was explained by our common descent from Adam and Eve. There was no abstract concept of or word for 'race' in the sense of black or white, caucasian, negroid, oriental, and so forth. The sixteenth-century choices were different from our own: either the Tupi people were members of the human race, descended from wandering Ham or the lost tribes of Israel, or they were humanoids—that is, they were human in form only, lacking the distinctive rational powers that distinguish people from brutes (to use period language again).<sup>21</sup> Since de Léry addressed these very issues with his scientific reportage, it is important to bear in mind that sixteenth-century vernacular terms such as *nazione*, *gente*, *razza* do not correspond to our own categories.

The text I am examining is at the foundation of later habits of classifying people according to their visual appearance. This is an important aspect of my interest in de Léry. But I am getting ahead of the discussion—let me return to the history of his illustrations. Since anthropologists and historians have been the only scholars to examine de Léry's work, it has been doubly awkward to deal with the problems of authorship and authenticity presented by his images, which ideally call for an art historian to review the record.<sup>22</sup> In turning to the problems of attribution—as a way of introducing more significant conceptual issues—let me clarify which illustrations I am talking about. I am not going to discuss the three narrative scenes which were added to subsequent editions, such as one depicting combat between Tupis and the Margaias in the foreground and a cannibalistic barbecue prepared by the victors in the background. No doubt these tried-and-true formulas borrowed from earlier travel accounts, as were the illustrations in the publication by de Léry's arch rival André Thevet were intended to meet public demand, that is, to increase sales.<sup>23</sup>

The illustrations that played an important role in the development of visual ethnography are quite unlike the narrative scenes derived from decorative paintings and manuscript illuminations. There are altogether five images of



Jean de Léry, illustration  
for Chapters 14 and 15 of  
*Histoire d'un voyage fait en  
la terre du Brésil autrement  
dite Amerique*, Geneva,  
1578.



full-length figures engaged in typical daily activities. I would like to discuss the image [38] that illustrates the chapters on war and cannibalism.<sup>24</sup> Two extraordinarily muscular warriors are depicted with their weapons—we see not individual portraits, but two views of a single type, Tupi mannequins who display how their instruments of war function—how the bow is drawn, how well the combatants' physiques are developed to make it work. No violence. The reference to cannibalism is suppressed, but not excluded altogether, since the head on the ground, conveniently cut off at the neck by the frame, refers discreetly to the dismemberment described elsewhere in the text, in the following unillustrated chapter on ceremonies of war, which precedes the chapter on religious rites.

Even today, ethnographic illustrations based on the format de Léry developed are considered 'neutral,' which is, as I hope to demonstrate, far from the case.<sup>25</sup> The pictorial conventions that we have been observing—iconic, sculpturally conceived figures, modeled in light and shadow, with only a bare indication of setting, are presented along with clear, conceptual contrasts—by which I mean the deliberate juxtaposition of subordinate features such as one head in frontal view next to the side view; or the juxtaposition of a pineapple in the foreground with a hammock in the background. Without other distracting elements (and in the case of the pineapple, with sufficient knowledge of Aristotle to recognize the rudimentary comparison of the products of nature and man), the visual juxtapositions can be 'read out' of the image as a conceptual contrast.<sup>26</sup> De Léry's organization of the picture on this methodological level is striking. His visual syntax allows the image to function in close correlation with the literary text. Clear visual juxtapositions direct the viewer to draw specific comparisons.

The visual antitheses in de Léry's illustrations mirror more complicated contrasts described in the text. A dialectic between image and text reinforces certain habits of conceptualization. For example, when de Léry describes the Tupinamba warrior, he treats his human subject as if it were a plant or animal—something you might see in real life or in a zoological or botanical text, but not a portrait of an individual, not a real person to engage in conversation. De Léry explains, moreover, that he has constructed this visual reference with specific contrasting elements for the reader's benefit, so that one can connect the appearance of the Tupi warrior (and, I might add, trigger one's memory) with the author's discussion of a nonvisual topic, namely the ritual context in which cannibalism is practiced among the Tupi people. The visual substitution of body decor for war activities makes the subject more attractive and less threatening—as de Certeau says, it turns the Tupis into the object of the viewer's pleasure—while the emotionally charged topic of Tupi anthropophagy is cut up and dispersed throughout the body of de Léry's work. We might say that the author's textual practice reproduces the ritual dissection and reassimilation of the fragmented subject into a new body, namely the ethnographic text. In the chapter under discussion, the subject of cannibalism is occluded under the neutral category of 'life and manners,' subcategory 'dress,' that de Léry inherited ultimately from Herodotus. De Léry avoids a sensationalist presentation and writes with scientific detachment:

As for those who have committed these murders, they think that it is to their great glory and honor; the same day that they have dealt the death blow, they withdraw and have incisions made, to the point of drawing blood, on their chests, thighs, the thick part of their legs, and other parts of the body. And so that it may be visible all their lives, they rub these slits with certain mixtures and with a black powder that cannot ever be effaced. The more slashes they carry the more renowned they will be for having killed many prisoners, and they are consequently esteemed the more valiant by others. (So that you can understand this more clearly, I have repeated the illustration of the savage covered with slashes, next to whom there is another one drawing a bow.)<sup>27</sup>

It is impossible to say whether de Léry saw the same correlations between his authorial activities and the subject of his study that we might construe in terms of the continuity between literal and literary ‘cannibalism.’ We can be certain, however, that he consciously manipulated his discourse in numerous ways that I would now like to consider more fully. As we have already observed, he controls the reader’s reading by illustrating some passages and not others, thus directing attention (and memory) to certain topics and certain thematic connections over others. With this skillful play of word and image in mind, let us first examine the immediate sources for de Léry’s illustrations. No direct studies for the five woodcuts survive, but part of their history can be pieced together from extant copies of watercolors by the Huguenot artist Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues. Some of Le Moyne’s studies survive second hand, in copies made by the English watercolorist John White when Le Moyne was in England from 1572 until his death in 1588.<sup>28</sup> Both Le Moyne and White were trained artists who accompanied early explorers and afterwards worked for Theodor de Bry, a Frankfurt printmaker who, beginning in 1588, published lavishly illustrated accounts of European explorations. We might think of his *Great Voyages* as *Life* magazines or *National Geographic*s of the early modern period. De Bry engraved drawings by both White and Le Moyne. Some of these illustrations accompanied his new edition of de Léry’s *Voyage*.<sup>29</sup>

Various solutions have been proposed to account for the relationship among the images produced by de Léry, Le Moyne, White, and de Bry. Based on the surviving visual evidence and documentation, a straightforward explanation would be the following. Le Moyne’s drawings, known through White’s copies, must either be studies for the woodcuts or copies after them. Discrepancies between the woodcuts and the watercolors rule out the possibility that Le Moyne depended on the published illustrations, as is often assumed.<sup>30</sup> Revisions were made to conform with de Léry’s text. The visual evidence strongly suggests that Le Moyne’s watercolors were preparatory studies. Even though no direct link has ever been established between Le Moyne and de Léry, they must have come into direct contact through their Huguenot involvements.

Regardless of the complex problems of authorship, in the present context what really matters is that the illustrations were *and still are* accorded a kind of veracity, as if they were direct evidence of de Léry’s firsthand experience with the Tupinamba. Yet the visual formulas are indebted to costume book illustrations. A considerable number of sixteenth-century publications were devoted to this topic. An innovative example would be the illustrations in one of the most lavish collections of manners and customs of the period, Braun and Hogenberg’s *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*.<sup>31</sup> Sixteenth-century European

audiences learned about voyages of discovery and conquest through the publication of sumptuous illustrated atlases organized by 'nation' or 'people.' These 'cosmographies,' as they were often called, filtered information through long-established categories in the manuscript tradition of Herodotus, Pliny, Solinus, Isidore of Seville, Bartolomaeus Anglicus, and their printed counterparts beginning with the *Nuremberg Chronicle*.<sup>32</sup> One reason for the continued popularity and credibility of this textual tradition must have been its flexibility—that is, due to the nature of the genre, pictorial encyclopedias were continually assimilating new information. Printing technology encouraged the constant development of novel visual models to attract a broad readership. Although the scale of de Léry's *Voyage* is modest judged against the most elaborate illustrated cultural geographies, his innovations were part of this new market for popular culture.

In comparison with White's watercolors, the figures in the printed edition of de Léry's *Voyage* are more muscular, the compositions are more compressed, the empty page is closed in around the figures. These formal elements, along with a sophisticated engraving technique employing multiple kinds of cross-hatching to give the sculpturally conceived figures strong relief, the artist's command of anatomy, the energetic contours and daring foreshortening of his figures, all indicate that (an)other professional artist(s) played a role in the production process after Le Moyne. A professional engraver and a trained artist must have been responsible for the bold graphic designs of the final composition. De Léry's education only prepared him for the ministry. Yet he claimed to be responsible for the images—'speaking out of my own knowledge, that is, my own seeing and experience'—in a different sense from our modern understanding of artistic authority. The sixteenth-century idea that the patron of the work is its author encouraged de Léry to use a rhetorical technique as old as John Mandeville's account of dogheaded people and other monsters that de Léry actively sought to discredit.<sup>33</sup> The difference in de Léry's appeal to experience is that no one questioned the veracity of his images, not even modern revisionist writers like de Certeau who have studied the expository conventions of his writing.

### Anatomy of a Text

To better understand the rhetorical power of de Léry's scientific prose and pictorial presentation, I would now like to introduce another source, or rather context, for de Léry's designs, one that no anthropologist or historian has yet investigated. I would like to suggest that de Léry's presentation of the Tupinamba culture was indebted and to some extent perhaps even directed to ongoing debates about scientific method.<sup>34</sup> Aristotle and the second-century medical authority Galen were the most important textual authorities in these widespread discussions, which often took the form of polemical arguments published in commentaries or prefaces to other works. The greatest development of method took place within the medical tradition, which was the focus of considerable controversy.

De Léry's presentation, consistent with his theological views, is in the spirit of Galen's method to combine theoretical knowledge with direct experience. His precedents included Protestant reformers like the Lutheran



Philip Melanchthon, who advocated a linear method of mathematical proof and specifically recommended the ‘anatomical method’ of considering each subject according to the ten Aristotelian categories, proceeding by the analysis of phenomena into their parts and the examination of their interrelated function.<sup>35</sup> Andreas Vesalius’s revolutionary anatomy text, entitled *De humani corporis fabrica*, and its companion volume, the *Epitome*, both published in Basel in 1543, arguably contain the most famous anatomical illustrations in all of medical history.<sup>36</sup> Vesalius provided de Léry with a compelling scientific model of illustration in the analytical mode. The rhetorical effectiveness of the *Fabrica* rests on the same equation as de Léry’s between the author’s direct experience and its artificial analogue in the visual presentation.<sup>37</sup> Vesalius, also like de Léry, claimed that he drew his own images directly from nature but actually employed professional artists working in a classicizing Renaissance style who were trained in the modern sciences of anatomy and optics, and were familiar with ancient theories of human proportion.

Even beyond these extensive similarities in aim and procedure, Vesalius’s flayed muscle men provided de Léry with convincing visual prototypes for illustrating his text [39]. Perhaps we could cautiously suggest that Vesalius’s illustrations even conditioned the terms in which de Léry described the Tupinamba—their classicizing but excessively developed musculature, their bold but strange rhetorical gestures, the patterns incised in their skins, filled with black powder and worn as the sole body adornment, the representation of fragments—mimic the most characteristic and cherished qualities of the Vesalian muscle men: the overt references to classical sculpture appreciated in its modern decay; the humorous device of presenting a cadaver as a speaking, moving figure; the technique of modeling the forms with parallel lines of hatching and bold simplifications of the main lines of musculature.

I do not wish to argue, however, that de Léry’s illustrations are indebted to Vesalius only for their convincing visual formulas or references to ancient sculpture. Vesalius’s *Fabrica* and *Epitome* coordinate word and image in a minutely methodological sequence.<sup>38</sup> Vesalius balanced visual economy with anatomical completeness so that his reader could experience the procedure of dissection through the illustrations as if he were an eyewitness. The illustrations generally follow a linear method of demonstration from superficial to deep structures, but with sufficient complexity to incorporate visual comparisons, didactic devices to guide the student through the verbal, critical commentary. As Martin Kemp has discovered, sometimes Vesalius included details referring to the authority he disputes and sometimes he synthesized multiple dissections in a single image.<sup>39</sup> In other words, Vesalius’s images, like de Léry’s, function in an artificially constructed dialectical relationship with his verbal descriptions, masquerading under the sign of the natural. Reprinted in a revised and enlarged edition in 1555, plagiarized by a wide variety of authors who quickly disseminated Vesalius’s ideas into English, French, German, and Spanish, there is no chance that the illustrated anatomical method of Vesalius was unknown to de Léry.

The unusual circumstances that led de Léry to publish his account have been told many times.<sup>40</sup> A brief recapitulation at this juncture will clarify the specific historical context in which his appropriation of anatomical demonstration arose. De Léry trained for the ministry with Calvin in Geneva, from



where he was summoned in 1556 by Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, a Huguenot sympathizer, and Nicolas Durant de Villegagnon to establish a reformed refuge and mission in Brazil. Villegagnon also engaged as his chaplain the Franciscan friar and Royal Cosmographer André Thevet. Such bitter disputes broke out between the Calvinist and Catholic factions in Brazil that de Léry sought shelter with the Tupinamba while he waited for a ship to take him home in 1558. The bitter dispute continued in Europe, where the main participants published rival accounts of the conflict between the Catholic and Huguenot missionaries and the Tupinamba. De Léry first drafted his in Geneva in 1563 but, due to his involvement in the Huguenot resistance, it did not appear in print until 1578.

De Léry's preface is written in a polemical style entirely different from the scientific exposition of the rest of his text. This shift in expository techniques should alert us to his sensitivity to different modes of argumentation. In the extended preface to the 1585 edition, de Léry contrasts Thevet's '*paradigme cosmographique*,' with its false representations and geographical errors, its rhetorical figures that are 'more appropriate to paintings and other metallic things that can be engraved and decorated artistically,' with his own authentic report of what he has seen with his own eyes.<sup>41</sup> In the context of the present discussion of the unity of text and image in de Léry's discourse on the Tupinamba, and considering the care that he put into the production and description of his scientific illustrations, it is significant that he used an example of pictorial seductiveness to criticize Thevet's rhetorical method of argumentation. On the contrary, de Léry's own dissection of the evidence is grounded in Aristotelian methods of scientific demonstration, with its clear definition of the subject and subordinate sets of comparisons and contrasts. In keeping with these scientific underpinnings, his criticism of Thevet points away from the value of optical naturalism *per se*: a text can be embellished with superficial luster, but praiseworthy *elocutio* also has substance, because it is the manifestation of scientific method.

In conclusion, to emphasize why it is so important to recognize the rhetorical strategy of de Léry's scientific presentation—why the persuasive power of word and image in framing the ethnographic subject is of such great historical significance—I would like to refer his illustrations to the general context of printed images produced by Reformation writers. There is no room to develop this discussion here, but perhaps I can briefly indicate a productive direction for further investigation. Ambiguities circulating within de Léry's text—internal contradictions that I have characterized as rooted in tension between rhetorical and scientific modes of discourse—point to even greater ambiguities experienced by his readership. The strange French experiment in Rio de Janeiro that brought Catholics and Huguenots to blows 350 years before Lévi-Strauss disembarked in his tropical paradise was a tempest in a teapot compared to religious conflicts brewing in Europe. Both Reformation and Catholic factions used the Tupinamba and other Native American societies to make points about the religious opposition, and these complicated political allusions introduced a great deal of ambiguity into the new, ostensibly secular iconography.<sup>42</sup> Current scholarly debate over the reception of Reformation broadsheets indicates how difficult it is to interpret the so-called popular imagery.<sup>43</sup>

The politics of Reformation images are important to bear in mind, however, because de Léry was himself a Calvinist minister who, only two years before *History of a Voyage* appeared, published a scientific, descriptive account of the devastating siege of Sancerre, in which he participated.<sup>44</sup> The earlier publication confirms de Léry's commitment to peaceful resistance and also suggests that his representation of the Tupinamba conceals an ironic dimension. As de Léry himself notes in his account of the famine he endured in the besieged city following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the Tubinambas' programed, ritual practice of war and cannibalism is a striking contrast to arbitrary acts of savage cannibalism and mob violence associated with the ongoing European religious conflicts.<sup>45</sup> Judging from the brief observations on the Tupinamba in the Sancerre volume, it is likely that de Léry also intended to provide his readers with a hortatory example in his extended, second account of Brazilian society. Most significantly for the modern discipline of anthropology, his implicit comparison between good Brazilian savages and bad European civilians, while it ennoble the savage, it also assigns the Tupinamba to an inferior position in the social and intellectual hierarchy—the equation is between all Indians (regardless of the actual structure of their own society) and all unruly peasants and artisans. In other words, a diametric contrast issuing from the double inversion of a negative stereotype endowed both Indians and Peasants with the attributes of a generalized category of humanity and relegated them both to an inferior position in society. Even in de Léry's verbal descriptions the pictorial dominates; and in the case of his *History of a Voyage*, as we have already seen in the comparison with Vesalius, he treats the image as primary evidence. The relations of power are embodied in his illustrations in conjunction with his text.

This chapter, unlike most of the contributions to this volume, stages an argument for the importance of understanding the construction of 'modernism' that *preceded* the modern period. In opening the discussion with Warburg's problematic study of Hopi ritual, I wanted to plant a suggestion in readers' minds about the manner in which de Léry's rhetorical strategies continue to be reproduced in current disciplinary practices. The conjunction of word and image on the cover of the Warburg Institute's recent republication of Warburg's American photographs powerfully illustrates this phenomenon in play. In the book itself the title *Photographs at the Frontier* is superimposed directly on top of that (in)famous shot of the young Warburg pretending to be a cowboy, posing with a Hopi dancer whose ceremonial dress and body-paint, although 'authentic' in themselves, fictionalize his identity for most viewers. That is, for most contemporary as well as historical viewers—familiar with popular culture stereotypes of Indians but not with actual Hopi life-ways—such attire (mis)identifies the dancer as an Indian 'warrior.' As should now be clear from the foregoing discussion, the objectifying ethnographic frame of reference in the original photograph was conveyed visually through conventions of pose, framing, and costume. As a contemporary dust jacket, the photograph-cum-caption replays the same silent rhetorical strategies as operate in de Léry's book with a self-reflexive irony that is, nonetheless, incapable of divesting its former colonial ideology.

The *intended* irony of the dust jacket, conveyed by the superimposed title *qua* caption, is that Warburg's progressive ideas defined the frontier of a new

field of study. An additional, presumably unintended, metacritical effect of the words-with-photographic image, however, reiterates (and wordlessly condones) the former colonial frame of reference: for, in effect, the dust jacket conveys that the American subject matter in which Warburg pioneered his theoretical contribution to art history is still marginal to the field of art history. The American Southwest once was Europe's as well as art history's 'frontier,' but from a contemporary perspective this can no longer legitimately be the case. We live and work in a global network of social, political, and economic relationships—and uneven though the field of social production is from an economic point of view, there is no universally recognized set of ontological priorities operating within it. On the dust jacket, however, there is only room for Warburg and his unnamed companion to celebrate the Euro-American Wildwest fantasy while referring to Warburg's actual trip. The current, politically sensitive status of any Pueblo image of an esoteric, private ceremony—much less one that shows a katsina dancer without his mask—is denied any other status than that of 'Other.'

At a more general level, then, what I hope my study has done is articulate a major problem inherent in every center/periphery model of art history, because, in fact, the structure itself unavoidably reiterates the historical relations of power that its critical reemployments attempt to dismantle.

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# Mechanisms of Meaning

## Introduction

The problem of what and how and for whom artefacts such as works of art are significant remains an enduring question underlying all approaches to art history as an academic discipline. The most enduring disciplinary debates during the growth and international expansion of academic art history throughout the twentieth century, echoing comparable controversies in other academic fields, centred upon the extent of information required to render its objects of interest adequately meaningful. Where and when does a *properly art historical* interest (assuming it really does exist in the first place) actually begin or end? When and under what conditions (and for whom) is the analysis of an artwork adequate or sufficient? And is the domain of interest of an academic field such as art history fixed or fluid? Exactly how is the latter dependent upon what are regarded as properly artistic entities or artefacts? Is art history a 'what' or a 'when'? Does an observer or analyst work *art historically* only under certain (methodological) conditions, following accepted routines of analysis and attention? Or are any such routines or methods more or less circumstantial, defined in relation to the (obviously vastly different) kinds of objects potentially available for attention?

It will become evident quite quickly that any of these questions implies for its answers positions taken on any or all of the others. The question of what an artefact means, signifies, or represents is invariably a function of the uses to which such knowledge can or may be put by differently interested parties. Which itself raises the more general issues of what *art historical* knowledge is (whether it is a *kind* of knowing or a *way of approaching* potentially any thing), and whom it may or may not benefit. What are the obligations and responsibilities of the art historian or critic with regard to objects considered of aesthetic or art historical interest where the producers and users of such objects view them as essentially religious or spiritual in nature and function, and deem academic interest in or use of the 'same' objects as constituting illegal access to privileged knowledge, or as blasphemous? The case of Aby Warburg discussed above by Farago is only one obvious case in point, but more generally there are situations where even what might be imagined as disinterested 'interpretation' (or even representation itself) may be construed by sectarian groups as blasphemous and potentially punishable by death. Again (however indistinctly or indirectly), such questions immediately conjure up problems of a philosophical, ethical, political, cultural, social, commercial, or theological nature.

All of which raises the following more general problem; one that goes to the heart of the identity, nature, and extent of art history as such: what becomes of a discipline ostensibly founded upon a vision of the universality of 'art'—art as a pan-human phenomenon shared by any and all peoples—in the face of fundamental disagreements regarding the nature, function, and uses of objects or artefacts as such? Can an academic field be securely grounded in a universal *aestheticizing* (and in the contemporary world the universal *commodifying*) of any and all objects as artistic, whether or not intended as such? Which also raises the problem of the potential mismatch between the 'intentions' of those making and using artefacts (where those might be commensurate) and the products of a person or people, taken as aesthetic or artistic objects, whether intended as such or not. Such differences concern the entire history of art historical and museological practice over the past several centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Previous readings and discussions have focused primarily (albeit not exclusively) on *what* artworks have been taken to signify. By and large, the emphasis has been on the oscillations between formalist and contextualist interpretations of works of art. Beginning with this and the next chapter, the focus shifts by adding to that 'what' the 'how' of the ways artefacts have been understood as meaning: the processes or mechanisms of signifying or representing. Art history, in short, as system of meaning production—what might be termed an 'epistemological technology'. The selections in this chapter include exemplary and theoretically and methodologically important readings which foreground the interpretative processes in art historical practice.

Oscillations between formalist and contextualist views on the adequacy of information required for interpretation characterized art historical debate in the twentieth century no less than in the eighteenth and nineteenth, even if the specific meanings of form, content, and context have altered substantially at different times and places. The formalism of 1920s Marxist Formalism was radically different from the formalism of Wölfflin, the latter decried in the 1930s by Walter Benjamin in his defence of Alois Riegl, who today might be taken as virtually indistinguishable from Wölfflin in his 'formalism'.<sup>2</sup> Part of Benjamin's motivation for attacking Wölfflin's formalist art history was the latter's failure to escape a 'sentimentalist' vision of artistic interpretation, despite the apparent rigour of his formal method. By contrast, Riegl's formalist methodology allowed for a vision of a larger social collective (the *Kunstwollen*) which was more congenial to Benjamin's own enterprise of social and cultural critique. If aesthetic philosophy signalled for an eighteenth-century bourgeoisie a reaction to absolutist politics, dogmatic religionism, and mechanistic rationalism, in contemporary terms it might for some constitute a radical (if impotent) disturbance of the increasing bureaucratization of culture by hegemonic institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Such complexities render the vision of a unilinear and progressive evolution of the discipline of art history extremely problematic, and may foreground what is often obscured in these debates—the disciplinary impulse to see as commensurate the history of artistic practice and the history of art history as an artefact in its own right. What was and is at stake here is visions

of history itself, of which art history has been seen as a particular instance. Is or was art history itself an art?

For some, an understanding of an object's formal and material properties, and the manner in which such properties might change over time in chronological sequences of like objects, have constituted sufficiently relevant information. The formal transformations of the properties or features seen in artworks have for some historians and critics provided by structural analogy certain essential insights into the nature of a culture, people, place, or period. In such cases, the genealogy of forms constituted a representation or simulation of a genealogy of character, mentality, or 'spirit' either of an individual artist or of an entire society, class, ethnic group, nationality, or even a 'race'. For others, criteria of adequacy in interpretation swung to what might appear an opposite pole wherein the formal features of objects were of secondary or ancillary importance relative to circumstantial or 'contextual' factors of production and construal.<sup>4</sup>

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, debates about the nature of visual signification were marked by a series of generational differences, especially as regards the relations between iconography and semiology. The former, articulated by one of the members of Aby Warburg's circle in the 1920s, Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968), appeared to some as a variant of the ancient semiological tradition in Western philosophy, (re)emerging in Europe in various fields following the Second World War (especially in the immediate post-war period in art and architectural theory and practice), and in academic art history more intensively in the 1970s, with the anglophone interest in continental philosophy. In fact, investigations of the 'mechanisms of meaning' under the name of semiology or semiotics (visual, verbal, and otherwise) have a very long history in Western philosophy, theology, philology, and anthropology.<sup>5</sup>

Erwin Panofsky's essay 'Iconography and Iconology' excerpted here was originally published in 1939 as the introduction to his book *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 1939). It was a revision of an essay published in Germany in 1932, the year before Panofsky migrated to the USA. Panofsky was concerned with the meaning, subject matter, or content of works of art, in reaction to what he and his associates in the early decades of the twentieth century (including art historians Aby Warburg, Fritz Saxl, and historian and philosopher Ernst Cassirer) perceived as too great a preoccupation with the formal qualities of objects (in their view the 'formalist' work of Wölfflin and Riegl). The disciplinary opposition between 'form and meaning' was treated in Panofsky's methodological hypotheses not as oppositional but rather as continuous, and as complex and multilayered. His aim was to render less impressionistic and naturalistic, and also considerably more complex, the processes of signification or meaning construction, suggesting an ideal set of procedures we commonly undertake in attributing meaningfulness to objects. Meaning is layered because our knowledge of the world is itself a process of apprehension that unfolds over time. Even if that time factor is near instantaneous, the steps to understanding corresponded, for Panofsky, to different modes or forms of knowledge. These modes of knowledge, he argued, presuppose historical experience: an understanding

of the history of styles; the history of types (the kinds of themes or concepts commonly expressed by objects of certain styles); and the history of cultural symbols (the kinds of 'underlying essential tendencies' of the human mind expressed by certain forms and styles, within a given culture at a certain time and place).

This tripartite system of signification established a nested set of meanings, each incorporating or presupposing the other, the apprehension of each calling for specific, distinct kinds of knowledge. For Panofsky, reflecting common psychological theories of his time, these consisted of the knowledge of objects (practical experience), knowledge of texts (familiarity with themes and concepts), and a form of knowing he termed 'synthetic intuition', or the familiarity with the 'essential tendencies' of the human mind, as realized within the frameworks and constraints of a given culture and society at a particular time. Interpretation at the first or primary 'level' he termed *pre-iconographical* description, the second *iconography* proper, and the third and 'deepest' level *iconology*.

Panofsky's hypothetical methodology was in one sense the *antithesis* of those of Riegl or Wölfflin, in effect deconstructing the idea of 'form as such', virtually everything of interest to the art historian now being assimilated into one or another aspect of subject matter or 'content'. Developed in relationship to certain kinds of early modern Western figurative art, particularly medieval and Renaissance painting with religious, political, and classical subject matter, Panofsky's 'iconographic analysis' became a method for correlating visual imagery with other (principally textual) cultural information that would be pertinent to the proper reading of traditional imagery. It was seen by some, because of its generality and seemingly neutral technical nature, to provide a useful methodological framework for analysing certain forms of non-Western figurative art as well. Taken out of the specific role-related position it occupied relative to other levels of analysis, 'iconography' came after the Second World War to be a generic term for the study of visual subject matter, guided by an assumption that every image 'contained' a certain amount of hidden or 'symbolic' matter that could be elicited by a close reading of the image and some knowledge of the referential context of the work.

Although 'iconography' flourished in academic art history principally in the 1950s and 1960s, the term has since come to be used to refer more generically to the art historical study of visual imagery in contrast on the one hand to more strictly 'formal or material analyses and on the other to more fully 'contextual' analyses (including, especially, 'social-historical' interpretation), both of which were also articulated as 'stages' in the analysis of an object—analysis presumably reaching a degree of closure or completion with an interlinked account of these different 'levels' of analysis. Such a paradigm remained a sanctioned academic enterprise for a whole generation of writers of university theses and doctoral dissertations, particularly in the USA in the latter third of the twentieth century, even in the midst of academic debates and controversies over newer theories and methods affecting a wide variety of disciplines.

For some art historians, Panofskian iconography and iconology came to be seen in the 1960s and 1970s as an idiosyncratic pre-war precursor to

a more explicit engagement in the field with the development of a visual or art historical semiotics linked to a wider interest in signification and the structure of sign systems in a variety of fields.<sup>6</sup> The next reading, a 1975 essay by French art historian Hubert Damisch entitled ‘Semiotics and Iconography’, addresses the question of similarities and contrasts between modern (Panofskian) iconology and semiology, published at a time when art historical interest in semiology—reflecting that in many other fields—was burgeoning, although (apart from writings on architecture) little art historical writing on the subject was then widely available.<sup>7</sup> The following essay, by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, was published a decade and a half later in 1991, in the official house organ of the US College Art Association, the *Art Bulletin*, as one of a series of commissioned essays designed to introduce its audience to ‘new perspectives’ that had been affecting disciplinary practice over the previous couple of decades. Each of the commissioned ‘perspectives’ was staged as if they were distinct (new) subjects (semiotics, politics, gender, etc.) and overlaps between what the editorial board had determined in advance should be distinct were not permitted.<sup>8</sup>

The contrasts between the two essays are instructive, and their juxtaposition here will highlight the differences in the authors’ perceptions of semiology and of various theses treating works of art as visual sign systems linked to other social systems of signification. They also foreground the differences in their implied audiences: for Damisch, an interdisciplinary audience of semioticians; for Bal and Bryson, a professional art historical audience who might welcome a serious investigation of the potential usefulness of semiotic theories for disciplinary practice. In the excerpted reading here, they address the blatant hostility of (largely uniquely American) art historians in the 1980s to various facets of contemporary ‘critical theory’, which had become an umbrella term for gender studies, semiology, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and reception theory, and deconstruction.

The final essay in this chapter is the most recent: published a dozen years after the Bal and Bryson text by Stephen Bann (2003), it provides important clarifications about Panofsky’s project, its historical motivations, its relationships with semiology, and its potential positive and negative effects upon art historical practice. Bann’s lucid explication of the wider social and cultural consequences of attending carefully to the iconographic and semiological aspects of painting in the Western tradition suggests that Panofsky’s conceptually seductive model of a distinct series of interpretative stages from the ‘pre-iconographic’ to the ‘iconological’ is ultimately dependent upon a very particular notion of the artist–producer embedded in historically contingent and culturally specific early modern Western practices, problematizing their applicability beyond the horizon of those practices. The essay has broader cautionary implications for current debates about the possibility of constructing a more ‘globalized’ art history, bringing the latter into serious question, as indicated from a variety of perspectives in the final chapter of this book.



# Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art

1 Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form. Let us, then, try to define the distinction between subject matter or meaning on the one hand, and form on the other.

When an acquaintance greets me on the street by lifting his hat, what I see from a formal point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of color, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an object (gentleman), and the change of detail as an event (hat-lifting), I have already over-stepped the limits of purely formal perception and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning. The meaning thus perceived is of an elementary and easily understandable nature, and we shall call it the factual meaning; it is apprehended by simply identifying certain visible forms with certain objects known to me from practical experience, and by identifying the change in their relations with certain actions or events.

Now the objects and events thus identified will naturally produce a certain reaction within myself. From the way my acquaintance performs his action I may be able to sense whether he is in a good or bad humor, and whether his feelings towards me are indifferent, friendly or hostile. These psychological nuances will invest the gestures of my acquaintance with a further meaning which we shall call expressional. It differs from the factual one in that it is apprehended, not by simple identification, but by 'empathy.' To understand it, I need a certain sensitivity, but this sensitivity is still part of my practical experience, that is, of my everyday familiarity with objects and events. Therefore both the factual and the expressional meaning may be classified together: they constitute the class of primary or natural meanings.

However, my realization that the lifting of the hat stands for a greeting belongs in an altogether different realm of interpretation. This form of salute is peculiar to the Western world and is a residue of mediaeval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful intentions of others. Neither an Australian bushman nor an ancient Greek could be expected to realize that the lifting of a hat is not only a practical event with certain expressional connotations, but also a sign of politeness. To understand this significance of the gentleman's action I must not only be familiar with the practical world of objects

and events, but also with the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization. Conversely, my acquaintance could not feel impelled to greet me by lifting his hat were he not conscious of the significance of this act. As for the expressional connotations which accompany his action, he may or may not be conscious of them. Therefore, when I interpret the lifting of a hat as a polite greeting, I recognize in it a meaning which may be called secondary or conventional; it differs from the primary or natural one in that it is intelligible instead of being sensible, and in that it has been consciously imparted to the practical action by which it is conveyed.

And finally: besides constituting a natural event in space and time, besides naturally indicating moods or feelings, besides conveying a conventional greeting, the action of my acquaintance can reveal to an experienced observer all that goes to make up his 'personality.' This personality is conditioned by his being a man of the twentieth century, by his national, social and educational background, by the previous history of his life and by his present surroundings; but it is also distinguished by an individual manner of viewing things and reacting to the world which, if rationalized, would have to be called a philosophy. In the isolated action of a polite greeting all these factors do not manifest themselves comprehensively, but nevertheless symptomatically. We could not construct a mental portrait of the man on the basis of this single action, but only by co-ordinating a large number of similar observations and by interpreting them in connection with our general information as to his period, nationality, class, intellectual traditions and so forth. Yet all the qualities which this mental portrait would show explicitly are implicitly inherent in every single action; so that, conversely, every single action can be interpreted in the light of those qualities.

The meaning thus discovered may be called the intrinsic meaning or content; it is essential where the two other kinds of meaning, the primary or natural and the secondary or conventional, are phenomenal. It may be defined as a unifying principle which underlies and explains both the visible event and its intelligible significance, and which determines even the form in which the visible event takes shape. This intrinsic meaning or content is, normally, as much above the sphere of conscious volition as the expressional meaning is beneath this sphere.

Transferring the results of this analysis from everyday life to a work of art, we can distinguish in its subject matter or meaning the same three strata:

1. *Primary or natural subject matter*, subdivided into *factual* and *expressional*. It is apprehended by identifying pure forms, that is: certain configurations of line and color, or certain peculiarly shaped lumps of bronze or stone, as representations of natural objects such as human beings, animals, plants, houses, tools and so forth; by identifying their mutual relations as events; and by perceiving such expressional qualities as the mournful character of a pose or gesture, or the homelike and peaceful atmosphere of an interior. The world of pure forms thus recognized as carriers of primary or natural meanings may be called the world of artistic motifs. An enumeration of these motifs would be a pre-iconographical description of the work of art.

2. *Secondary or conventional subject matter*. It is apprehended by realizing that a male figure with a knife represents St. Bartholomew, that a female

figure with a peach in her hand is a personification of veracity, that a group of figures seated at a dinner table in a certain arrangement and in certain poses represents the Last Supper, or that two figures fighting each other in a certain manner represent the Combat of Vice and Virtue. In doing this we connect artistic motifs and combinations of artistic motifs (compositions) with themes or concepts. Motifs thus recognized as carriers of a secondary or conventional meaning may be called images, and combinations of images are what the ancient theorists of art called *invenzioni*; we are wont to call them stories and allegories.<sup>1</sup> The identification of such images, stories and allegories is the domain of what is normally referred to as 'iconography.' In fact, when we loosely speak of 'subject matter as opposed to form,' we chiefly mean the sphere of secondary or conventional subject matter, viz., the world of specific themes or concepts manifested in images, stories and allegories, as opposed to the sphere of primary or natural subject matter manifested in artistic motifs. 'Formal analysis' in Wölfflin's sense is largely an analysis of motifs and combinations of motifs (compositions); for a formal analysis in the strict sense of the word would even have to avoid such expressions as 'man,' 'horse,' or 'column,' let alone such evaluations as 'the ugly triangle between the legs of Michelangelo's David' or 'the admirable clarification of the joints in a human body.' It is obvious that a correct iconographical analysis presupposes a correct identification of the motifs. If the knife that enables us to identify a St. Bartholomew is not a knife but a corkscrew, the figure is not a St. Bartholomew. Furthermore, it is important to note that the statement 'this figure is an image of St. Bartholomew' implies the conscious intention of the artist to represent St. Bartholomew, while the expressional qualities of the figure may well be unintentional.

3. *Intrinsic meaning or content.* It is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—qualified by one personality and condensed into one work. Needless to say, these principles are manifested by, and therefore throw light on, both 'compositional methods' and 'iconographical significance.' In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for instance (the earliest examples can be dated around 1300), the traditional type of the Nativity with the Virgin Mary reclining in bed or on a couch was frequently replaced by a new one which shows the Virgin kneeling before the Child in adoration. From a compositional point of view this change means, roughly speaking, the substitution of a triangular scheme for a rectangular one; from an iconographical point of view, it means the introduction of a new theme to be formulated in writing by such authors as Pseudo-Bonaventure and St. Bridget. But at the same time it reveals a new emotional attitude peculiar to the later phases of the Middle Ages. A really exhaustive interpretation of the intrinsic meaning or content might even show that the technical procedures characteristic of a certain country, period, or artist, for instance Michelangelo's preference for sculpture in stone instead of in bronze, or the peculiar use of hatchings in his drawings, are symptomatic of the same basic attitude that is discernible in all the other specific qualities of his style. In thus conceiving of pure forms, motifs, images, stories and allegories as manifestations of underlying principles, we interpret all these elements as what Ernst Cassirer has called 'symbolical' values. As long as we limit ourselves to stat-

ing that Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco shows a group of thirteen men around a dinner table, and that this group of men represents the Last Supper, we deal with the work of art as such, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as its own properties or qualifications. But *when we try to understand it as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more particularized evidence of this 'something else.'* The discovery and interpretation of these 'symbolical' values (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call 'iconology' as opposed to 'iconography.'

[The suffix 'graphy' derives from the Greek verb *graphein*, 'to write'; it implies a purely descriptive, often even statistical, method of procedure. Iconography is, therefore, a description and classification of images much as ethnography is a description and classification of human races: it is a limited and, as it were, ancillary study which informs us as to when and where specific themes were visualized by which specific motifs. It tells us when and where the crucified Christ was draped with a loincloth or clad in a long garment; when and where He was fastened to the Cross with four nails or with three; how the Virtues and Vices were represented in different centuries and environments. In doing all this, iconography is an invaluable help for the establishment of dates, provenance and, occasionally, authenticity; and it furnishes the necessary basis for all further interpretation. It does not, however, attempt to work out this interpretation for itself. It collects and classifies the evidence but does not consider itself obliged or entitled to investigate the genesis and significance of this evidence: the interplay between the various 'types'; the influence of theological, philosophical or political ideas; the purposes and inclinations of individual artists and patrons; the correlation between intelligible concepts and the visible form which they assume in each specific case. In short, iconography considers only a part of all those elements which enter into the intrinsic content of a work of art and must be made explicit if the perception of this content is to become articulate and communicable.

[It is because of these severe restrictions which common usage, especially in this country, places upon the term 'iconography' that I propose to revive the good old word 'iconology' wherever iconography is taken out of its isolation and integrated with whichever other method, historical, psychological or critical, we may attempt to use in solving the riddle of the sphinx. For as the suffix 'graphy' denotes something descriptive, so does the suffix 'logy'—derived from *logos*, which means 'thought' or 'reason'—denote something interpretative. 'Ethnology,' for instance, is defined as a 'science of human races' by the same *Oxford Dictionary* that defines 'ethnography' as a 'description of human races,' and Webster explicitly warns against a confusion of the two terms inasmuch as 'ethnography is properly restricted to the purely descriptive treatment of peoples and races while ethnology denotes their comparative study.' So I conceive of iconology as an iconography turned interpretative and thus becoming an integral part of the study of art instead of being confined to

the role of a preliminary statistical survey. There is, however, admittedly some danger that iconology will behave, not like ethnology as opposed to ethnography, but like astrology as opposed to astrology.]

Iconology, then, is a method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather than analysis. And as the correct identification of motifs is the prerequisite of their correct iconographical analysis, so is the correct analysis of images, stories and allegories the prerequisite of their correct iconological interpretation—unless we deal with works of art in which the whole sphere of secondary or conventional subject matter is eliminated and a direct transition from motifs to content is effected, as is the case with European landscape painting, still life and genre, not to mention ‘non-objective’ art.

Now, how do we achieve ‘correctness’ in operating on these three levels, pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation?

In the case of a pre-iconographical description, which keeps within the limits of the world of motifs, the matter seems simple enough. The objects and events whose representation by lines, colors and volumes constitutes the world of motifs can be identified, as we have seen, on the basis of our practical experience. Everybody can recognize the shape and behavior of human beings, animals and plants, and everybody can tell an angry face from a jovial one. It is, of course, possible that in a given case the range of our personal experience is not wide enough, for instance when we find ourselves confronted with the representation of an obsolete or unfamiliar tool, or with the representation of a plant or animal unknown to us. In such cases we have to widen the range of our practical experience by consulting a book or an expert; but we do not leave the sphere of practical experience as such, which informs us, needless to say, as to what kind of expert to consult.

Yet even in this sphere we encounter a peculiar problem. Setting aside the fact that the objects, events and expressions depicted in a work of art may be unrecognizable owing to the incompetence or malice aforethought of the artist, it is, on principle, impossible to arrive at a correct pre-iconographical description, or identification of primary subject matter, by indiscriminately applying our practical experience to the work of art. Our practical experience is indispensable, as well as sufficient, as material for a pre-iconographical description, but it does not guarantee its correctness.

A pre-iconographical description of Rogier van der Weyden’s *Three Magi* in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum at Berlin would, of course, have to avoid such terms as ‘Magi,’ ‘Infant Jesus,’ etc. But it would have to mention that the apparition of a small child is seen in the sky. How do we know that this child is meant to be an apparition? That it is surrounded with a halo of golden rays would not be sufficient proof of this assumption, for similar halos can often be observed in representations of the Nativity where the Infant Jesus is real. That the child in Rogier’s picture is meant to be an apparition can only be deduced from the additional fact that he hovers in mid-air. But how do we know that he hovers in mid-air? His pose would be no different were he seated on a pillow on the ground; in fact, it is highly probable that Rogier used for his painting a drawing from life of a child seated on a pillow. The only valid reason for our assumption that the child in the Berlin picture is meant to be an apparition is the fact that he is depicted in space with no visible means of support.

But we can adduce hundreds of representations in which human beings, animals and inanimate objects seem to hang loose in space in violation of the law of gravity, without thereby pretending to be apparitions. For instance, in a miniature in the *Gospels of Otto III* in the Staatsbibliothek of Munich, a whole city is represented in the center of an empty space while the figures taking part in the action stand on solid ground.<sup>2</sup> An inexperienced observer may well assume that the town is meant to be suspended in mid-air by some sort of magic. Yet in this case the lack of support does not imply a miraculous invalidation of the laws of nature. The city is the real city of Nain where the resurrection of the youth took place. In a miniature of around 1000 'empty space' does not count as a real three-dimensional medium, as it does in a more realistic period, but serves as an abstract, unreal background. The curious semicircular shape of what should be the base line of the towers bears witness to the fact that, in the more realistic prototype of our miniature, the town had been situated on a hilly terrain, but was taken over into a representation in which space had ceased to be thought of in terms of perspective realism. Thus, while the unsupported figure in the van der Weyden picture counts as an apparition, the floating city in the Ottonian miniature has no miraculous connotation. These contrasting interpretations are suggested to us by the 'realistic' qualities of the painting and the 'unrealistic' qualities of the miniature. But that we grasp these qualities in the fraction of a second and almost automatically must not induce us to believe that we could ever give a correct pre-iconographical description of a work of art without having divined, as it were, its historical 'locus.' While we believe that we are identifying the motifs on the basis of our practical experience pure and simple, we really are reading 'what we see' according to the manner in which objects and events are expressed by forms under varying historical conditions. In doing this, we subject our practical experience to a corrective principle which may be called the history of style.<sup>3</sup>

Iconographical analysis, dealing with images, stories and allegories instead of with motifs, presupposes, of course, much more than that familiarity with objects and events which we acquire by practical experience. It presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition. Our Australian bushman would be unable to recognize the subject of a Last Supper; to him, it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party. To understand the iconographical meaning of the picture he would have to familiarize himself with the content of the Gospels. When it comes to representations of themes other than Biblical stories or scenes from history and mythology which happen to be known to the average 'educated person,' all of us are Australian bushmen. In such cases we, too, must try to familiarize ourselves with what the authors of those representations had read or otherwise knew. But again, while an acquaintance with specific themes and concepts transmitted through literary sources is indispensable and sufficient material for an iconographical analysis, it does not guarantee its correctness. It is just as impossible for us to give a correct iconographical analysis by indiscriminately applying our literary knowledge to the motifs, as it is for us to give a correct pre-iconographical description by indiscriminately applying our practical experience to the forms.



A picture by the Venetian seventeenth-century painter Francesco Maffei, representing a handsome young woman with a sword in her left hand, and in her right a charger on which rests the head of a beheaded man, has been published as a portrayal of Salome with the head of John the Baptist.<sup>4</sup> In fact the Bible states that the head of St. John the Baptist was brought to Salome on a charger. But what about the sword? Salome did not decapitate St. John the Baptist with her own hands. Now the Bible tells us about another handsome woman in connection with the decapitation of a man, namely Judith. In this case the situation is exactly reversed. The sword in Maffei's picture would be correct because Judith beheaded Holofernes with her own hand, but the charger would not agree with the Judith theme because the text explicitly states that the head of Holofernes was put into a sack. Thus we have two literary sources applicable to our picture with equal right and equal inconsistency. If we should interpret it as a portrayal of Salome the text would account for the charger, but not for the sword; if we should interpret it as a portrayal of Judith the text would account for the sword, but not for the charger. We should be entirely at a loss were we to depend on the literary sources alone. Fortunately we do not. As we could supplement and correct our practical experience by inquiring into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, objects and events were expressed by forms, viz., into the history of style, just so can we supplement and correct our knowledge of literary sources by inquiring into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific themes or concepts were expressed by objects and events, viz., into the history of types.

In the case at hand we shall have to ask whether there were, before Francesco Maffei painted his picture, any unquestionable portrayals of Judith (unquestionable because they would include, for instance, Judith's maid) with unjustified chargers; or any unquestionable portrayals of Salome (unquestionable because they would include, for instance, Salome's parents) with unjustified swords. And lo! while we cannot adduce a single Salome with a sword, we encounter, in Germany and North Italy, several sixteenth-century paintings depicting Judith with a charger;<sup>5</sup> there was a 'type' of 'Judith with a Charger,' but there was no 'type' of 'Salome with a Sword.' From this we can safely conclude that Maffei's picture, too, represents Judith, and not, as had been assumed, Salome.

We may further ask why artists felt entitled to transfer the motif of the charger from Salome to Judith, but not the motif of the sword from Judith to Salome. This question can be answered, again by inquiring into the history of types, with two reasons. One reason is that the sword was an established and honorific attribute of Judith, of many martyrs, and of such virtues as Justice, Fortitude, etc.; thus it could not be transferred with propriety to a lascivious girl. The other reason is that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the charger with the head of St. John the Baptist had become an isolated devotional image (*Andachtsbild*) especially popular in the northern countries and in North Italy; it had been singled out from a representation of the Salome story in much the same way as the group of St. John the Evangelist resting on the bosom of the Lord had come to be singled out from the Last Supper, or the Virgin in childbed from the Nativity. The existence of this devotional

image established a fixed association of ideas between the head of a beheaded man and a charger, and thus the motif of a charger could more easily be substituted for the motif of a sack in an image of Judith, than the motif of a sword could have penetrated into an image of Salome.

Iconological interpretation, finally, requires something more than a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources. When we wish to get hold of those basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, as well as the production and interpretation of images, stories and allegories, and which give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed, we cannot hope to find an individual text which would fit those basic principles as John 13: 21 ff. fits the iconography of the Last Supper. To grasp these principles we need a mental faculty comparable to that of a diagnostician—a faculty which I cannot describe better than by the rather discredited term ‘synthetic intuition,’ and which may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar.

However, the more subjective and irrational this source of interpretation (for every intuitive approach will be conditioned by the interpreter’s psychology and ‘Weltanschauung’), the more necessary the application of those correctives and controls which proved indispensable where only iconographical analysis and pre-iconographical description were concerned. When even our practical experience and our knowledge of literary sources may mislead us if indiscriminately applied to works of art, how much more dangerous would it be to trust our intuition pure and simple! Thus, as our practical experience had to be corrected by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, objects and events were expressed by forms (history of style); and as our knowledge of literary sources had to be corrected by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific themes and concepts were expressed by objects and events (history of types); just so, or even more so, must our synthetic intuition be corrected by an insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, the general and essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts. This means what may be called a history of cultural symptoms—or ‘symbols’ in Ernst Cassirer’s sense—in general. The art historian will have to check what he thinks is the intrinsic meaning of the work, or group of works, to which he devotes his attention, against what he thinks is the intrinsic meaning of as many other documents of civilization historically related to that work or group of works, as he can master: of documents bearing witness to the political, poetical, religious, philosophical, and social tendencies of the personality, period or country under investigation. Needless to say that, conversely, the historian of political life, poetry, religion, philosophy, and social situations should make analogous use of works of art. It is in the search for intrinsic meanings or content that the various humanistic disciplines meet on a common plane instead of serving as handmaidens to each other.

In conclusion: when we wish to express ourselves very strictly (which is of course not always necessary in our normal talk or writing, where the general context throws light on the meaning of our words), we have to distinguish between three strata of subject matter or meaning, the lowest of which is commonly confused with form, and the second of which is the special province of iconography as opposed to iconology. In whichever stratum we move,

OBJECT OF INTERPRETATION	ACT OF INTERPRETATION
I <i>Primary</i> or <i>natural</i> subject matter— (A) factual, (B) expressional—constituting the world of artistic motifs.	<i>Pre-iconographical description</i> (and pseudo-formal analysis).
II <i>Secondary</i> or <i>conventional</i> subject matter, constituting the world of <i>images</i> , <i>stories</i> and <i>allegories</i> .	<i>Iconographical analysis</i> .
III <i>Intrinsic meaning</i> or <i>content</i> , constituting the world of ' <i>symbolical</i> ' values.	<i>Iconological interpretation</i> .

our identifications and interpretations will depend on our subjective equipment, and for this very reason will have to be supplemented and corrected by an insight into historical processes the sum total of which may be called tradition.

I have summarized in a synoptical table what I have tried to make clear thus far. But we must bear in mind that the neatly differentiated categories, which in this synoptical table seem to indicate three independent spheres of meaning, refer in reality to aspects of one phenomenon, namely, the work of art as a whole. So that, in actual work, the methods of approach which here appear as three unrelated operations of research merge with each other into one organic and indivisible process.

II Turning now from the problems of iconography and iconology in general to the problems of Renaissance iconography and iconology in particular, we shall naturally be most interested in that phenomenon from which the very name of the Renaissance is derived: the rebirth of classical antiquity.

The earlier Italian writers about the history of art, such as Lorenzo Ghiberti, Leone Battista Alberti, and especially Giorgio Vasari, thought that classical art was overthrown at the beginning of the Christian era, and that it did not revive until it served as the foundation of the Renaissance style. The reasons for this overthrow, as those writers saw it, were the invasions of barbarous races and the hostility of early Christian priests and scholars.

In thinking as they did the early writers were both right and wrong. They were wrong in so far as there had not been a complete break of tradition during the Middle Ages. Classical conceptions, literary, philosophical, scientific and artistic, had survived throughout the centuries, particularly after they had been deliberately revived under Charlemagne and his followers. The early writers were, however, right in so far as the general attitude towards antiquity was fundamentally changed when the Renaissance movement set in.

The Middle Ages were by no means blind to the visual values of classical art, and they were deeply interested in the intellectual and poetic values of classical literature. But it is significant that, just at the height of the mediaeval period (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), classical motifs were not used for the representation of classical themes while, conversely, classical themes were not expressed by classical motifs.

For instance, on the façade of St. Mark's in Venice can be seen two large reliefs of equal size, one a Roman work of the third century A.D., the other executed in Venice almost exactly one thousand years later.<sup>6</sup> The motifs are so

EQUIPMENT FOR INTERPRETATION	CORRECTIVE PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION ( <i>History of Tradition</i> )
<i>Practical experience</i> (familiarity with <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> ).	History of <i>style</i> (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> were expressed by <i>forms</i> ).
<i>Knowledge of literary sources</i> (familiarity with specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i> ).	History of <i>types</i> (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific <i>themes</i> or <i>concepts</i> were expressed by <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> ).
<i>Synthetic intuition</i> (familiarity with the <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> ), conditioned by personal psychology and ‘ <i>Weltanschauung</i> .’	History of <i>cultural symptoms</i> or ‘ <i>symbols</i> ’ in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> were expressed by specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i> ).

similar that we are forced to suppose that the mediaeval stone carver deliberately copied the classical work in order to produce a counterpart of it. But while the Roman relief represents Hercules carrying the Erymanthean boar to King Euristheus, the mediaeval master, by substituting billowy drapery for the lion’s skin, a dragon for the frightened king, and a stag for the boar, transformed the mythological story into an allegory of salvation. In Italian and French art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we find a great number of similar cases; viz., direct and deliberate borrowings of classical motifs while the pagan themes were changed into Christian ones. Suffice it to mention the most famous specimens of this so-called proto-Renaissance movement: the sculptures of St. Gilles and Arles; the celebrated *Visitation* at Rheims Cathedral, which for a long time was held to be a sixteenth-century work; or Nicolo Pisano’s *Adoration of the Magi*, in which the group of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus shows the influence of a Phaedra Sarcophagus still preserved in the Camposanto at Pisa. Even more frequent, however, than such direct copies are instances of a continuous and traditional survival of classical motifs, some of which were used in succession for quite a variety of Christian images.

As a rule such reinterpretations were facilitated or even suggested by a certain iconographical affinity, for instance when the figure of Orpheus was employed for the representation of David, or when the type of Hercules dragging Cerberus out of Hades was used to depict Christ pulling Adam out of Limbo.<sup>7</sup> But there are cases in which the relationship between the classical prototype and its Christian adaptation is a purely compositional one.

On the other hand, when a Gothic illuminator had to illustrate the story of Laocoön, Laocoön becomes a wild and bald old man in contemporary costume who attacks the sacrificial bull with what should be an ax, while the two little boys float around at the bottom of the picture, and the sea snakes

briskly emerge from a pool of water.<sup>8</sup> Aeneas and Dido are shown as a fashionable mediaeval couple playing chess, or may appear as a group resembling the Prophet Nathan before David, rather than as a classical hero before his paramour. And Thisbe awaits Pyramus on a Gothic tombstone which bears the inscription 'Hic situs est Ninus rex,' preceded by the usual cross.<sup>9</sup>

When we ask the reason for this curious separation between classical motifs invested with a nonclassical meaning, and classical themes expressed by nonclassical figures in a nonclassical setting, the obvious answer seems to lie in the difference between representational and textual tradition. The artists who used the motif of a Hercules for an image of Christ, or the motif of an Atlas for the images of the Evangelists,<sup>10</sup> acted under the impression of visual models which they had before their eyes, whether they directly copied a classical monument or imitated a more recent work derived from a classical prototype through a series of intermediary transformations. The artists who represented Medea as a mediaeval princess, or Jupiter as a mediaeval judge, translated into images a mere description found in literary sources.

This is very true, and the textual tradition through which the knowledge of classical themes, particularly of classical mythology, was transmitted to and persisted during the Middle Ages is of the utmost importance, not only for the mediaevalist but also for the student of Renaissance iconography. For even in the Italian Quattrocento, it was from this complex and often very corrupt tradition, rather than from genuine classical sources, that many people drew their notions of classical mythology and related subjects.

Limiting ourselves to classical mythology, the paths of this tradition can be outlined as follows. The later Greek philosophers had already begun to interpret the pagan gods and demigods as mere personifications either of natural forces or moral qualities, and some of them had gone so far as to explain them as ordinary human beings subsequently deified. In the last century of the Roman Empire these tendencies greatly increased. While the Christian Fathers endeavored to prove that the pagan gods were either illusions or malignant demons (thereby transmitting much valuable information about them), the pagan world itself had become so estranged from its divinities that the educated public had to read up on them in encyclopaedias, in didactic poems or novels, in special treatises on mythology, and in commentaries on the classic poets. Important among these late-antique writings in which the mythological characters were interpreted in an allegorical way, or 'moralized,' to use the mediaeval expression, were Martianus Capella's *Nuptiae Mercurii et Philologiae*, Fulgentius' *Mitologiae*, and, above all, Servius' admirable Commentary on Virgil which is three or four times as long as the text and was perhaps more widely read.

During the Middle Ages these writings and others of their kind were thoroughly exploited and further developed. The mythographical information thus survived, and became accessible to mediaeval poets and artists. First, in the encyclopaedias, the development of which began with such early writers as Bede and Isidorus of Seville, was continued by Hrabanus Maurus (ninth century), and reached a climax in the enormous high-mediaeval works by Vincentius of Beauvais, Brunetto Latini, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and so forth. Second, in the mediaeval commentaries on classical and late-antique texts, especially on Martianus Capella's *Nuptiae*, which was annotated by

Irish scholars such as Johannes Scotus Erigena and was authoritatively commented upon by Remigius of Auxerre (ninth century).<sup>11</sup> Third, in special treatises on mythology such as the so-called *Mythographi I* and *II*, which are still rather early in date and are mainly based on Fulgentius and Servius.<sup>12</sup> The most important work of this kind, the so-called *Mythographus III*, has been tentatively identified with an Englishman, the great scholastic Alexander Neckham (died 1217);<sup>13</sup> his treatise, an impressive survey of whatever information was available around 1200, deserves to be called the conclusive compendium of high-mediaeval mythography, and was even used by Petrarch when he described the images of pagan gods in his poem *Africa*.

Between the times of the *Mythographus III* and Petrarch a further step in the moralization of classical divinities had been taken. The figures of ancient mythology were not only interpreted in a general moralistic way but were quite definitely related to the Christian faith, so that, for instance, Pyramus was interpreted as Christ, Thisbe as the human soul, and the lion as Evil defiling its garments; while Saturn served as an example, both in a good and in a bad sense, for the behavior of clergymen. Instances of this type of writings are the French *Ovide Moralisé*,<sup>14</sup> John Ridewall's *Fulgentius Metaforalis*,<sup>15</sup> Robert Holcott's *Moralitates*, the *Gesta Romanorum* and, above all, the *Moralized Ovid* in Latin, written around 1340 by a French theologian called Petrus Borchorius or Pierre Bersuire, who was personally acquainted with Petrarch.<sup>16</sup> His work is preceded by a special chapter on the pagan gods, mainly based on the *Mythographus III*, but enriched by specifically Christian moralizations, and this introduction, with the moralizations cut out for brevity's sake, attained great popularity under the name of *Albricus, Libellus de Imaginibus Deorum*.<sup>17</sup>

A fresh and highly important start was made by Boccaccio. In his *Genealogia Deorum*<sup>18</sup> he not only gave a new survey of the material, greatly enlarged since about 1200, but also tried consciously to revert to the genuine Antique sources and carefully collate them with one another. His treatise marks the beginning of a critical or scientific attitude towards classical antiquity, and may be called a forerunner of such truly scholarly Renaissance treatises as the *De diis gentium . . . Syntagmata* by L. G. Gyraldus, who, from his point of view, was fully entitled to look down upon his most popular mediaeval predecessor as a 'proletarian and unreliable writer'.<sup>19</sup>

It will be noticed that up to Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum* the focal point of mediaeval mythography was a region widely remote from direct Mediterranean tradition: Ireland, Northern France and England. This is also true of the Trojan Cycle, the most important epic theme transmitted by classical antiquity to posterity; its first authoritative mediaeval redaction, the *Roman de Troie*, which was frequently abridged, summarized and translated into the other vernacular languages, is due to Benoît de Ste. More, a native of Brittany. We are in fact entitled to speak of a proto-humanistic movement, viz., an active interest in classical themes regardless of classical motifs, centered in the northern region of Europe, as opposed to the proto-Renaissance movement, viz., an active interest in classical motifs regardless of classical themes, centered in Provence and Italy. It is a memorable fact which we must bear in mind in order to understand the Renaissance movement proper, that Petrarch, when describing the gods of his Roman ancestors, had to consult



a compendium written by an Englishman, and that the Italian illuminators who illustrated Virgil's *Aeneid* in the fifteenth century had to have recourse to the miniatures in manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* and its derivatives. For these, being a favorite reading matter of noble laymen, had been amply illustrated long before the Virgil text proper, read by scholars and schoolboys, and had attracted the attention of professional illuminators.<sup>20</sup>

It is indeed easy to see that the artists who from the end of the eleventh century tried to translate into images those proto-humanistic texts could not but depict them in a manner utterly different from classical traditions. One of the earliest instances is among the most striking: a miniature of about 1100, probably executed in the school of Regensburg, depicting the classical divinities according to the descriptions in Remigius' *Commentary on Martianus Capella*.<sup>21</sup> Apollo is seen riding in a peasant's cart and holding in his hand a kind of nosegay with the busts of the Three Graces. Saturn looks like a Romanesque jamb-figure rather than like the father of the Olympian gods, and the raven of Jupiter is equipped with a tiny halo like the eagle of St. John the Evangelist or the dove of St. Gregory.

Nevertheless, the contrast between representational and textual tradition alone, important though it is, cannot account for the strange dichotomy of classical motifs and classical themes characteristic of high-mediaeval art. For even when there had been a representational tradition in certain fields of classical imagery, this representational tradition was deliberately relinquished in favor of representations of an entirely nonclassical character as soon as the Middle Ages had achieved a style entirely their own.

Instances of this process are found, first, in classical images incidentally occurring in representations of Christian subjects, such as the personifications of natural forces in, for example, the Utrecht Psalter, or the sun and the moon in the Crucifixion. While Carolingian ivories still show the perfectly classical types of the *Quadriga Solis* and the *Biga Lunae*,<sup>22</sup> these classical types are replaced by nonclassical ones in Romanesque and Gothic representations. The personifications of nature tended to disappear; only the pagan idols frequently found in scenes of martyrdom preserved their classical appearance longer than other images because they were the symbols par excellence of paganism. Secondly, what is much more important, genuine classical images appear in the illustrations of such texts as had already been illustrated in lateantique times, so that visual models were available to the Carolingian artists: the Comedies of Terence, the texts incorporated into Hrabanus Maurus' *De Universo*, Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, and scientific writings, particularly treatises on astronomy, where mythological images appear both among the constellations (such as Andromeda, Perseus, Cassiopeia) and as planets (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercury, Luna).

In all these cases we can observe that the classical images were faithfully though often clumsily copied in Carolingian manuscripts and lingered on in their derivatives, but that they were abandoned and replaced by entirely different ones in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at the latest.

In the ninth-century illustrations of an astronomical text, such mythological figures as Boötes, Perseus, Hercules or Mercury are rendered in a perfectly classical fashion, and the same is true of the pagan divinities appearing in Hrabanus Maurus' *Encyclopaedia*.<sup>23</sup> With all their clumsiness, which is

chiefly due to the incompetence of the poor eleventh-century copyist of the lost Carolingian manuscript, the figures in the Hrabanus illustrations are evidently not concocted from mere textual descriptions but are connected with Antique prototypes by a representational tradition.

However, some centuries later these genuine images had fallen into oblivion and were replaced by others—partly newly invented, partly derived from oriental sources—which no modern spectator would ever recognize as classical divinities. Venus is shown as a fashionable young lady playing the lute or smelling a rose, Jupiter as a judge with his gloves in his hand, and Mercury as an old scholar or even as a bishop.<sup>24</sup> It was not before the Renaissance proper that Jupiter reassumed the appearance of the classical Zeus, and that Mercury reacquired the youthful beauty of the classical Hermes.<sup>25</sup>

All this shows that the separation of classical themes from classical motifs took place, not only for want of a representational tradition, but even in spite of a representational tradition. Wherever a classical image, that is, a fusion of a classical theme with a classical motif, had been copied during the Carolingian period of feverish assimilation, this classical image was abandoned as soon as mediaeval civilization had reached its climax, and was not reinstated until the Italian Quattrocento. It was the privilege of the Renaissance proper to reintegrate classical themes with classical motifs after what might be called a zero hour.

For the mediaeval mind, classical antiquity was too far removed and at the same time too strongly present to be conceived as an historical phenomenon. On the one hand an unbroken continuity of tradition was felt in so far as, for example, the German emperor was considered the direct successor of Caesar and Augustus, while the linguists looked upon Cicero and Donatus as their forefathers, and the mathematicians traced their ancestry back to Euclid. On the other hand, it was felt that an insurmountable gap existed between a pagan civilization and a Christian one.<sup>26</sup> These two tendencies could not as yet be balanced so as to permit a feeling of historical distance. In many minds the classical world assumed a distant, fairy-tale character like the contemporary pagan East, so that Villard de Honnecourt could call a Roman tomb '*la sepulture d'un sarrazin*,' while Alexander the Great and Virgil came to be thought of as oriental magicians. For others, the classical world was the ultimate source of highly appreciated knowledge and time-honored institutions. But no mediaeval man could see the civilization of antiquity as a phenomenon complete in itself, yet belonging to the past and historically detached from the contemporary world—as a cultural cosmos to be investigated and, if possible, to be reintegrated, instead of being a world of living wonders or a mine of information. The scholastic philosophers could use the ideas of Aristotle and merge them with their own system, and the mediaeval poets could borrow freely from the classical authors, but no mediaeval mind could think of classical philology. The artists could employ, as we have seen, the motifs of classical reliefs and classical statues, but no mediaeval mind could think of classical archaeology. Just as it was impossible for the Middle Ages to elaborate the modern system of perspective, which is based on the realization of a fixed distance between the eye and the object and thus enables the artist to build up comprehensive and consistent images of visible things; so was it impossible for them to evolve the modern idea of history, based on

the realization of an intellectual distance between the present and the past which enables the scholar to build up comprehensive and consistent concepts of bygone periods.

We can easily see that a period unable and unwilling to realize that classical motifs and classical themes structurally belonged together, actually avoided preserving the union of these two. Once the Middle Ages had established their own standards of civilization and found their own methods of artistic expression, it became impossible to enjoy or even to understand any phenomenon which had no common denominator with the phenomena of the contemporary world. The high-mediaeval beholder could appreciate a beautiful classical figure when presented to him as a Virgin Mary, and he could appreciate a Thisbe depicted as a girl of the thirteenth century sitting by a Gothic tombstone. But a Venus or Juno classical in form as well as significance would have been an execrable, pagan idol while a Thisbe attired in classical costume and sitting by a classical mausoleum would have been an archaeological reconstruction entirely beyond his possibilities of approach. In the thirteenth century even classical script was felt as something utterly 'foreign': the explanatory inscriptions in the Carolingian *Cod. Leydensis Voss. lat. 79*, written in a beautiful *Capitalis Rustica*, were copied, for the benefit of less erudite readers, in angular High Gothic script.

However, this failure to realize the intrinsic 'oneness' of classical themes and classical motifs can be explained, not only by a lack of historical feeling, but also by the emotional disparity between the Christian Middle Ages and pagan antiquity. Where Hellenic paganism—at least as reflected in classical art—considered man as an integral unity of body and soul, the Jewish-Christian conception of man was based on the idea of the 'clod of earth' forcibly, or even miraculously, united with an immortal soul. From this point of view, the admirable artistic formulae which in Greek and Roman art had expressed organic beauty and animal passions, seemed admissible only when invested with a more-than-organic and more-than-natural meaning; that is, when made subservient to Biblical or theological themes. In secular scenes, on the contrary, these formulae had to be replaced by others, conforming to the mediaeval atmosphere of courtly manners and conventionalized sentiments, so that heathen divinities and heroes mad with love or cruelty appeared as fashionable princes and damsels whose looks and behavior were in harmony with the canons of mediaeval social life.

In a miniature from a fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralisé*, the Rape of Europa is enacted by figures which certainly express little passionate agitation.<sup>27</sup> Europa, clad in late-mediaeval costume, sits on her inoffensive little bull like a young lady taking a morning ride, and her companions, similarly attired, form a quiet little group of spectators. Of course, they are meant to be anguished and to cry out, but they don't, or at least they don't convince us that they do, because the illuminator was neither able nor inclined to visualize animal passions.

A drawing by Dürer, copied from an Italian prototype probably during his first stay in Venice, emphasizes the emotional vitality which was absent in the mediaeval representation. The literary source of Dürer's Rape of Europa is no longer a prosy text where the bull was compared to Christ, and Europa to the human soul, but the pagan verses of Ovid himself as revived in two delight-

ful stanzas by Angelo Poliziano: 'You can admire Jupiter transformed into a beautiful bull by the power of love. He dashes away with his sweet, terrified load, and she turns back her face to the lost shore, her beautiful golden hair fluttering in the wind which blows back her gown. With one hand she grasps the horn of the bull, while the other clings to his back. She draws up her feet as if afraid that the sea might wet them, and thus crouching down with pain and fear, she cries for help in vain. For her sweet companions remain on the flowery shore, each of them crying 'Europa, come back.' The whole seashore resounds with 'Europa, come back,' and the bull looks round [or 'swims on'] and kisses her feet.'<sup>28</sup>

Dürer's drawing actually gives life to this sensual description. The crouching position of Europa, her fluttering hair, her clothes blown back by the wind and thus revealing her graceful body, the gestures of her hands, the furtive movement of the bull's head, the seashore scattered with the lamenting companions: all this is faithfully and vividly depicted; and, even more, the beach itself rustles with the life of *aquatichi monsticuli*, to speak in the terms of another Quattrocento writer, while satyrs hail the abductor.

This comparison illustrates the fact that the reintegration of classical themes with classical motifs which seems to be characteristic of the Italian Renaissance as opposed to the numerous sporadic revivals of classical tendencies during the Middle Ages, is not only a humanistic but also a human occurrence. It is a most important element of what Burckhardt and Michelet called 'the discovery both of the world and of man.'

On the other hand, it is self-evident that this reintegration could not be a simple reversion to the classical past. The intervening period had changed the minds of men, so that they could not turn into pagans again; and it had changed their tastes and productive tendencies, so that their art could not simply renew the art of the Greeks and Romans. They had to strive for a new form of expression, stylistically and iconographically different from the classical, as well as from the mediaeval, yet related and indebted to both.

# Semiotics and Iconography

The title given, as a cover, to these few, too brief remarks on the scope and implications of a possible semiotic approach to artistic practices is, with its false simplicity, *suspect*, like all titles of this double-entry type ('art and revolution', 'civilization and technology', etc.) where two uncertainly defined terms are coordinated in the service of a demonstration, usually of an ideological nature. For this conjunction can, according to circumstances, denote union just as much as opposition (semiotics as allied to iconography or, conversely, as its opponent?), adjunction as much as exclusion (semiotics *and* iconography, semiotics *or* iconography), and even dependence (iconography as the servant of semiotics, or conversely as its 'blueprint', in the sense that, as for Saussure, linguistics was to be the 'blueprint' of all semiology). But this conjunction takes on a still more equivocal function, in so far as it may appear to balance the two terms against each other, while at the same time introducing an element of doubt. To question the status of iconographic studies (of iconography, in Panofsky's definition, as 'a method applicable to the history of art') in their connexion with a semiotics of the visual arts considered as possible means, in fact, to question the very validity of semiotics' attempts at analysing the products of Art (if not their application to the history of Art itself), and above all to question their novelty, and originality [40].

By the same token a first justification is found for the covering title, delineating as it does the boundaries assigned to the text and imposing its own regimen upon it. And even if it is to reset the whole stake of the semiotic and iconographical work, at least it should ensure, from the start, freedom from the imperialism as well as the dogmatism and a-priorism which all too often characterize semiotic discourse. For it might seem that in the field of the visual arts iconography has already achieved, if perhaps on too empirical a plane, a large part of the analytical work which semiotics, for its part, obstinately puts off undertaking. Does this mean that in this respect semiotics (like, according to Panofsky, iconology before it) is no more than a word, a new label for an already ancient practice?

Certainly, the moment that it recognizes the existence of a meaning, if not a denotation, in artistic images, and undertakes, for instance, to identify figures from their attributes, or to establish the repertory of motives, symbols, themes, etc., characteristic of the art of an epoch, iconography seems to justify the introduction into art studies of a problematic of the sign, while imposing the idea that an image is not intended solely for perception and contemplation, but demands a real effort of reading, even of interpretation. When, moreover, having designated the figures (having, as the old textbooks say, 'declared' them), it then sees them as the protagonists of scenes, or, as Alberti puts it, 'Stories', which are themselves identifiable and recognizable as such, it may seem to open the way for an analysis of a semiotic kind, of the



syntactic, and even the narrative structures of the image. But semiotics, in so far as its object is taken as the 'life of signs' and the functioning of signifying systems, establishes itself on another level. Whereas iconography attempts essentially to state what the images *represent*, to 'declare' their meaning (if we accept Wittgenstein's assertion of the equivalence between the meaning of an image and what it represents), semiotics, on the contrary, is intent on stripping down the mechanism of signifying, on bringing to light the mainsprings of the signifying process, of which the work of art is, at the same time, the locus and the possible outcome. In view of the almost artisanal modesty of its declared intent, could iconography, having once been the servant of the history of Art, become the servant of semiotics, providing it with part of its raw material, while semiotics in return would reinforce it with its own theoretical apparatus and enable it to widen its scope, to elaborate its aims?

We are in fact a long way from any such division of labour, since iconography persists in serving exclusively a history of Art which—now that the great period of Riegl, Dvorak, Wölfflin and others is past, and excepting a few prestigious but isolated enterprises (such as that of Meyer Schapiro, virtually unique of its kind nowadays)—has shown itself to be totally incapable of renovating its method, and above all of taking any account of the potential contribution from the most advanced lines of research in linguistics, psychoanalysis and, *a fortiori*, semiotics, not to mention Marxism, which has entered this field only in its most caricatural form. Nor does this resistance point merely to the epistemological abdication of an intellectual discipline which, in its day, was one of the best-attested sources of the Formalist movement, and thereby of the semiotic venture itself. Even at its best, it answers the perfectly legitimate concern to assert the specificity of artistic, and principally plastic phenomena, and to preserve their study from any contamination by



verbal models, whether linguistic or psychoanalytic, since the characteristic articulation and import of the work of art are assumed to be irreducible to the order and dimension of discourse.

It is a paradox that, while making iconography a privileged weapon in its methodological arsenal, art history has never ceased in practice—and this quite innocently—to adhere to the logocentric model which it claimed to be denouncing, at the very moment when, for their part, linguistics and the philosophy of language were beginning to take notice of the image, which Saussure and Wittgenstein were about to set at the operative core of sign and proposition: Saussure, by defining the sign as a two-faced entity consisting of an ‘acoustic-image’ associated to a concept, itself represented by a drawing; Wittgenstein, by establishing the image, in its ‘logical form’, the form it has in common with reality, to the principle of language and proposition. In so far as iconography concerns itself primarily with the ‘signified’ in images, and reduces the plastic ‘signifier’ to a question of treatment, a connotation of ‘style’, it must necessarily be led to confuse meaning and—at any rate verbal—denotation. Of course, what the image *signifies* cannot be in any way reduced to what it gives us to *see*: on any supposedly natural meaning, corresponding to a strictly iconic level of articulation, to the image as it addresses itself to perception, there is often superposed (in accordance with the theory of levels of reading and interpretation developed by Panofsky) a conventional, if not arbitrary meaning (the figure of a naked woman with her head wreathed in clouds will be read as the sign of ‘Beauty’). The important point is that on both levels, if the image lends itself to a reading, and eventually to an interpretation, it is only to the extent that the elements—figures and/or signs—of which it is made up allow themselves to be identified and indicated: the reading necessarily proceeding according to a declarative order in which each element comes up in turn to be named.

Of course iconography, at least in its most sophisticated form, can in no way be reduced to a mere nomenclature: but even at this elementary level, it already implies a reference to pre-existing knowledge, which predates the reading, and has been elaborated externally to it. And this knowledge is not merely ‘anthropological’, as Roland Barthes would say, inscribed at the deepest level in each of the individuals sharing one culture, and allowing them to recognize immediately in a given configuration of lines or dots the image of a house, a tree, an apple or a horse; on the contrary, it is a knowledge which is ‘cultivated’, elaborated, linked, in the final analysis, to the textual order. In most cases of doubt a textual reference will carry the day by providing a ‘key’ which allows the image to be interpreted. But the same is true at the level of the ‘subject’, of the ‘story’, a level where iconography mostly applies Poussin’s precept literally: ‘Read both the story *and* the picture to know whether each thing is appropriate to the subject.’ In parentheses, one could note that such a precept bears testimony that the metaphor of reading, as applied to the works of art, was introduced long before semiotics emerged as a specific discipline, implicit as it was from the beginning in the practice of iconography. To read both the story and the picture certainly does not mean envisaging the picture as a text, and even less citing painting before the jurisdiction of the text, as semiotics, in its most elaborate form, attempts to do. It means introducing into the analysis of the picture the authority of the text from which the pic-

ture is supposed to derive its arrangement through a kind of figurative and/or symbolical *application*, in which each pictural element corresponds to a linguistic term. This is an important distinction, and one with epistemological implications. The iconographic method, iconography as a method, is theoretically founded on the postulate that the artistic image (and indeed any relevant image) achieves a signifying articulation only within and because of the textual reference which passes through and eventually imprints itself in it.

If this is the case, we must admit that any iconographic reading of the image is, as it were, appended to the verbal chain (text or discourse) which 'declares' its figures. But it is precisely this complicity between the method as such and the logocentric model—an inborn, although never explicit, never theorized, complicity—which explains why iconography can nowadays try to some extent to appear not only as part of a semiotics of art (still to be formally established), but also as a 'blueprint' for it, as the model whose pattern and articulations should be copied by any similar enterprise. The essential fact (but also the one most difficult to elaborate into a theory) is the degree to which the idealistic conception of the image implied in the iconographic approach as defined above is indissolubly bound up with a representative structure whose limits, historical as well as geographical, have now been recognized. Such a structure, from the moment it claims to base its effects demonstratively on the repetition of the experimental conditions of vision, seems indeed to imply a purely *denoted* level, referable immediately to external reality.

This claim to a truth value, if not a reality value (what Frege, precisely, means by *denotation*), which was one of the mainsprings of the 'break' that occurred in the visual arts at the beginning of the fifteenth century, is clearly illustrated in a famous painting by Rogier van der Weyden, 'St. Luke painting the Virgin' (Boston Museum of Fine Arts); whereas a Byzantine (or perhaps medieval) icon reproduced a 'prototype', a pre-existing image, which acted as its referent, the modern painter is not afraid of showing the making of the prototype itself, placing its creator, and his model as well, in the position of what is denoted. The Virgin (and, as in a mirror, the painter himself, a latter-day St. Luke) is installed in contemporary costume in front of a window framing a familiar landscape, Alberti's 'window' in fact, and the painting assimilated to an aperture in the wall, opening on to the outside; in this way it is 'reiterated' within the painting itself, according to the schema of double inscription which governs the representative system (any representation, as Peirce says, being a representation of a representation). The schema calls for a further elaboration, as soon as a more acute observation reveals that the painter ('St. Luke') is not *painting* the Virgin but *drawing* her, that he is making a sketch from nature with a pencil, the operation introducing one more relay in the representative circuit, as well as alluding to the function devoted, in such a circuit, to drawing and to the process of intra-semiotic translation.

A painting of this type requires not so much a reading as an interpretation (the one roughly outlined here, or some other). But if the process of interpretation can thus short-circuit the reading process, if the interpretation does not assume an antecedent theoretical constitution and articulation of the pictural text, this is because no trace of the creative apparatus which produced the image as such can be found in the picture; it cannot be too much emphasized that this creative apparatus, in the case of Rogier van der Weyden's painting,

cannot even be hypothetically reduced to some 'perspectivist' model (that of the 'camera obscura', the principle of which the photographic camera was to reproduce), for while defining it one must equally take into account the actual process of coloured 'reproduction', and of illusionist texture linked to the 'discovery' of painting with oils (whose position in the system corresponds to the one assigned, in the circuit of photographic registration, to the sensitized plate or film).

If iconography operates from a privileged position within the system of representation, which it goes so far as to take literally, it does so precisely to the extent that this system introduces a decisive split between a denotative plane presented as 'natural' and the network of symbolic, even stylistic connotations which can be grafted on to it. But by the same token it takes its place within the historical limits of the iconological venture as Cesare Ripa, in the 'Proemio' of his *Iconology* (1593), had already defined it. This 'iconology'—the first responding to this name—insisted on dealing solely, to the exclusion of all others, with such images as were meant to *signify* something different from what they offered to *view* (like the image of 'Beauty'), that is the very definition which Panofsky was to adopt—without referring to Ripa and without distinguishing between the different types of images—to characterize the second of the levels of meaning which he recognizes in the work of art, the strictly iconographical level where the image is invested with a conventional meaning which may be at any distance from the primary, 'natural' meaning. The fact remains that Ripa's text went much further towards an iconology, a science of images, than any of the 'iconographies' which have flourished since its time, in as much as he was the first and only one of his kind able to enunciate the programme and conditions both of a logic of images (*ragionamenti d'imagini*) and of a discourse of meaning applicable to images, while marking quite sharply, if not quite clearly, the distinction between the register of *formare* and that of *dichiarare*, as well as that between the strictly iconic constitution of the image and its logical articulation, between its description and its explanation. The 'iconological operator' puts into work a logic of concatenation which paves the way for an analysis of the image as a visual definition, articulated in metaphorical and allegorical terms.

The image conceived in the mode of definition: such a formula may sound extravagant (how can it be conceived, Peirce was to ask, that something like an iconic proposition can exist?); it nevertheless fits in, in spite of its assumed naivety, with the attempt to set up a semiotics of art totally conditioned by the category of the sign, and by the hypothesis of the axiomatic interdependence of image and concept, such as was already clear in Saussure's schema of the operation of translation, characterized by acoustic and conceptual images switching positions.

The iconographic project is thus linked in its principle to a representational structure which implies the erasing of the externality of the signifier, and, first of all, the obliteration of the actual substance of expression, as long as the signified seems to be directly attainable, before any attention is to be paid to the figurative system. It is consequently easy to see the value of all those attempts made at breaking down the naturalist prejudices which cling to images conceived in the illusionist mode. In this way, in the field opened by Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, the now classical study of

B. A. Uspenskij on ancient Russian icons sets about demonstrating the existence of a primary level of articulation of the painted image corresponding to the phonological level in natural language: that is the level of figuration corresponding to the most general processes (non-significant in themselves?), which allow the painter to represent relations of time and space and on which are superimposed semantic (figurative), grammatical (ideographic), even idiomatic (symbolic) levels.

Of course, such a cleavage is still modelled after the linguistic 'blueprint'. But the very idea that different systems of organization for one and the same figurative material might exist, or even coexist (one recalls that Buffon meant by 'figuration' a specific mode of the organization of matter, characteristic of minerals, as 'vegetation' is of plants and 'life' of animals), this idea cannot have any theoretical consequences until the split, constitutive of the representative system, between the (figurative) level of denotation and the (symbolic) levels of connotation has been questioned. The image is always seen, whatever its constitution as image, as the prop, the vehicle for any and every signified injected into it from outside, and research still obeys a model of signifying, of communication, which leads to a radical distinction between that aspect of the image which belongs to the order of perception, and that which has properly semiotic dimensions.

Iconography has its roots deeply entrenched in the metaphysics of the sign. But where the old Platonic theory, which assimilated the relation between the image and its signified to that between body and soul—the perceptible body of the image being supposed to awaken in the spectator a wish, a *desire* to know its soul (i.e. its meaning)—did at least pose the problem of the articulation of the visible and the legible, iconography no longer heeds the sensible body of the image. Phenomenology comes to its aid, with its notion of the 'neutralization', if not the 'neantization' of the material element of the image, as does a strictly logocentric linguistics, according to which the sound as such does not belong to the realm of *langue*, whose system takes its cue from the acoustic, the verbal *image*. Although less metaphorical than the platonic theory, Freud's notion of *regression* also registers the question of the relation between visual and verbalized thought within the dependence of desire: the (dream) image is not the mirrored double, the perceptible manifestation of thought as constituted in the element of language; it is both the locus and the product of an activity which allows impulses originating in the unconscious, and which have been refused all possibility of verbalization, to find expression through figurative means and to move at ease (in Freud's own terms) on a stage *other* than that of language.

It so happens, remarkably, that the most subtle research engendered by the iconographic method cuts across, up to a point, Freud's schemata. Panofsky has refuted a too-narrow notion of iconography, intended as an auxiliary discipline, a purely classificatory one, which would provide the historian with a first localization in space and time of the works he has to deal with. Moreover, at a more elaborate level, he has been led to go much beyond a strictly lexical approach. His work on symbolism in Flemish painting and on the figurative procedures used by the Van Eycks to represent, through purely visual means, abstract notions and relations (such as the opposition of 'before' and 'after', of the old and the new Law, etc., as indicated by the juxtaposition

within a single painting of architectural elements of the Romanesque and Gothic styles) belongs, in a formal sense, in the line of Freud's analysis of the dream-work and the acceptance of figurability (*Darstellbarkeit*). A decisive encounter, yet insufficient to break the circle of icon and sign as it has been drawn by a centuries old tradition which has passed through great crises (fits of iconoclasm) without really being shaken. Peirce, once again, in his last writings, was to introduce, together with the distinction between icon and *hypoicon*, the idea that the icon is not necessarily a sign, that it does not necessarily follow the triadic order of representation, and that inside that order itself there is something not to be accounted for in terms of this relation. (Peirce even goes so far as to mention the 'immediate, characteristic flavour' of a tragedy such as *King Lear*: but what about a painting like Titian's 'Sacred and profane love' or Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon?') The images of art might primarily be *hypoicons*: an idea which is hard to grasp, just as it is hard to see not only the visual products of alien cultures, but also those of the very few artists of our time who, from Cézanne to Mondriaan, from Matisse to Rothko and Barnett Newman, seem to carry out their work *on the near side* of the figure if not against it, *on the near side* of the sign, if not against it.

The Impressionists had already brought to the fore the question of coloured articulation instead of figurative denotation, thus forcing the spectator to read traditional works of art in this new light, in order to recognize in them everything that, in the icon itself, eludes the order of the sign in the strict sense of the word (on this point, I cannot do better than refer the reader back to Schapiro's essay on 'Field and Vehicle in Image-signs').<sup>1</sup> Like possibly the Byzantine or the Chinese image, the modern image imposes a different concept of 'signification', of meaning and of its 'cuisine' (Barthes' term), and consequently a different notion of *taste* in the most profound sense of that word, irreducible to the norms of communication (except in so far as it would be possible to determine what factors in the notion of information itself belong with a theory of form, or even with the formless). This, rather than the logocentric starting-point which a humanist history of Art refuses to give up, is the area in which a semiotics of art, whose very existence depends on its being comparative, might have a chance to develop.

# Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Context and Senders

The basic tenet of semiotics, the theory of sign and sign-use, is anti-realist. Human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs. The core of semiotic theory is the definition of the factors involved in this permanent process of sign-making and interpreting and the development of conceptual tools that help us to grasp that process as it goes on in various arenas of cultural activity. Art is one such arena, and it seems obvious that semiotics has something to contribute to the study of art.<sup>1</sup>

From one point of view, it can be said that the semiotic perspective has long been present in art history: the work of Riegl and Panofsky can be shown to be congenial to the basic tenets of Peirce and Saussure,<sup>2</sup> and key texts of Meyer Schapiro deal directly with issues in visual semiotics.<sup>3</sup> But in the past two decades, semiotics has been engaged with a range of problems very different from those it began with, and the contemporary encounter between semiotics and art history involves new and distinct areas of debate: the polysemy of meaning; the problematics of authorship, context, and reception; the implications of the study of narrative for the study of images; the issue of sexual difference in relation to verbal and visual signs; and the claims to truth of interpretation. In all these areas, semiotics challenges the positivist view of knowledge, and it is this challenge that undoubtedly presents the most difficulties to the traditional practices of art history as a discipline.

Because of the theoretical skepticism of semiotics, the relationship between contemporary semiotics and art history is bound to be a delicate one. The debate between the critical rationalists and the members of the Frankfurt school, earlier on in this century, may have convinced most scholars of the need for a healthy dose of doubt in their claims to truth; nevertheless, much 'applied science'—in other words, scholarship that, like art history, exists as a specialized discipline—seems to be reluctant to give up the hope of reaching positive knowledge. Whereas epistemology and the philosophy of science have developed sophisticated views of knowledge and truth in which there is little if any room for unambiguous 'facts,' causality, and proof, and in which interpretation has an acknowledged central position, art history seems hard pressed to renounce its positivistic basis, as if it feared to lose its scholarly status altogether in the bargain.<sup>4</sup>

Although art history as a whole cannot but be affected by the skepticism that has radically changed the discipline of history itself in the wake of the



'linguistic turn,' two fields within art history are particularly tenacious in their positivistic pursuit: the authentication of *œuvres*—for example, those of Rembrandt, van Gogh, and Hals, to name just a few recently and hotly debated cases—and social history.<sup>5</sup> As for the former, the number of decisions that have an interpretive rather than a positive basis—mainly issues of style—have surprised the researchers themselves, and it is no wonder, therefore, that their conclusions remain open to debate.<sup>6</sup> In section 2 ('Senders') we will pursue this question further. But, one might object, this interpretive status concerns cases where positive knowledge of the circumstances of the making of an artwork is lacking, not because such knowledge is by definition unattainable. Attempts to approach the images of an age through an examination of the social and historical conditions out of which they emerged, in the endeavor of social history, are not affected by that lack.

The problem, here, lies in the term 'context' itself. Precisely because it has the root 'text' while its prefix distinguishes it from the latter, 'context' seems comfortably out of reach of the pervasive need for interpretation that affects all texts. Yet this is an illusion. As Jonathan Culler has argued,

But the notion of context frequently oversimplifies rather than enriches the discussion, since the opposition between an act and its context seems to presume that the context is given and determines the meaning of the act. We know, of course, that things are not so simple: context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events. Yet whenever we use the term *context* we slip back into the simple model it proposes.<sup>7</sup>

Context, in other words, is a text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretive choices. The art historian is always present in the construction she or he produces.<sup>8</sup>

In order to endorse the consequences of this insight, Culler proposes to speak not of context but of 'framing': 'Since the phenomena criticism deals with are signs, forms with socially constituted meanings, one might try to think not of context but of the framing of signs: how are signs constituted (framed) by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, systems of value, semiotic mechanisms?'<sup>9</sup>

This proposal does not mean to abandon the examination of 'context' altogether, but to do justice to the interpretive status of the insights thus gained. Not only is this more truthful; it also advances the search for social history itself. For by examining the social factors that frame the signs, it is possible to analyze simultaneously the practices of the past and our own interaction with them, an interaction that is otherwise in danger of passing unnoticed. What art historians are bound to examine, whether they like it or not, is the work as effect and affect, not only as a neatly remote product of an age long gone. The problem of context, central in modern art history, will be examined further from a semiotic perspective in section 1 here, and the particular problem of the reception of images, and of the original viewer, will come up in section 3 ('Receivers'), and again in section 8 ('History and the Status of Meaning').

In this article, we intend to conduct two inquiries simultaneously. On the one hand, we will examine how semiotics challenges some fundamental

tenets and practices of art history. Although this is intrinsic to the article as a whole, it will receive greater emphasis in the first three sections. On the other hand and perhaps more important for many, we will demonstrate how semiotics can further the analyses that art historians pursue (this point will be central to sections 6 and 7). The parallel presentation of a critique and a useful set of tools conveys our view that art history is in need of, but also can afford, impulses from other directions. Since semiotics is fundamentally a transdisciplinary theory, it helps to avoid the bias of privileging language that so often accompanies attempts to make disciplines interact. In other words, rather than a linguistic turn, we will propose a semiotic turn for art history. Moreover, as the following sections will demonstrate, semiotics has been developed within many different fields, some of which are more relevant to art history than others. Our selection of topics is based on the expected fruitfulness for art history of particular developments, rather than on an attempt to be comprehensive, which would be futile and unpersuasive. This article does not present a survey of semiotic theory for an audience of art historians. For such an endeavor we refer the reader to Fernande Saint-Martin's recent study.<sup>10</sup> Some of the specialized semioticians (e.g., Greimas, Sebeok) might see an intolerable distortion in our presentation. However, some of the theorists discussed here, like Derrida or Goodman, might not identify themselves as semioticians, nor might some of the art historians whose work we will put forward as examples of semiotic questioning of art and art history. In order to make this presentation more directly and widely useful, we have opted to treat semiotics as a perspective, raising a set of questions around and within the methodological concerns of art history itself.

The first three sections deal centrally with the semiotic critique of 'context' as a term in art-historical discussion. From questions of context we move to the origins and history of semiotics, the ways in which these tools and critical perspectives have grown out of initial theoretical projects. The limits of space force us to consider just two early figures: Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher (section 4), and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (section 5). In section 6 we present a semiotic view of psychoanalysis, demonstrating a variety of ways that psychoanalysis is bound up with semiotics and can be useful for art history, and then going on to discuss the most relevant concept, central in art history, that of the gaze. Psychoanalysis connects semiotics with an awareness of gender differentiation as pervasively relevant, indeed, as a crucial basis for the heterogeneous and polysemous nature of looking. Feminist cultural analysis has been quick to see the relevance of semiotic tools for its own goals. We wish to acknowledge that efficacy and we would have liked to demonstrate the inevitable 'feminist turn' in semiotic theory itself by presenting the intersections between feminism's theorizing of gender, semiotics, and art history. But lack of space combined with the risk of overlap with an earlier survey article on feminism and art history published in this journal forced us, regretfully, to relegate feminism to the margins.<sup>11</sup> Following the presentation of a psychoanalytically oriented semiotics, we go on to show the interpretive and descriptive, but also critical, value of a semiotically based narrative theory or narratology for the study of images—images that frequently have a narrative side that is not necessarily literary in background (section 7, 'Narratology'). Instead of rehearsing the view of

history painting as basically illustrative of old stories, a view that privileges language over visual representation, we demonstrate the specifically visual ways of story-telling that semiotics enables one to consider. Section 8 offers a few reflections on the status of meaning in relation to the historical considerations so important for art history.

One further question concerns the relation between the disciplines. Interdisciplinary research poses specific problems of methodology, which have to do with the status of the objects and the applicability of concepts designed to account for objects with a different status. Thus a concept mainly discussed in literary theory—for example, metaphor—is relevant to the analysis of visual art, and refusing to use it amounts to an unwarranted decision to take all images as literal expressions. But such use requires a thinking-through of the status of signs and meaning in visual art—for example, of the delimitation of discrete signs in a medium that is supposed to be given over to density.<sup>12</sup> Rather than borrowing the concept of metaphor from literary theory, then, an art historian will take it out of its unwarranted confinement within that specific discipline and first examine the extent to which metaphor, as a phenomenon of transfer of meaning from one sign onto another, should be generalized. This is the case here, but not all concepts from literature lend themselves to such generalization. Rhythm and rhyme, for example, although often used apropos visual images, are more medium-specific and their use for images is therefore more obviously metaphorical.

Semiotics offers a theory and a set of analytic tools that are not bound to a particular object domain. Thus it liberates the analyst from the problem that transferring concepts from one discipline into another entails. Recent attempts to connect verbal and visual arts, for example, tend to suffer from unreflected transfers, or they painstakingly translate the concepts of the one discipline into the other, inevitably importing a hierarchy between them. Semiotics, by virtue of its supradisciplinary status, can be brought to bear on objects pertaining to any sign-system. That semiotics has been primarily developed in conjunction with literary texts is perhaps largely a historical accident, whose consequences, while not unimportant, can be bracketed.<sup>13</sup> As a supradisciplinary theory, semiotics lends itself to interdisciplinary analyses, for example, of word and image relations, which seek to avoid both the erection of hierarchies and the eclectic transferring of concepts.<sup>14</sup> But the use of semiotics is not limited to interdisciplinarity. Its multidisciplinary reach—as journals like *Semiotica* demonstrate, it can be used in a variety of disciplines—has made semiotics an appropriate tool for monodisciplinary analysis as well. Considering images as signs, semiotics sheds a particular light on them, focusing on the production of meaning in society, but it is by no means necessary to semiotic analysis to exceed the domain of visual images.

## 1. Context

One area in which the semiotic perspective may be of particular service to art history is in the discussion of ‘context’<sup>15</sup>—as in the phrase ‘art in context.’ Since semiotics, following the structuralist phase of its evolution, has examined the conceptual relations between ‘text’ and ‘context’ in detail, in order to ascertain the fundamental dynamics of socially operated signs, it is a field

in which analysis of 'context' as an idea may be particularly acute. Many aspects of that discussion have a direct bearing on 'context' as a key term in art-historical discourse and method.<sup>16</sup>

When a particular work of art is placed 'in context,' it is usually the case that a body of material is assembled and juxtaposed with the work in question in the hope that such contextual material will reveal the determinants that make the work of art what it is. Perhaps the first observation on this procedure, from a semiotic point of view, is a cautionary one: that it cannot be taken for granted that the evidence that makes up 'context' is going to be any simpler or more legible than the visual text upon which such evidence is to operate. Our observation is directed in the first place against any assumption of opposition, or asymmetry, between 'context' and 'text', against the notion that here lies the work of art (the text), and over there is the context, ready to act upon the text to order its uncertainties, to transfer to the text its own certainties and determination. For it cannot be assumed that 'context' has the status of a given or of a simple or natural ground upon which to base interpretation. The idea of 'context,' posited as platform or foundation, invites us to step back from the uncertainties of text. But once this step is taken, it is by no means clear why it may not be taken again; that is, 'context' implies from its first moment a potential regression 'without brakes.'

Semiotics, at a particular moment in its evolution, was obliged to confront this problem head-on, and how it did so has in important ways shaped the history of its own development. We will discuss later the different conceptions of semiosis in Saussure and in the work of post-Saussureans such as Derrida and Lacan. Suffice it to say, for now, that in its 'structuralist' era semiotics frequently operated on the assumption that the meanings of signs were determined by sets of internal oppositions and differences mapped out within a static system. In order to discover the meanings of the words in a particular language, for example, the interpreter turned to the global set of rules (the *langue*) simultaneously governing the language as whole, outside and away from actual utterances (*parole*). The crucial move was to invoke and isolate the synchronic system, putting its diachronic aspects to one side. What was sought, in a word, was structure. The critique launched against this theoretical immobility of sign systems pointed out that a fundamental component of sign systems had been deleted from the structuralist approach, namely the system's aspects of ongoing semiosis, of dynamism. The change-over from theorizing semiosis as the product of static and immobile systems, to thinking of semiosis as unfolding in time is indeed one of the points at which structuralist semiotics gave way to post-structuralism. Derrida, in particular, insisted that the meaning of any particular sign could not be located in a signified fixed by the internal operations of a synchronic system; rather, meaning arose exactly from the movement from one sign or signifier to the next, in a *perpetuum mobile* where there could be found neither a starting point for semiosis, nor a concluding moment in which semiosis terminated and the meanings of signs fully 'arrived.'<sup>17</sup>

From this perspective, 'context' appears to have strong resemblances to the Saussurean signified, at least in those forms of contextual analysis that posit context as the firm ground upon which to anchor commentaries on works of art. Against such a notion, post-structuralist semiotics argues that 'context'

is in fact unable to arrest the fundamental mobility of semiosis for the reason that it harbors exactly the same principle of interminability within itself. Culler provides a readily understood example of such nonterminability in his discussion of evidence in the courtroom.<sup>18</sup> The context in a legal dispute is not a given of the case, but something that lawyers make, and thereby make their case; and the nature of evidence is such that there is always more of it, subject only to the external limits of the lawyers' own stamina, the court's patience, and the client's means. Art historians, too, confront this problem on a daily basis. Suppose that, in attempting to describe the contextual determinants that made a particular work of art the way it is, the art historian proposes a certain number of factors that together constitute its context. Yet it is always conceivable that this number could be added to, that the context can be augmented. Certainly there will be a cut-off point, determined by such factors as the reader's patience, the conventions followed by the community of art-historical interpreters, the constraints of publishing budgets, the cost of paper, etc. But these constraints will operate from an essentially external position with regard to the enumeration of contextual aspects. Each new factor that is added will, it may be hoped, help to bolster the description of context, making it more rounded and complete. But what is also revealed by such supplementation is exactly the uncurtailability of the list, the impossibility of its closure. 'Context' can always be extended; it is subject to the same process of mobility that is at work in the semiosis of the text or artwork that 'context' is supposed to delimit and control.

To avoid misunderstanding, one should remark that while the consideration that contexts may be indefinitely extended makes it impossible to establish 'context' in the form of a totality—a compendium of all the circumstances that constitute a 'given' context—semiotics does not in fact follow what may appear to be a consequence of this, that the concept of determination should somehow be given up. On the contrary, it is only the goal of totalizing contexts that is being questioned here, together with the accompanying tendency toward making a necessarily partial and incomplete formulation of context stand for the totality of contexts, by synecdoche. Certainly the aim of identifying the total context has at times featured prominently in linguistics (among other places). Austin's remark concerning speech act theory is a case in point: 'The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating.'<sup>19</sup> Semiotics' objection to such an enterprise focuses primarily on the idea of mastering a totality that is implicit here, together with the notion that such a totality is 'actual,' that is, that it can be known as a present experience. However, this by no means entails an abandoning of 'context' and 'determination' as working concepts of analysis. Rather, semiotics would argue that two principles must operate here simultaneously. 'No meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation.'<sup>20</sup> Though the two principles may not sit easily together or interact in a classical or topologically familiar fashion, context as determinant is very much to the fore in semiotic analyses, and particularly those that are *post*structuralist.

As semioticians have tried to work through the complexities of the text/context distinction, they have developed a further caveat, concerning the stroke or bar (/) between the terms 'text' and 'context.' That mark of separ-

ation presupposes that one can, in fact, separate the two, that they are truly *independent* terms. Yet there are many situations within art-historical discourse that, if we consider them in detail, may make it difficult to be sure that such independence can easily be assumed. The relation between 'context' and 'text' (or 'artwork') that these terms often take for granted is that history stands prior to artifact; that context generates, produces, gives rise to text, in the same way that a cause gives rise to an effect. But it is sometimes the case that the sequence (from context to text) is actually inferred from its endpoint, leading to the kind of metalepsis that Nietzsche called 'chronological reversal'.<sup>21</sup> 'Suppose one feels a pain. This causes one to look for a cause and spying, perhaps, a pin, one links and reverses the perceptual or phenomenal order, *pain ... pin*, to produce a causal sequence, *pin ... pain*.'<sup>22</sup> In this case, the pin as cause is located after the effect it has on us has been produced. Does one find comparable instances of such metalepsis or 'chronological reversal' in art-historical analysis?

The answer may well be yes. Imagine a contemporary account of, say, mid-Victorian painting, one that aims to reconstruct the context for the paintings in terms of social and cultural history. The works themselves depict such social sites as racetracks, pubs, railway stations and train compartments, street scenes where well-to-do ladies pass by workmen digging the road, interiors in which domestic melodramas are played out, the stock exchange, the veterans' hospital, the church, the asylum. It would not be thought unusual for the art historian to work from the paintings out toward the history of these sites and milieux, in order to discover their historical specificity and determination, their detailed archival texture. Just this sort of inquiry is what, perhaps, the word 'context' asks for; such reconstruction would be fitting and, one might say, *indicated* by the nature of the visual materials to hand.

But there are senses in which the procedure is still strange, despite its aura of familiarity. A primary difficulty is that those features of mid-Victorian Britain missing from mid-Victorian painting are rarely featured as part of the context that accounts for the works of art. A social history that set out, unassisted by pictures, to discover the social and historical conditions of mid-Victorian Britain might well attend to quite other milieux, different social sites, and indeed many other kinds of historical objects that do not readily lend themselves to pictorial representation. A harder social analysis might treat the pictures incidentally, in passing, as one sort of evidence among many. If one is going to study social history, why privilege works of art in such a way that the findings of historiography must be bound to the *mise-en-scène* of painting?

There are a number of observations that might be made at this point: for example, concerning the relations between art history and social history as disciplines both intertwined and impelled by different kinds of momentum, or concerning the role played by synecdoche in the rhetoric of art-historical discourses.<sup>23</sup> The point that concerns us here, though, is that in the example chosen, the pictures have in some sense *predicted* the form of the historian's portrayal, that the work of art history is 'anticipated by the structure of the objects it labors to illuminate.'<sup>24</sup> If that is so, then the 'context' in which the work of art is placed is in fact being generated out of the work itself, by means of a rhetorical operation, a reversal, a metalepsis, that nonetheless purports to



regard the work as having been produced by its context and not as producing it. Moreover, in a further rhetorical maneuver, the work of art is now able to act as evidence that the context that is produced for it is the right one; the reversal can be made to produce a 'verification effect' (the contextual account must be true: the paintings prove it).

In cases of this kind, elements of visual text migrate from text to context and back, but recognition of such circulation is prevented by the primary cut of text-stroke-context. The operation of the stroke consists in the creation of what, for semiotics, is a fantasmatic cleavage between text and context, followed by an equally uncanny drawing together of the two sides that had been separated. The stroke dividing 'text' from 'context' is the fundamental move here, which semiotic analysis would criticize as a rhetorical operation.<sup>25</sup> From one point of view, as Derrida has argued, this cut is precisely the operation that establishes the aesthetic as a specific order of discourse. From another point of view, the cut (text/context) is what creates a discourse of art-historical explanation; it is because the blade can so cleanly separate the two edges, of text and context, that one seems to be dealing with an order of explanation at all, with explanation on one side and *explanandum* on the other. To set up this separation of text from context, then, is a fundamental rhetorical move of self-construction in art history.

Semiotic inquiry has a further reservation about procedures of this kind; since it is concerned with the functioning of signs, it is particularly sensitive to the fact that in our example (a contextual account of mid-Victorian painting) the status of the paintings as works of the sign has in fact largely been effaced. This need not happen with all contextualizing accounts—and our example is, of course, only an imaginary case. What the example depends on is the idea of a number of contextual factors converging on the work (or works) of art. The factors proposed may be many; they may belong to all sorts of domains; but they all finally arrive *at* the artwork, conceived as singular and as the terminus of all the various causal lines or chains. The question to be answered was, 'what factors made the work of art what it is?' And in order to answer such a question, it is appropriate and inevitable that some narrative of convergence will be produced. The question casts itself in just this convergent form: *n* number of factors, all leading toward and into their final point of destination, the work of art in question.

What semiotics would query here is the idea, the shape, of convergence. Certainly the model is appropriate if the object of the inquiry is assumed to be singular, complete in itself, autotelic. All the clues point toward the one outcome, as in a work of detection. But the problem that is overlooked here is that insofar as works of art are works of the sign, their structure is not in fact singular, but iterative.<sup>26</sup> Singular events occur at only one point in space and time: the guest at the country house party was murdered in the library; the Magna Carta was written in 1215; the painting was autographed and framed. But signs are by definition repeatable. They enter into a plurality of contexts; works of art are constituted by different viewers in different ways at different times and places. The production of signs entails a fundamental split between the enunciation and the enunciated: not only between the person, the subject of enunciation, and what is enunciated; but between the circumstances of enunciation and what is enunciated, which can never coincide.<sup>27</sup> Once

launched into the world, the work of art is subject to all of the vicissitudes of reception; as a work involving the sign, it encounters from the beginning the ineradicable fact of semiotic play. The idea of convergence, of causal chains moving toward the work of art should, in the perspective of semiotics, be supplemented by another shape: that of lines of signification opening out from the work of art, in the permanent diffraction of reception.

It may be that scholars in certain other disciplines are more at ease than art historians with the possibility of a work of art that constitutively changes with different conditions of reception, as different viewers and generations of viewers bring to bear upon the artwork the discourses, visual and verbal, that construct their spectatorship. Admittedly, the openness of such a text or work of art can and has been appropriated and used in the name of a number of ideological exercises: the rehabilitation of the concept of the canon in literary criticism is one (the open text turning out to coincide with the shelf of master-works, the rest remaining ephemeral and merely *lisible*); the cult of the reader as hedonistic consumer is another (a consumer who never reflects on the preconditions of consumption). But obviously the plurality attributed so selectively to the 'classic' text (whether visual or verbal) is not excessive because it is a masterpiece. Rather the opposite: the openness of the classic is the result of that fundamental lack it shares with all texts, master-works or not. It is the consequence of the fact that the text or artwork cannot exist outside the circumstances in which the reader reads the text or the viewer views the image, and that the work of art cannot fix in advance the outcome of any of its encounters with contextual plurality. The idea of 'context' as that which will, in a legislative sense, determine the contours of the work in question is therefore different from the idea of 'context' that semiotics proposes: what the latter points to is, on the one hand, the unarrestable mobility of the signifier, and on the other, the construction of the work of art within always specific contexts of viewing.

When 'context' is located in a clearly demarcated moment in the past, it becomes possible to overlook 'context' as the contextuality of the present, the current functioning of art-historical discourses. Such an outcome is something that semiotics is particularly concerned to question. It hardly needs remarking that the referent of 'context' is (at least) dual: the context of the production of works of art and the context of their commentary. Semiotics, despite frequent misunderstandings of precisely this point (and especially of semiotic 'play'), is averse neither to the idea of history nor to the idea of historical determination. It argues that meanings are always determined in specific sites in a historical and material world. Even though factors of determination necessarily elude the logic of totality, 'determination' is recognized and indeed insisted upon. Similarly, in recommending that the present context be included within the analysis of 'context,' semiotics does not work to avoid the concept of historicity; rather, its reservations concern forms of historiography that would present themselves in an exclusively aoristic or constative mode, eliding the determinations of historiography as a performative discourse active in the present. The same historiographic scruple that requires us to draw a distinguishing line between 'us' and the historical 'them'—in order to see how they are different from us—should, in the semiotic view, by the same token urge us to see how 'we' are different from 'them'

and to use 'context' not as a legislative idea but as a means that helps 'us' to locate ourselves instead of bracketing out our own positionalities from the accounts we make.

## 2. Senders

'Context,' then, turns out to be something very different from a given of art-historical analysis. But no less problematic is the status of the concept of 'artist'—painter, photographer, sculptor, and so forth. (To avoid some of the connotational baggage that comes with the label 'artist,' we use here the more neutral word 'author.')

<sup>28</sup> It might seem at first that the idea of the author of a work of art is, again, a natural term in the order of explanation, and one that is now much more substantial and tangible than 'context.' As the idea of context is probed and tested, various disturbing vistas open up—regressions, *mises-en-abyme*,<sup>29</sup> multiple or folded temporalities—but 'author' seems much more stable. We may not be able in the end to point to a context, since in so many ways the context-idea involves lability and shifting grounds; but the author of a work of art is surely someone we can indeed point to, a living (or once living), flesh-and-blood personage with a palpable presence in the world, as solid and undeniable as any individual bearing a proper name, as reliably there as you or me.

Yet, as Foucault points out,<sup>30</sup> the relation between an individual and his or her proper name is quite different from the relation that obtains between a proper name and the function of authorship. The name of an individual (as they say in Britain, J. Bloggs)<sup>31</sup> is a designation, not a description; it is arbitrary in the sense that it does not assign any particular characteristics to its bearer. But the name of an author (a painter, a sculptor, a photographer, etc.) oscillates between designation and description: when we speak of Homer, we do not designate a particular individual; we refer to the author of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, of the body of texts performed by the rhapsodes at the Panathenaic Festivals, or we intend a whole range of qualities, 'Homeric' qualities that can be applied to any number of cases (epics, epithets, heroes, types of diction, of poetic rhythm—the list is open-ended). 'J. Bloggs' is in the world, but an 'author' is in the works, in a body of artifacts and in the complex operations performed on them. Like 'context,' 'authorship' is an elaborate work of framing, something we elaborately produce rather than something we simply find.

Some of the processes of this enframing can be seen at work in the strategies of attribution.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the first procedure in attribution is to secure clear evidence of the material traces of the author in the work, metonymic contiguities that move in a series from the author in the world, the flesh- and-blood J. Bloggs, into the artifact in question. The traces may be directly autographic—evidence of a particular hand at work in the artifact's shaping. Or they may be more indirect—perhaps documents pertaining to the work, or the physical traces of a milieu (as when an artifact is assigned to the category 'Athenian, circa 700 B.C.'). At this level, the most 'scientific' stage of attribution, all sorts of technologies may provide assistance: X-rays, spectroscopic analysis, cryptography. What is assumed is that the category of authorship will be decided on the basis of material evidence, and what 'author' names

here is the work's physical origin. The techniques employed are essentially the same as those that would be used by a detective<sup>33</sup> to establish whether J. Bloggs is guilty or innocent (whether the artwork is authentic or fake); and to this extent there is nothing as yet peculiar to art-historical discourse about the construction of authorship: the techniques are part of a general science of forensics. But attribution in art history involves further operations that lead away from science and technology into subtler, and more ideologically motivated, considerations concerning quality and stylistic standardization. Before, the 'author' referred to a physical agent in the world, but now it refers to the putative creative subject. In the drastic changeover from scientific procedures built on measurement and experimental knowledge to the highly subjective and volatile appraisals of quality and stylistic uniformity, one already sees how multifarious are the principles that 'authorship' brings into play. Not only are the principles diverse, which would make 'authorship' an aggregated or multilayered concept, but they are also contradictory—though the essentially unificatory drive of the concept of authorship as a whole will work to mask this, and to conceal the joins between conflicting elements from view.

If a certain measure of arbitrariness is already evident in the principles of quality and of stylistic standardization, a further and quite different range of the arbitrary is found in the procedures for 'setting limits' to what counts within authorship. J. Bloggs, under the forensic principle, is the origin of all the physical traces that point to Bloggs's presence in the world, every one of them, however minute; forensics can consider all possible evidence, even the most unpromising. But 'authorship' is an exclusionary concept. On one side, it works to circumscribe the artistic corpus, and on the other it works to circumscribe the archive. If the author were the physical agent J. Bloggs, we should have to count among Bloggs's authorized works every doodle, every jotted diagram, that Bloggs left in the world. Similarly, in defining the archive for Bloggs, we would have to admit into it the traces of every circumstance that Bloggs encountered in his life. As a concept, 'authorship' turns out after all to entail the same regressions and *mises-en-abyme* involved in 'context.' And as it operates in practice, 'authorship' manages these receding vistas through many variations on the theme of nonadmission.

Excluded from 'authorship' are whole genres, and the decisions regarding such genres are historically variable to a degree. In our own time, graphic art occupies a mysteriously fluctuating zone between authorship (many graphics in magazines bear signatures) and anonymity (many others do not). Photography is similarly divided, with sometimes an expectation of authorship (for example, when photographs appear in museums, where authorship operations are essential), and sometimes not (many photographs in daily newspapers). Among the forces that patrol these borders are those deriving from the economic matrix, since 'authorship' in the modern sense has historically developed *pari passu* with the institution of property. Here the concept becomes a legal and monetary operation, closely bound up with the history of copyright law. And the forces must also include the protocols of writing and the rules governing what is to count as a correct mode of narration. For instance, a catalogue raisonné would be breaking those rules if it wandered into the realm of an author's doodles and napkin sketches, just as a biography of the author would be breaking them if it widened the aperture of rel-

evance to the proportions of a *Tristram Shandy*. That such deviant narratives are rarely encountered is proof of the efficiency of the ‘authorship’ operation, which is designed to prevent such aberrations. By a rule of correct narration or ‘emplotment,’ only those aspects of an author’s innumerable wanderings through the world that may be harmonized with the corpus of works will count as relevant, and only a certain number of an author’s traces will count as elements of the authorized corpus. The exclusionary moves are mutually supportive, and ‘correct’ narration will set up further conventions, which vary from period to period, from Vasari to the present,<sup>34</sup> concerning exactly how much latitude may be permitted in describing the perimeters.

Authorship, then, is no more a natural ground of explanation than is context. To paraphrase Jonathan Culler, authorship is not given but produced; what counts as authorship is determined by interpretive strategies;<sup>35</sup> and in the disparities among the plural forces that determine authorship are seen lines of fissure that put in question the very unity that the concept seeks, contradictions that the concept must (and does) work hard to overcome. Consider the following:

	(B) physical agency	
(A) property	‘author’	(C) creative subject
	(D) narration	

Interdependent, these are various pressures that take different forms in different sites: in museums and auction houses, for example, (A) and (B) assume more centrality, and are subject to more exacting differentiation, than in departments of art history, where (C) and (D) may be more pressing than questions of monetary value or of forensics. In art history, modes of narration are of capital importance. And according to the view of many writers, from Barthes to Preziosi, the whole purpose of art-historical narration is to merge the authorized corpus and its producer into a single entity, the totalized narrative of the-man-and-his-work, in which the rhetorical figure *author=corpus* governs the narration down to its finest details.

What these writers find unacceptable is that such narratives are saturated with a romantic mythology of the full creative subject. Barthes writes: ‘The author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*... We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.’<sup>36</sup> Preziosi writes:

The disciplinary apparatus works to validate a metaphysical recuperation of Being and a unity of intention or Voice. At base, this is a theophanic regime, manufactured in the same workshops that once crafted paradigms of the world as Artifact of a divine Artificer, all of whose Works reveal ... a set of traces oriented upon a(n immaterial) center. In an equivalent fashion, all the works of the artist canonized in this regime reveal traces of (that is, are signifiers with respect to) a homogeneous Selfhood that are proper(ty) to him.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of ‘author’ brings together a series of related unities that, though assumed as given, are precisely the products and goals of its discursive operations. First is the unity of the Work. Second is the unity of the Life. Third, out

of the myriad of accidents and contingent circumstances, and the plurality of roles and subject positions that an individual occupies, the discourse of authorship constructs a coherent and unitary Subject. Fourth is the doubly reinforced unity that comes from the superimposition of Work upon Life upon Subject in the narrative genre of the life-and-work; for in that genre, everything the Subject experiences or makes will be found to signify his or her subjecthood. The mythology of this Subject is not only theophanic, it is also—as Griselda Pollock and others have shown—sexist: In a male-dominated art history ‘Women were not historically significant artists ... because they did not have the innate nugget of genius (the phallus) which is the natural property of men.’<sup>38</sup>

There can be little doubt that the discursive operations of authorship have been appropriated by ideologies with a heavy investment in the kind of Subject described here. In art history, and particularly through the formula of the monograph, the narrative genre of the man-and-his-work has exercised a hold over writing that is perhaps unparalleled in the humanities. To the extent that this has been the case, the author-function has enjoyed a hegemonic influence within the discipline, naturalizing a whole series of ideological constructs (among them, genius, genius as masculine, the subject as unitary, masculinity as unitary, the artwork as expressive, the authentic work as most valuable). But however much one may recognize the forcefulness of the critique of the author/Subject, it may now be just as critical to realize the strategic limitations operating upon it. [...]



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# Meaning/Interpretation

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.

T. S. Eliot

What I seek to defend here is the view that the search for meaning—the process that is commonly called ‘interpretation’—is a virtually limitless one, which can be terminated only by the atrophy of the individual subject’s desire to know. This is not, however, tantamount to making the exploration of meaning a pursuit of wild, subjective fantasy. It is in the nature of works of art themselves that they should support and favor the process of interpretation. To pursue meaning is not like a game of Chinese boxes, where we open one at a time until we find what is bound to be the smallest and most secret box in the center. It is certainly a process in which one problem solved discloses another, but the movement is outwards, in the social dimension, rather than inwards, converging on a private truth. The semiologist Jan Mukarovsky effectively defined the issue by stating that every work of art has two components, the ‘work-thing’ (which we can touch, purchase, and have restored) and the ‘aesthetic object’ which is ‘laid down in the collective consciousness’ (Mukarovsky 1988, 7). To interpret the aesthetic object is inevitably to measure its participation in the multiple codes which govern the collective consciousness.

Thus far I have confined myself to making a general statement about the nature of interpretation. But what does it imply in terms of practical criticism? By what stages can we move from contemplation of the work of art as a concrete object staring us in the face to the further interpretation of its multiple codes? Here it may be useful to look first of all at a detailed description of another mode of interpretation, whose premises I have deliberately tried to invert in making my initial statement of method. I would not have insisted so firmly on the point that interpretation aims at the social dimension, rather than at private truth, if the pioneering art historian Erwin Panofsky had not, to some extent, implied the opposite.

Panofsky indeed took the trouble to bring together a group of his most penetrating essays under the title *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, and in one of these essays he gave an especially clear description of the method of ‘iconography,’ which ‘concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form’ (Panofsky 1970, 51). The method is defined in terms of three separate, sequential stages, and the example which Panofsky chooses is (perhaps significantly) not a confrontation with a work of art, but a meeting with an acquaintance in the street. This acquaintance greets Panofsky

by lifting his hat, and the first stage of interpretation is already under way: 'what I see from a formal point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of colour, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision.' The mist soon clears, however, and Panofsky is able to identify the 'configuration' as being 'an object (gentleman)' and in the change in the details as 'an event (hat-lifting).' We have stepped beyond the stage of 'purely formal perception and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning.'

It is not a trivial objection to point out, at this juncture, that Panofsky's seemingly incontrovertible assumption about the nature of perception is, in fact, dependent on a relatively recent change in the concept of vision. Jonathan Crary has shown very effectively that the notion of an 'innocent eye,' occupied with a 'primordial vision' of color and form, was inconceivable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was rendered possible only by far-reaching changes in the role of the observer which took place in the early nineteenth century (Crary 1990, 66). But let us allow Panofsky, for the moment, his transition from 'purely formal perception' to 'subject matter or meaning.' There is then a further crucial transition to be made, when we proceed from the immediate 'expressional' effect of the lifting of the hat, which is classed as part of his 'practical experience,' to the fuller interpretation of the act of politeness which is recognized as belonging to a specific, and historically conditioned, code: 'This form of salute is peculiar to the Western world and is a residue of medieval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions' (Panofsky 1970, 52). What has been set up, in this example, is a hierarchy of two different stages of meaning, one 'primary or natural' and the other 'secondary or conventional.' The art historian, of course, is the very person who is qualified to elucidate the secondary stage.

Thus far, Panofsky may seem to be developing his interpretation in much the same way as that recommended by the semiologist Mukarovsky. But when he transfers his example from the case of the meeting in the street to the encounter with a work of art, he makes it explicit that there is a further stage to be reckoned with. First of all, in the work, we perceive that 'primary or natural subject matter' which may be 'factual' or 'expressional': we recognize that the 'configurations of line and colour' represent natural objects like 'human beings, animals, plants, houses, tools and so forth,' and we attribute to them 'expressional' qualities like 'the homelike or peaceful character of an interior' (54). Second, we are equipped, by our previous knowledge, to detect in the attributes and poses of certain figures the codes of iconography: we realize that 'a male figure with a knife represents St Bartholemew, that a female figure with a peach in her hand is a personification of veracity, that a group of figures seated at a dinner table in a certain arrangement and in certain poses represents the Last Supper.' But we have to proceed beyond this stage to identify a further level of significance which Panofsky describes as 'intrinsic meaning or content.' At this point, the outward movement, into the social and historical world, is counterbalanced by an inward movement, into the subjectivity of the artist: we are invited to discover how 'those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a

religious or philosophical persuasion' can be 'qualified by one personality and condensed into one work' (55).

It is at this crucial stage, where the study of 'iconography' yields to what Panofsky terms 'iconology,' that the clarity of his analysis is overtaken by a degree of confusion. What are these values, described as 'symbolical' in deference to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, which underlie the forms and codes of the visual work of art? Panofsky seems to be saying that a work can 'condense' the artist's deepest feelings, or it can 'condense' the character of the society which surrounds it. But can these two possibilities coexist? How can we use a method which seems to point, on the one hand, to an extreme subjectivism and, on the other, to a bland notion of correspondence to the social world? Panofsky is clear that we have not got very far when we make the iconographical judgment that 'a group of thirteen men around a dinner table ... represents the Last Supper.' But does it get us much further to suggest that we should then study the work as 'a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude' (56)?

These issues are not really settled in Panofsky's formal statement of his method, published originally in 1939. But they are raised in an implicit and excitingly problematic form in an earlier essay, collected in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, which deals with Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* (National Gallery, London). Much the greater part of this piece is devoted to an absorbing process of iconographic detection: Panofsky tracks down the allegory—the conventional representation of Prudence as a figure with three conjoined heads—to the ancient world, and back, through the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance. But, in the closing pages, he lets slip the hazardous and seductive suggestion that the three heads shown in the work represent Titian himself in old age, his loyal son Orazio, and his beloved young relative Marco Vecelli; moreover that the painting is a document of 'the period when the old master and patriarch felt that the time had come to make provision for his clan.' Panofsky does not stop short at envisaging that the very document that condensed the aged artist's hopes for the future of his family was also, in physical terms, the means of access to his private papers: 'Were it permissible to indulge in romantic speculation, we might even imagine that it was intended to conceal a little cupboard recessed into the wall (*repositiglio*) wherein important documents and other valuables were kept' (202).

Panofsky's analysis of the *Allegory of Prudence* thus demonstrates, in an almost exaggerated way, the odd distortions implicit in the use of the iconographic and iconological method. He spends virtually the whole essay in the patient (and necessary) elucidation of the genealogy of the three-headed Prudence, and he finally chances his arm on this memorable 'speculation' about the personal significance of Titian's work. But the very fact that the iconographic search has led us through an enormous number of different media—bas-reliefs, illuminated manuscripts, statuettes, and coins—impels us to ask the question: in the end, how relevant to our interpretation is the fact that this is an oil painting, and indeed an oil painting by one of the greatest masters of the technique? Panofsky himself seems to antici-

pate this possible challenge in his final remarks, where he concedes that the 'abstruse allegory' which is also a 'moving human document' would never have been judged worthy of our attention if we had not first been captivated by the beauty of its form: 'In a work of art, "form" cannot be divorced from "content": the distribution of colour and lines, light and shade, volumes and planes, however delightful as a visual spectacle, must also be understood as carrying a more-than-visual meaning' (205). It is as if, after the long iconographic haul and the sudden iconological insight, Panofsky had been anxious to reinstate, at least on the primary level, the notion of the 'innocent eye.' Titian delights us with the effulgence of his forms, the purely 'visual spectacle,' and the stern quest for 'more-than-visual meaning,' when it engages us in the process of interpretation, cannot be entirely disentangled from our initial experience of the sensuously appealing surfaces.

Panofsky's ingenious and intellectually dazzling analysis of the *Allegory of Prudence* is taken here as a counterexample: that is to say, the very confidence with which the method is used, and the clarity with which each stage emerges from the previous one, are for my purposes subject to critical revision and reassessment. The point is that Panofsky has welded together two modes of spectatorial awareness—on the one hand, the 'innocent eye' which delights in 'visual spectacle,' and on the other, the informed consciousness of a spectator conversant with the obscure traditions of iconography. He betrays the fact, in this final quotation, that he is dissatisfied with the apparent cleavage between 'form' and 'content' that emerges. But he cannot explain how such a 'more-than-visual meaning' might be elicited from the colors, lines, lights, and shades of the painting.

He is also (it hardly has to be stressed) taking for granted that Titian's authorship of the *Allegory of Prudence* forms an unquestioned historical datum. At the time of writing, he has some justification for his assurance. 'The authenticity of [the] picture ... cannot be ... questioned' (182), as he asserts at an early stage in the argument. Yet the subsequently more vexed issue of the attribution to Titian reflects inevitably on the central use which he makes of Titian's authorship in the process of conducting his interpretation. It is not simply that we start with Titian, as the unquestioned author of the work, but also that we end up with Titian, as the old man who has put his deepest feelings into the 'moving human document.' As with the Chinese boxes, we have arrived at a secret inward space. But is this process in any way a general guide to the strategies that we might adopt in teasing the meaning out of any number of other, less seemingly distinctive works of visual art?

I intend to test the proposition that is implicit in this question by looking at a work which fulfills virtually none of the criteria met by Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*; and in this way, I hope to be in a position to reassess the mode of strong interpretation advocated in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. The first point to be emphasized in introducing my example is that it does not have just one author. In fact, no less than four artists have left their mark in the textual material which accompanies the image. Thus the initial task is to sort out the complex personal and professional linkages that are implied by their simultaneous appearance in the text appended to this fine seventeenth-century engraving.

To look first of all in the bottom right-hand corner of the work [41] is the approach which pays off, here as with the majority of visual works in the Western tradition. 'Magdalena Passaea Crisp. F. Fecit.' The discreet, neatly engraved capitals indicate that the print was 'made' by Magdalena de Passe, daughter of Crispin de Passe, and hence of a member of a flourishing family of engravers working in the Low Countries at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Crispin de Passe was born in the Dutch province of Zeeland around 1564, and enrolled with the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp in 1584/85; he was, however, a member of the Protestant sect known as the Mennonites, and the capture of Antwerp by the Spanish forces in 1585 forced him to leave the city. After making his home in Cologne for some years, he was once again obliged to move on as a result of a decree published in 1611 and became established in Utrecht, where he died in 1637.

The bare details of Crispin de Passe's life have only recently been established (see Luijten and Van Suchtelen 1993, 313). They indicate a pattern that is familiar from the years in which the Low Countries gradually became divided, along religious lines, between the southern provinces controlled by Catholic Spain and the Dutch United Provinces of the North, which were vindicating their civil and religious liberty. Crispin probably trained as a draftsman and engraver in a Haarlem studio, then made his brief and unsuccessful sortie to the rich Flemish city of Antwerp: his later years, in Utrecht, coincided with the growing prosperity of the emancipated Dutch provinces and the consequent beginnings of the 'golden age' of Dutch art.

Engraving was a collective affair for the de Passe family. A contemporary diary notes a visit to the artist's shop at Cologne in 1599, when his wife Magdalena de Bock (herself the niece of the Antwerp painter Marten de Vos) was in charge. Four of the five children born to Crispin and Magdalena trained in the family workshop as engravers, including their daughter Magdalena who appends her name (and her father's name) to this engraving. It seems as though the young Magdalena, who was born around 1600, traveled less widely than her three brothers, who were established at different times as far afield as London, Copenhagen, and Paris. She was married, shortly after 1624, and became established in Utrecht, where she died, the year after her father, in 1638.

These bare details merely scratch the surface of a prodigious amount of activity undertaken by the de Passe family over these years: it is calculated that their total output amounted to 'more than 1,400 prints and 50 illustrated works' (313). Within the family, there appears to have been some degree of specialization as far as the different genres and subjects were concerned. Crispin de Passe himself acquired fame at Cologne by portrait studies of prominent citizens, which he was evidently authorized to dedicate to his sitters. He did, however, also work on mythological and allegorical scenes. Yet it is not directly to her father that Magdalena de Passe is indebted for the subject, style, and visual presentation of this engraving. The crucial link must be with another artist established in Utrecht during the period, but one who had developed a far more cosmopolitan acquaintance with the art of the period and whose noble birth must have given him a special cachet in the artistic community: the engraver Hendrick Goudt.





41  
 Magdalena de Passe, *Apollo and Coronis*. Engraving after Adam Elsheimer, ca. 1625.

With Goudt, the northern European context in which I have placed the de Passe family enterprise begins to appear inadequate. It can be borne in mind that Magdalena’s maternal grandfather, Marten de Vos, had spent six years in Italy, at Rome first of all and subsequently in Venice, where ‘he is said to have worked as a landscape assistant to Tintoretto’ (Murray 1989, 443). But Marten de Vos died in 1603, during Magdalena’s early childhood. By contrast, Hendrick Goudt had spent a number of years in Rome, from 1606 onwards, and had formed a particularly close relationship with the German-born artist, Adam Elsheimer, whose remarkable oil paintings on copper plates he appears to have purchased and, from 1608, used as the basis for his own engravings. The work with which we are concerned, engraved by Magdalena de Passe, bears all the characteristics of this singular and specialized mode of production. Like Goudt, Magdalena de Passe composes her engraving ‘after’ an oil painting by this particular artist: like him, she credits the painter in an elegant italic formula, ‘Adam Elsheimer pinxit’; like him, she includes a set of verses in Latin to sum up the moral implications of the scene depicted; like him,



she includes a dedication to a prestigious figure as a prominent feature of the engraved text.

I have deliberately (but not, I hope, excessively) insisted on the multiple connections which are to be taken into account in interpreting this little work, by contrast with the splendid isolation of the individual author in the case of Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*. In this case, the work is enmeshed in a close texture of relationships which make it virtually impossible to separate out the stake of an individual authorship. Numerous interpersonal debts are involved here: that of Magdalena to her father Crispin, who taught her to engrave, as well as to her mother (and through her mother to the 'Italianizing' Antwerp painter, Marten de Vos); that of Magdalena to Hendrick Goudt, who must have shown her his superb engravings, and possibly the work by Elsheimer after which she made her own; and finally that of Goudt himself to Elsheimer, which was no ordinary relationship of patron to artist. Just as Goudt's seven famous prints after Elsheimer established his reputation as one of the finest northern engravers of the century, so his success in publicizing the work of this northern artist who had made his home in Rome succeeded in establishing Elsheimer's fame in northern Europe (Luijten and Van Suchtelen 1993, 306). The print by Magdalena de Passe is the continuing evidence of the artistic debt contracted by Goudt to this outstanding, yet still mysterious painter of the early seventeenth century, who had died at Rome in 1610.

It may appear perverse—now that the cat is out of the bag, and Elsheimer's painting is acknowledged as the source of this engraving—for me to have chosen to concentrate on the engraving rather than the painting. This is for a particular reason, which will shortly become clear. But it is also for a more general reason, which I indicated in my brief epigraph from T. S. Eliot. The point that no poet or artist 'has his complete meaning alone' has been sufficiently appreciated in the case of literature. The critic Harold Bloom has gone so far as to assert that 'there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts,' and these relationships depend on 'a critical act, a misreading or misprision, that one poet performs upon another' (Bloom 1975, 3). The art historian Norman Bryson has extended this intuition by suggesting that, in the visual arts, tradition has an even more constraining effect because the image maker 'lacks access to any comparable flow (at least before the mass dissemination of imagery)' (Bryson 1984, xvii). The example which I have chosen takes for granted the prior existence of the earlier painting as a constraining force: the priority of Elsheimer's painting is, after all, clearly declared in the textual material. But it also enables us to invoke a more useful notion of tradition, which is broadly implicit in the high-sounding dedication of the print not to a potentate of Rome (as Goudt was wont to do) but to the prince of Flemish painters: Peter Paul Rubens.

Elsheimer's special significance for Rubens is well attested. After entering the Guild of Saint Luke at Antwerp in 1598, Rubens traveled to Italy in 1600 and became court painter to the duke of Mantua. His meeting with Elsheimer in Rome took place in 1606, and the evidence of his letters shows the remarkable effect which these tiny, jewel-like oil paintings on copper exercised on the artist who was to become the most significant northern exponent of the baroque. When he learned in 1611 of Elsheimer's death, he wrote that 'our entire profession ought to clothe itself in mourning ... in my opinion

he had no equal in small figures, in Landscapes, and in many other subjects' (Andrews 1977, 51). There is an immediate appropriateness in the fact that Magdalena de Passe, whose grandfather had been influential in bringing the Venetian style back to Antwerp, should have dedicated this engraving after Elsheimer to the artist who made Antwerp and Flanders the center of northern Italianate painting: 'Peter Paul Rubens, easily the first in the art of painting in our century and supreme lover of all the liberal arts'; and moreover, that she should have chosen to do so through the token of a work by a painter whom Rubens valued so highly.

I have deliberately chosen to focus, in this example, on a work where the stakes of authorship are not clearly indicated. But one thing is obvious. This engraving forms a kind of relay between Elsheimer and Rubens, or, more precisely, between the small, highly original works of a uniquely important northern artist who worked in Rome and the eventual achievement of another northern artist who contrived to establish the high style of the Italian baroque in a Flemish context. What kind of relay, precisely, does the engraving form? Clearly, it is not like the *Allegory of Prudence*, in Panofsky's interpretation, which is put forward as the possible cover of a 'little cupboard' containing the artist's most private documents, thus giving access, either actually or metaphorically, to the inmost secrets of his mind. On the contrary, this engraving gives access, purely and simply, to another work of art, which is the painting by Adam Elsheimer: Magdalena de Passe's personal stake may, at a later stage in the argument, be accessible to recuperation, but for the moment, it is difficult to discern. What we need to investigate next, therefore, is the precise relationship between the two works, and this will require, for the first time, an interpretation of their subject matter.

The German painter and biographer, Joachim von Sandrart, who included an invaluable life of Adam Elsheimer in his *Teutsche Akademie* (1675–79), gave his own forthright opinion on the relationship of Magdalena de Passe and Goudt as engravers, to the original paintings of Elsheimer:

his works, of which he painted few, but excellently well on copper ... were used by Magdalena de Pas [*sic*] and others for engraving ... although [Goudt] often attempted to engrave [one of these works] on copper as faithfully as possible he was never able to reach complete excellence, because it is impossible that the art of engraving can equal that of painting. Although Goudt's engravings excel others, these engravings show up their inferiority when they are compared with the original paintings from which they were made—they are diminished in the same way as earthly light is diminished and shamed by the clear sun. (Andrews 1977, 56)

Here is an initial warning, then, about the limitations of the medium in which Goudt and Magdalena de Passe were working. Engraving could not, by its very nature, achieve the 'excellence' of painting. It was condemned to be, at best, an interpretation or more exactly a misinterpretation of the original work. Sandrart carefully chooses the metaphor of the sun's relationship to earthly light to express this relentless subordination of the print to the painting. And we shall see in a moment that this choice of terms is specially illuminating in the case that we have before us. But as misinterpretation, in the technical sense of an engraver approximately translating the effects of a painter, has now become an issue, it might as well be admitted that this work

by Magdalena de Passe is, in an even more direct sense, a misinterpretation. This sedulous engraver, whether consciously or unconsciously, actually misinterprets the scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that was the chosen mythological theme of Elsheimer's painting.

A nymph is lying on her back, with her arms raised, to the right-hand side of the picture (in the painting by Elsheimer, she lies to the left, as the engraving necessarily involves a reversal of directions). By her side, a male figure is bending down to gather some flowering plants, while, in the background, a group of people are preparing a fire. I am trying, in this brief description, to remain within Panofsky's category of 'primary or natural subject matter' which can be either 'factual' or 'expressional'; and I am already conscious of having trespassed into the 'iconographic' domain by calling the recumbent woman a 'nymph,' just as I have restrained myself from making the equally coded point that the person to the left of the fire is a satyr, with furry haunches and cloven feet. Nevertheless, I can try to make a little more headway in my interpretation by paying attention simply to those 'expressional' features of the image. The recumbent woman is either sleeping or in a much graver predicament. When I notice the arrow at her feet, with its stained tip, and the troubled expression of the bending companion, I begin to suspect that the second alternative is more likely: I begin to detect a look of apprehension in the glance which the naked child directs towards the foreground scene.

Magdalena de Passe has made it unnecessary for the reader to puzzle more strenuously over the meaning of the scene by including four lines of Latin verse, in the same stylish italic hand as the acknowledgment to Elsheimer (Goudt habitually included verses of this kind in his prints after Elsheimer, and it is more than likely that Magdalena de Passe was following his practice, if not employing his poetic collaborator, Janus Rutgers.) These are cautionary lines, pointing out the dangers of an ill-directed zeal and drawing our attention to the 'unhappy Procris' who perished at the hands of her husband, victim of the very gifts which she had endowed him with. To a person familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a Latin text widely diffused during the post-Renaissance period, the very word Procris would have been enough to call forth the entire myth upon which the printed verses tendentiously comment. Ovid tells the story of the warrior Cephalus, married to the beautiful Procris, who had made him a present of a dog (originally the gift of the goddess Diana) and a splendid javelin. Cephalus had originally doubted the faithfulness of his wife, and the gifts had been the result of their reconciliation. But the javelin was to prove fatal to her in the end. As she, in her turn, spied on her husband while he went hunting, the deluded Cephalus, thinking he heard a 'wild creature' in the woods, hurled his javelin in the direction of the suspicious sound and mortally wounded his wife. Despite a final reconciliation in the moments remaining to them, Cephalus was forced to witness his wife's death agony as a result of his own incautious action (Ovid 1955, 173–88).

The myth of Cephalus and Procris is not unknown as a subject for Renaissance painters. One of Piero di Cosimo's finest works is generally known as *The Death of Procris* (ca. 1500–10, National Gallery, London). It involves, in addition to the dead woman, what may be the faithful hound given by Diana and an attendant faun who, in a play by Niccolò da Correggio based on the Ovidian theme, is himself in love with Procris and led her to suspect her hus-

band in the first place (see Fermor 1993, 49–54). But Piero di Cosimo's *Death of Procris*—if this be in fact the subject of the painting—includes neither Cephalus himself nor the javelin (*iaculum*) that did the deed. It depicts not the story as told by Ovid, but the process of 'mourning' ensuing from it (50), which was indeed a prominent feature of Correggio's play.

What reason is there to suppose that Magdalena de Passe's engraving and the original painting by Elsheimer to which it refers do indeed represent the *Death of Procris* and do so in a fashion which reflects more faithfully the Ovidian myth? The first point to be borne in mind is that the painting by Elsheimer and the engraving by Magdalena de Passe were both known under that title until 1951, when the German art historian Holzinger proposed another Ovidian subject for the two of them (see Andrews 1977, 151). But apart from what must now be seen as Magdalena de Passe's misinterpretation, there is remarkably little evidence for the labeling of the recumbent woman as Procris, and only an obstinate dedication to the traditional title can justify its retention (see Sello 1988, 75–78). To try to interpret the engraving in the light of the Procris myth is to be met at each stage of the interpretation, by a puzzle or nonsense. In Ovid, Cephalus 'tear[s] the dress from [Procris's] breast ... [binds] up her cruel wounds, and [tries] to staunch the blood' (Ovid 1955, 178). But what is he doing here, as he rifles through the vegetation? Piero di Cosimo shows the clothed body of Procris as compatible with this description and includes Diana's dog, though the javelin has been cleared away. But here there is no dog, and indeed no javelin: the weapon that lies bloodied at the nymph's feet is unquestionably an arrow.

What are we to make of Magdalena de Passe's misinterpretation? The issue can be approached in several different ways. First of all, as has been shown, she had no direct acquaintance with Elsheimer. She may well have been acquainted with Goudt, who knew Elsheimer well enough to share a house with him and commission works from him, though the equivocal nature of their relationship is conveyed by Sandrart's claim that the painter was put into a debtor's prison because of his inability to complete the Dutchman's commissions (Andrews 1977, 56). She may well have accepted a title given by Goudt and seen no reason to check on the details of the Ovidian myth. What can be asserted without fear of contradiction is the fact that the Latin verses bring out the particular feature which, in representations of the *Death of Procris*, made such works appropriate for marriage gifts and wedding celebrations: reinterpreted as a *Death of Procris*, and glossed by the moralistic verses, it could be placed among 'the class of images that functioned as examples of wifely virtue or of the consequences of inappropriate behaviour' (Fermor 1993, 51). Is it permissible to move in this way from a Renaissance painting, destined perhaps for a bridal chamber, to an engraving, whose decorative impact would, under any circumstances, have been much less significant? Is Magdalena de Passe uninterested in the subject and content with a text which at least constrains the iconography within a simple, moralistic theme, and may to some extent perhaps improve its salability among her Calvinist compatriots? The answer cannot be given unequivocally, and perhaps it is also impossible to get much further in assessing the stake of this dutiful daughter and (if the print dates from after 1624) wife in a representation of femininity which differs significantly from the one which Elsheimer intended. The

mixture of history and speculation which has led to her immediate contemporary, the Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi, being credited with a direct subjective investment in the scene of male decapitation which she constructs (*Judith and Holofernes*) is inappropriate here (see Menzio 1979, 17–43). The skillful craftswoman effaces herself behind the scene which she has patiently re-created in another medium.

Yet it is precisely in this transcription to another medium, noted by Sandrart as an inevitable ‘diminishment’ of the original painting, that the full extent of Magdalena de Passe’s misinterpretation can be discerned. For the engraving does not simply suppress the ‘formal’ values of the painting (Panofsky’s ‘visual spectacle’) in the necessary process of converting colors and tones into a network of black lines; it also abandons some of the features which work to establish the indissolubility of ‘form’ and ‘content,’ giving a precise equivalent to Panofsky’s ‘more-than-visual meaning.’ In order to appreciate this point, however, it is necessary to substitute for Cephalus and Procris the circumstances of another Ovidian myth: Apollo and Coronis.

The story of Apollo and Coronis can be found in book I of the *Metamorphoses* (Cephalus and Procris being featured in book VII). Again it is a tale of a jealous lover, misled by false testimony, who impulsively kills a blameless woman. The god Apollo ‘with the arrow that none can avoid, pierced the breast he had so often clasped to his own’ (Ovid 1955, 66). Yet, besides the detail of the arrow, there is a constellation of features that betokens a more exact congruence between the circumstances of this myth and the scene of the engraving. Apollo, the god of healing as well as the relentless archer, attempts to ‘employ his healing art,’ and when this is in vain, snatches from Coronis’s womb the son whom she was about to bear to him. We may read the image, then, as the record of Apollo’s vain search for healing plants to avert his mistress’s death, as the funeral pyre is already in preparation (another detail specified in Ovid’s text). Abandoning the effort to save Coronis, Apollo will later ‘save from the flames’ their son, who is destined to be the god of medicine, Aesculapius.

In declaring this interpretation to be more satisfactory than the one implied by Magdalena de Passe’s textual additions, we are at the same time offering a test to our powers of imagination. The challenge is effectively this: can we see the central figure as a god, struck with remorse, searching the vegetation for healing balms? We may not find it easy to make any such interpretation of this clearly defined, anguished profile; we may indeed feel that if Magdalena de Passe interpreted the image as Cephalus and Procris, she may have wished to convey him as a simple huntsman, blessed with no healing powers.

At this point, there is every reason to transfer our attention to Elsheimer’s painting, now labeled *Apollo and Coronis* (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). For the comparison between the painting and the engraving shows a surprising shift in tone and value, capable of bearing a ‘more-than-visual meaning.’ Where Magdalena de Passe has shown a meadow stretching into the distance beyond Apollo’s profiled body, with a tiny figure striding along the sunlit sward, Elsheimer shows no perspectival depth, but a series of parallel bars of sunlight, cutting through the dark trees (the tiny figure has evidently climbed one of them, to gather wood for the funeral pyre). In Elsheimer’s painting, then, the death-dealing arrow at Coronis’s feet is supplemented metonym-

ically by these golden shafts, which also lighten the shoulder of the Sun God and kindle the cheek and forehead around his eye into a glowing half circle, as he tenderly adopts his healing role. Of this extraordinary interfusion between the theme of the Ovidian myth and the subtle plastic values calculated by Elsheimer, the engraving by Magdalena de Passe offers hardly a trace.

It may seem, by this stage, that the search for meaning has led us, paradoxically, to adopt an alibi; meaning lies, not in the engraving, but in the original painting. Yet, although I have used the term 'original painting' as a methodological convenience, there is in fact no compelling reason to conclude that the work in the Walker Art Gallery was employed, directly or indirectly, by Magdalena de Passe. This particular *Apollo and Coronis* is indeed now regarded as 'likely to be the original' (Andrews 1977, 151). But she may well have worked with other copies, since 'few compositions by Elsheimer have been copied so frequently,' and the effective misinterpretation, or reinterpretation, may have begun before she started her version.

And why should we stop at Elsheimer's *Apollo and Coronis*, once we have begun the task of working back, through the visual motifs which are transcribed (and traduced) in the engraving? It has always been recognized that Elsheimer's arrival in Venice, on his move from Germany to Italy, exposed him to an extraordinary wealth of recent painting in the Renaissance tradition, such as Tintoretto's immense cycle of works in the Scuola San Rocco (17). Despite the disparity between these vast paintings and the tiny oils on copper which Elsheimer produced, it is clear that his special talent (and the one appreciated by successors like Rubens and Rembrandt) was his ability to achieve the sureness of composition usually associated with these large-scale machines on an intimate, miniature level. *Apollo and Coronis* echoes Tintoretto in two specific respects: the recumbent Coronis recalls the female figure, also with a thrown-back arm, who occupies the left foreground in the *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Scuola San Rocco; Apollo reaching for his plants repeats the motif, even taking into account the oblique distribution of light, of the figure searching for stones in the left foreground of the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* in the Palladian church of San Giorgio. The fact that the former painting by Tintoretto illustrates a woman who is about to be deprived of her children, by violence, while the latter again shows a violent act in preparation, as the figure prepares to hurl his stones, is surely significant. Elsheimer has not only condensed these figures to a fraction of their size, but also expressed their destiny as beneficent, rather than violent: the unborn child will be saved, and Apollo's healing power transferred to him. The artist also interprets, and misinterprets.

Where Magdalena de Passe's engraving might lead us, as a further stage of interpretation, is still open at the end of this essay. I have tried to show that Panofsky's ideal model of interpretation, though seductive in particular cases, prejudges many important issues, notably in its assumption of a series of distinct stages, from the 'pre-iconographic' to the 'iconological' and in its dependence on a stable notion of authorship. In my example, the stakes of authorship were more widely distributed, and the idea of a progression from 'visual spectacle' through layers of iconographic meaning was replaced by a movement from the engraving to the 'original' painting, whose plastic values were found to be integrally linked to its meaning. Have we



abandoned completely Panofsky's iconological stage and the ultimate goal represented by the suggestion that Titian put his deepest hopes and fears into the *Allegory of Prudence*? In a sense this is so, and the obscure biography of Adam Elsheimer lends little support for any such speculation. But one thing is clear. Both in *Apollo and Coronis* and in his repeated subject of *Tobias and the Angel* Elsheimer concerns himself with the arts of medicine. In the former, he conjures up the circumstances for the birth of the god of healing, while in the latter he takes an obscure story from the Apocrypha, of a son who cures his father with the liver of a miraculous fish. To presuppose that Elsheimer was attentive to these fables of healing is not necessarily to assume that he had a personal psychological investment in this beneficent theme. It is also possible, for example, that he had friends, or even patrons, in professional medical circles. What may be the most attractive idea to pursue, elsewhere than here, is the possibility that he saw in the long, laborious work of painting his tiny images, and in the quasi-alchemical preparation of his pigments, a powerful and congenial analogy to the arts of healing: these would indeed be images to heal and save. To track this issue further, however, would lead not into the personal history of one man, but into the wider social and cultural history of the arts in the Western tradition.

## Stephen Bann: Meaning/Interpretation

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# Deconstruction and the Limits of Interpretation

## Introduction

There is a certain structural affinity between two otherwise radically different phenomena: the practice of reading elaborated in the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida beginning in the 1960s that became widely known by the name he coined, *deconstruction*, and the situation of the child discovering the fallibility of its parents and remaining committed to loving and caring for them whilst learning to comprehend, to think through and with, their contradictory behaviours.

In both cases these are practices of reckoning in the double sense of the term: coping with a situation in which one is impelled to investigate the contradictions and exclusions that haunt an appearance of unity and homogeneity, and thinking with it, using its own language. Derrida's term was a transformation of a word used by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), variously rendered as 'destruction' and 'retrieve', and which for Heidegger indicated the nature of a relationship to one's tradition that was simultaneously critical and respectful; both detached and attached at the same time. For Derrida, deconstruction named this complex relationship, and the situation of reading philosophy in which practising it and confounding it were inseparable.

What implications might there be of a 'deconstructive' attention to art history: to art history's *art* and to its *history* of art, as well as to the history of art history as an instituted 'practice of reading'? Could there be such a thing as a 'deconstructivist' art history?

To appreciate the extent of the possible implications of deconstruction for the practice of art history, consider that Derrida's first essays on the visual arts, in *The Truth in Painting* (1978), addressed a subject essential to any understanding of artworks, and one that directly addressed some of the most fundamental concerns of the aesthetic philosophers of the eighteenth century. Put briefly, this was the problem as to whether objects designated as aesthetic in intent, motivation, or effect could be considered as relatively autonomous in a semiological sense. In other words, whether 'the visual arts' might justifiably be considered a *code* comparable to, but distinct from, other practices of social meaning-production (see the discussion in Chapter 5). This was the question as to the limits or boundaries of works—both individually, or as a class of objects—an issue first raised by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* (see Chapter 1), in connection with the idea of the *parergon* or the boundaries or limits of a work.

What exactly might constitute the ‘inside’ of a work, in contrast to its ‘outside’, is a question of the most fundamental kind, not least because it affects all aspects of the critical and historical discourse about art in modern times. Derrida’s perspective on these problems, which he elaborated in the essays making up *The Truth in Painting*, connected such questions to frames, signatures, museums, archives, and commodity marketing, among other things. It was his contention that both visual and verbal practices were fundamentally heterogeneous, never existing in any pure or unmediated form. An ‘otherness’ always inhabits a work, and no artistic expression can ever be an unmediated manifestation of emotion or thought.

Derrida made it clear that the visual arts were a species of graphic production, which includes writing itself, and that from such a perspective, the social situation or contingency of fixed distinctions between genres or media or semiological codes might be better understood. Fundamental to this was the notion of the *trait* or trace, referring to anything that is drawn (including writing). His work has dealt extensively with the boundaries and distinctions between writing and speech as well as those conventionally articulated in modern Western philosophies between all forms of graphic production (art, architecture, film) and what those practices purport to ‘re-present’.

In effect, what Derrida sought to show was that the ‘inside’ of any work is already inhabited by that which might have been bracketed out as its ‘outside’—signatures, verbal discourse, frames, institutional stagecraft, and so forth. He began his investigations of the visual arts at their conceptual heart and historical beginnings: with Kant’s idea of the parergon; it was the frame or frame-effect that was essential to Enlightenment philosophy’s project of delineating an ‘aesthetic’ realm of cognition as distinct from practical or pure reasoning. As earlier readings and discussions in this volume have suggested, such distinctions formed the basis for the construction of ‘art’ and its ‘history’ as a distinct investigative domain.

The aim of this chapter and its selection of readings is to situate these questions at the centre of the reading of three texts which, in Derrida’s own words, are gathered together as a ‘polylogue’ in which all three (one of which is Derrida’s own) are both juxtaposed and cumulatively superimposed.

The Melville essay (‘The Temptation of New Perspectives’ of 1990) is placed here as a kind of prologue to the ‘polylogue’ that Derrida made of the superimposition of the two earlier texts by Schapiro and Heidegger. It is an astute meditation on art history as a historical artefact in its own right, and its perspective on Hegel and his fabrication of a (German) nationalist discipline compares with that of Luc Ferry, discussed in Chapter 1.

The second selection (Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ of 1935) is followed by a Meyer Schapiro essay (‘The Still Life as a Personal Object—A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh’) published in a 1968 anthology. The Schapiro essay is a critique of Heidegger’s use of van Gogh’s painting *Old Shoes* to ‘illustrate’ a point that, in Schapiro’s opinion, could as well apply to a ‘real’ pair of peasant shoes.

The Derrida text, excerpted from the ‘restitutions’ section of his 1978 publication *The Truth in Painting*,<sup>1</sup> originated as a short article in the same issue of the journal *Macula* (vol. 3, 1978) in which the Schapiro essay was also reprinted; both were part of a series of articles in that issue on Heidegger’s

observations on van Gogh's *Shoes*, and Derrida acted out or narrated his text in a seminar at Columbia University in New York in October 1977. Schapiro took part in the ensuing debate. The excerpt made here includes much of the very complex multivoiced quality of Derrida's text, and is an excellent example of Derrida's deconstructive practice of reading that attends to the paradoxes of its own position(s), and to the fundamental ironies of art historical 'reading' as such.

The literature on deconstruction, and on Jacques Derrida, is very extensive, as is the body of Derrida's own writing, extending from 1962 to the present. Among the most useful introductions to deconstruction in general are: Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, 1982), which situates Derrida's work in its historical and critical contexts, and discusses its implications for theory and criticism; Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London, 1982), which relates Derrida's work to various intellectual and social movements in the twentieth century; and Norris's *Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), which discusses his place in modern philosophy. The volume edited by Peggy Kamuf, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (New York, 1991), contains an excellent introduction to Derrida's writings, perhaps the most diverse and representative selection of his work, and has a complete bibliography of his writings between 1962 and 1990. David Carroll's *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (London, 1987) is an excellent comparative examination of the concept of the aesthetic in the writings of these three authors, and Michael Payne's *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva* (Oxford, 1993) investigates the similarities and differences between psychoanalytic and deconstructive practices; it includes a very clear comparative discussion on 'reading paintings' by Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida (Chapter 5).

For two decades there have been very lively debates about 'deconstruction and ...'—the potentially very extensive implications of deconstruction for art, architecture, literature, linguistics, feminism, or postmodern culture in general. Two volumes which provide an excellent introduction to some of this are: Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture* (Cambridge, 1994), which includes an interview with Derrida on the spatial arts. On relations between architecture and philosophy, the most interesting study is that of Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993). Both of these texts will also provide a useful introduction to the work of artists and architects who have engaged with Derridean concepts.

Of Derrida's own writings, only several of the earlier and most widely known will be mentioned: *Of Grammatology*, translation by Gayatri Spivak of *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967), (Baltimore, 1976); *Dissemination*, translation by Barbara Johnson of *La Dissemination* (Paris, 1972), (Chicago, 1981); *Margins of Philosophy*, translation by Alan Bass of *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris, 1972) (Chicago, 1982). In addition to *The Truth in Painting* of 1978 excerpted here, Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (Chicago, 1993; translation by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas of *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris, 1990)) extends his exploration of art and representation begun in this earlier study. *Mémoires* is a catalogue to an exhibition of which Derrida was curator at the Louvre.



# The Temptation of New Perspectives

Let me begin by offering three rather disparate characterizations of these remarks. They constitute, first, a sort of story about an interest literary theory might take or discover in art history; as such they sketch out if not an actual intellectual and institutional itinerary then something of the underlying logic of one. It is, I think, important here that this is not a story about the portability of theory or method but more a story about the way in which what is sometimes called theory reshapes or rediscovers itself within its new occasion.

My remarks might also be described as a sort of oblique introduction to certain writings by Jacques Derrida. Under this description, it will be a significant feature of my presentation that it falls somewhat short of its goal. Martin Heidegger produced, beginning in 1935, a piece of 'aesthetics' under the title 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' In the late 1960s Meyer Schapiro threw his considerable professional weight behind a sharply administered art-historical correction to Heidegger's treatment of a particular van Gogh, with the clear intent of disposing of the apparent more general interest of Heidegger's speculations. In the mid 70s Derrida took up this argument in a complex 'polylogue' called 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing' that seems aimed at least in part at renewing the philosophic interest of Heidegger's essay.<sup>1</sup> One question one might have about this sequence of writings is whether or not it is of any conceivable interest to art history; I want to suggest that it is, and I want to do so by a somewhat circuitous return to the speculative foundations of art history. If I do not now have much to say about the three essays in question, I am nonetheless working toward a certain description or redescription of the place in which the debate among them happens.

Finally, this reflection is an attempt to map, in an admittedly brief and preliminary fashion, something of the relations that may now bind together the notions of 'theory,' 'postmodernity,' and 'art history.' It is an attempt to say something about the kinds of challenge and possibility that may be facing the discipline of art history now.

I have already mentioned Derrida, and it should be clear in advance that my position is at least loosely deconstructionist.

Deconstruction presents itself as, in general, a practice of reading, a way of picking things up against their own grain, or at their margins, in order to show something about how they are structured by the very things they act to exclude from themselves, and so more or less subtly to displace the structure within which such exclusions seem plausible or necessary. Like an analyst listening

to an analysis, deconstruction attends to the other that haunts, organizes and disorganizes, a speech that takes itself to be in control of its meanings and identity. Deconstruction arises as a certain commitment to flux and to fluidity—rather like this essay, it rambles, circles, connects, and disconnects. In his *Blindness and Insight* the late Paul de Man offered a summary of Derrida's reading of Rousseau that still seems a good enough short introduction to deconstruction's typical and most easily standardized textual procedures:

Whenever Rousseau designates the moment of unity that exists at the beginning of things, when desire coincides with enjoyment, the self and the other are united in the maternal warmth of their common origin, and consciousness speaks with the voice of truth, Derrida's interpretation shows, without leaving the text, that what is thus designated as a moment of presence always has to posit another, prior moment and so implicitly loses its status as a point of origin. . . . All attempts to trace writing back to a more original form of vocal utterance lead to the repetition of the disruptive experience that alienated the written word from experience in the first place.

The term *deconstruction* itself was coined by Derrida as, at least in part, an interpretation of a nest of terms in the philosophic writings of Martin Heidegger that had been variously rendered 'destruction' and 'retrieve.' With these terms Heidegger attempted to name a relation to his tradition that was at once radically critical *of* and profoundly attached *to* it; for Heidegger, as for most continental philosophy after Hegel, the distinction frequently made in Anglo-American circles between being an historian of philosophy and actually doing philosophy is essentially senseless: one does philosophy out of its past and in search of what remains in some sense concealed within that past. Derrida's revisionary translation of Heidegger's terms participates in this complex ambition, at once continuing and critiquing the deep lines of the Heideggerean project, and it accelerates the confounding of the reading of philosophy and the doing of it.

Given the weight this places on the act of reading, it is hardly surprising that Derrida's writings should have had a substantial effect on literary criticism. But, of course, crossing from philosophy to criticism and from France to America, deconstruction enters into engagement with different pasts and different conditions, and some of us at least are still concerned to understand the full weight of these differences.

The term 'deconstruction' seems to have entered art talk primarily because of a perceived appropriateness to the effect of work frequently described as 'postmodern.' It has also gained some more general methodological purchase as a part of broader efforts to bring literary theory to bear upon the consideration of visual objects—as, for example, in the work of Norman Bryson. But there is certainly one other area in which one can imagine it intervening, and that would lie in the reading of the texts of art history itself. In the long run, these three areas are bound to be interconnected, and the surest index of this interconnection lies perhaps in the apparent naturalness with which one will speak, precisely, of 'reading' a painting; deconstruction does not let such remarks pass as somehow 'merely metaphorical.'

To one who comes from literary theory, one of the most striking features of art history is what I might call its 'foundedness.' Literary criticism is, at least

in this country, not founded in the way art history is: it took no special argument to invent departments for the study of literature, although it did take the construction of some special methods, more or less captured by the phrase 'close reading.' Literature departments are just that—literature departments; even if their curricula are for the most part organized by period, the essential element in their self-definition seems to be a notion of the rights or necessity of 'literary language' and not, in the first instance, the historicity of their object. It was enough for I. A. Richards and others to find a way to read that could be justified in the face of very strong and particular philosophic pressures—generally associated with the project of logical positivism—for there to be English Departments.<sup>2</sup>

With art history we have a very different situation. There are founding texts, texts engaged in a struggle to define both an object and an account of our access to it. The work of Riegl, Wölfflin, Panofsky, and others is quite different from that of the founders of academic literary criticism; it is more densely engaged with a philosophic past—above all an Hegelian past—that seems at once to offer to it and to deprive it of the very same object; my questions will be about how far art history can be said to have mastered this past in establishing a certain past as its object. It should be noted in advance that the philosophic past at issue here is one the discipline shares to a significant degree with the tradition that eventuates in Derrida's philosophic work of reading and writing.

This is then a sort of report on work in progress in which I have been trying to make some sense of these founding struggles, to read in them the scars and fissures by which they are still marked and which can open again at any moment—and which are indeed perhaps being forcibly opened now under the impress of a new inflection of the modern. The argument I offer here is partial in every sense: tendentious, incomplete in its arguments and evidence, and committed to a certain finitude of appearances.

Whatever interest the works that concern us may have held for observers throughout the course of what we now call the history of art, that history in its specific visibility becomes possible only at a certain moment within the Western tradition, and this moment is firmly moored to the name of Hegel, whose claim that art has come to an end—has become, that is, merely historical—engenders both an object and a question about our access to it.

Hegel's claim, as I understand it, is not so much that the artistic impulse has exhausted itself as much as it is that an impulse once inchoate and buried in the terms of its world has become now detached and explicit, and that with this achievement it passes over into the still greater explicitness of philosophy. From Hegel's vantage what had been lived variously as ornament, religion, memorial, and so on shows itself to have formed a single history, a story of what is now visible as art. The concept of art is thus bound up with the notion of its end; its achievement is inseparable from its pastness—art comes to presence and explicitness precisely as historical, as already overcome. It is in this sense that one might see or sense in Hegel a certain registration of the museum as the essential site of art (although, to the best of my knowledge, the word 'museum' does not appear in Hegel's writings). One might thus be led to think of what are now called 'institutional theories of art' as coeval with the emergence of art itself.

I want to note a couple of consequences of this view.

A first is the inscription of a permanent worry about context within the project of art history: precisely because the becoming available of art is the story of its detachment from context, there will be a deep tension within the art-historical project between the historicity of its object, the rhythms that organize art as art, and the history in or through which works were lived. This tension seems now most visible in the form of a conflict between the claim to achievement and the claims of context and condition, between the masterpiece and its social history. Institutional theories of art derive such power as they have from their apparent ability to span—or obliterate—some versions of this gap, but they are perhaps better taken as symptoms of it, intimately entangled with the extraordinarily difficult relation of art history and modern art. One mark of the postmodern—I am thinking of the work of someone like Hans Haacke—lies in its impulse to address this entanglement as art and not as a theory of art.

These considerations may point us toward a second consequence of the Hegelian account of art: that the emergence of art as a properly historical object is contemporaneous with the possibility of claiming to make art *as* art. The same history that produces the possibility of art history produces the possibility of modernism in art, and the two possibilities are linked in the thought, which I borrow from Stanley Cavell, that modernism is well defined as the having of the past as a problem. It bears remarking here that these twinned possibilities do not and in general cannot face one another, falling as they do on opposite slopes of the cusp that is the becoming explicit or objective of art. If art history and modernism in art are tied to one another, they nonetheless do not stand fully in one another's view. One thing the recently entered claims to 'postmodernism' may mean is just that this relation has achieved a certain kind of availability for us: that modernism itself can now appear to us as historical, and that art history can now be seen as in some specifiable sense modernist. A full acknowledgment of the postmodern would then entail not simply the addition of a period to the normal art history curriculum but a reevaluation of the discipline itself.

A third consequence of the Hegelian view can set us toward such a work of revision. For those moved to lay out the terms of art history in Hegel's wake, a certain argumentative course is laid out in advance. A Hegelianizing history of art must give some account of its own coming to be, and this means an account, explicit or not, of the becoming historical of art in the North, in Germany above all. It seems to me important that whatever else Wölfflin and Riegl are doing, they are also offering a story about how art history emerges as a Northern discipline. The failure of this offering—a breaking with Hegelian kinds of narrative—would then be an important feature of what art history has been for us. The full story of this failure is not simply intellectual or argumentative; it is a story of war and immigrations, of translations made and not made, of the construction and fate of Germany, and of the propping of that construction on an imagination of Greece and in the face of another, prior claim to Renaissance. It is a story that knots together a nation, its poets and philosophers, Hölderlin and Hegel, Nietzsche and Burckhardt, in ways I cannot pretend to understand. 'America' too would have its place in this story. What I offer instead is a few thoughts about Riegl and Wölfflin and Panofsky.

The Hegelian task assigned to the German founders of art history is extraordinarily complex. A casual index of this complexity may perhaps be found in the recurrence of the term 'late' in the titles of major works by both Riegl and Wölfflin. It seems important to notice this as a description not only of the periods under central consideration but of an interest in 'lateness' or 'belatedness' inscribed within the founding task. 'Lateness' seems to encode or allegorize beyond chronology interests in being both German and post-Hegelian as well as an uncertainty about when art history comes on the scene in relation to the actual history of art. One might recall here Hegel's assertion that 'philosophy always arrives on the scene too late'—an assertion through which philosophy assumes or is condemned to the burden of modernism. One might also note that these resonances might well cease to be heard in the different philosophical climate of, for example, America.

If under the impress of Hegelian logic and historiography, the question of art history is inseparable from the question of the becoming historical of art, the theoretical foundations of the discipline will be laid only through accounts of the history of art. These accounts will have as one major task the avoidance of any overt reliance upon the Hegelian schematizations that end by reducing an apparent history of vision to a real history of philosophic knowledge and self-consciousness on the one hand, or to a transient and historically regional science within a larger logic on the other.

Alois Riegl, for example, seems to play peek-a-boo with the dialectic, giving us what appear to be analyses from significantly different methodological positions of disparate empirical moments within the history of art. And yet something seems to bind just those moments together, thus justifying Riegl's claim that with his study of the later Roman art industry, the story of art attains closure. And indeed Riegl's work does seem to sketch out a certain systematic dialectic within which methodological variation shows itself as a dialectically driven development like that of the consciousness that journeys through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—we have an initial moment of the self-unfolding of sheer artistic will and attention in the *Stilfragen*, a later moment of transformation that imposes upon that sheer will an awareness of its being for another, and a final moment in which that other is explicitly posed as a human, and Northern, subject. Across the movement from palmette motifs to late Roman art to the group portrait, the initial brute fact of 'attention'—and its subsidiary terms of 'feeling' and 'will'—becomes the highly complex fact of a Northern audience or witness to the historicity of art. Punning implicitly, perhaps unconsciously, but nonetheless powerfully against Hegel, this narrative is one of the freeing of art from the haptic *grasp* of the Concept to an opticality standing in permanent need of a beholder to guarantee its objectivity. Hegel is thus revised back toward Kant, inscribing a permanent formalism among the constituent elements of the emergent field. This revisionary move remains difficult for art history, at once enabling its objectivity in the face of the threat of its absorption into mere intellectual history and risking the detachment of those objects from the thicker prose of the world in which they gained their initial shape and human purchase.

The tension engendered here can be seen to animate centrally the work of Wölfflin as it struggles to assert the 'two roots of style,' and finds that difference between what might be said to be internal and external to art repeated

within what is claimed to be purely internal. As I understand the intention of Wölfflin's argument in his *Principles*, it is in part to justify both classical and Northern baroque, with their linked subpolarities, as distinct and equally legitimate modes of representation. Each yields a valid presentation of things—on the one hand 'as they are' and on the other 'as they appear.' Further, both modes are defined primarily not by any relation, adequate or otherwise, to things, but by their ability to sustain visual presentation—the painterly giving us things as 'pure seeings,' sheer visual presences, and the linear giving us, with equal claim to the truth of painting, the fact of material surface and planar extent.

When, however, we protest against Wölfflin's formalism and isolation of the visual from the larger world, we are registering an effect of the text that outraces the argument it would embody. To recognize this is to extend the implications of Marshall Brown's deconstructive reading of Wölfflin's *Principles* and his argument about the primacy of the baroque and impossibility of the classical as such, which we can now recognize as itself a version of the question of things-as-they-are/things-as-they-appear.<sup>3</sup> It is the baroque impulse alone that moves toward a purification of vision apart from material conditions or bodily/conceptual graspings. That is, if one takes Wölfflin's *intention* seriously one has to postulate an original and irreducible duplicity to such key terms as 'vision' and 'surface.' But in doing so, one loses the stable and principled object of the disciplined or disciplinary history of vision, so the text works always to displace its major insight to the margins in order to ensure an apparent stability at the center. If Brown is right that the classical becomes actual only and always in the baroque, the cast-out impurity of its proper and impossible image of vision returns as the always deferred or excluded 'second root of style' (so this nondialectic of classical and baroque threatens to betray art history again to Kant). This renegotiation of the distinction between haptic and optic is not without its costs: in particular, one loses the distinction between, and interlacing of, internal and external form that underlay Riegl's understanding of the place of the art historian and that gave his account its dialectical energy. What one gains is something like a method, an analytic vocabulary, propped up on what seems to be the discovery and isolation of the proper object of a history of vision.

One index of the continuing instability of Wölfflin's object appears in the complex bundle of references to language at work in the text *Principles*. On the one hand, his five founding polarities introduce a recognizably linguistic model for art history, surprisingly close to Saussure's. Given the strong diacritical tendency of Wölfflin's polarities, it becomes natural to speak of our 'reading' of one or another feature as 'marked' in one way or another. The language of art would be structured by diacritical contrasts of linear/painterly, open/closed, and so on. At the same time, however, Wölfflin casts each individual term within these oppositions as itself amounting to a language; these two levels of linguistic analogy are run constantly together in his text, thus tangling together problems of translation and representation. Such terms as 'one's own language' or 'mode of representation as such' introduce a deep complication to notions of medium, genre, and relation within art history. This uncertainty within Wölfflin's text about the level at which a linguistic analogy is to enter the account seems of a piece with the other uncertainties about internal and external roots of style and



the classical and the baroque that I have tried, too briefly, to chart here: all of them, I suggest, work both to maintain a constant reference to reading within the field of the history of vision, and to maintain it as at once fleeting and natural, something like a metaphor—but a metaphor without which one cannot quite manage, a catechesis then.

There is a sense in which we may be tempted to think of Riegl certainly, and Wölfflin largely, as ancient history, not yet really art history. With Panofsky we seem to step into an altogether different register, one in which the founding of art history is an achieved fact. But I think this sense is perhaps well understood as the effect of a text of extraordinary power.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly one element in our sense of Panofsky's difference lies in the distance he takes from the 'Northern' problematic that seemed to impose itself on both Riegl and Wölfflin. Whereas in Wölfflin, key terms ('thing in itself,' 'thing as it appears') can, from paragraph to paragraph and often undecidably, be given variously Kantian or Hegelian inflections, in Panofsky, Kant unequivocally presides and the explicit problematic of historicity recedes. The 'Kant' in question here is also quite particular: given the state of Kant's German inheritance in the early part of this century, Panofsky could, in effect, have moved either toward the neo-Kantian tendencies that culminate in the work of Ernst Cassirer or toward the more radical revision of Kant set in motion by Heidegger. And Panofsky's choice was, clearly, for Cassirer. Panofsky thus turns away from the arguably most powerful inheritors of Hegel in his tradition—Nietzsche and Heidegger. This choice is reflected in Panofsky's effort to read the necessarily hermeneutical activity of art history as a constrained passage from the 'natural' to the 'essential,' the circularity of which can be held at bay and is essentially inconsequential.<sup>5</sup> One can say that Schapiro's much later attack on Heidegger in effect replays this early reduction of interpretive implication within one's object to questions of methodology distinct from the historicity of the object.

One consequence of this choice appears to be a return to the valorization of Italian art that now seems to be defining art history in its traditional practice.<sup>6</sup> But we will not have given an adequate account of this until we have described not only how the retreat from Hegelian and Heideggerean considerations of historicity de-emphasizes the question of Northern art, but also how Panofsky finds within Italian art a more compelling articulation of the terms of our access to the past. Both Michael Podro and Michael Holly have convincingly located this new articulation in the essay 'Perspective as Symbolic Form,' with its explicit dependence on Cassirer. It is, I think, hard to find a succinct formulation for what Panofsky manages here: I suppose I want to say that he finds in the Renaissance a period that delivers us from what might seem the debilitating fact of periodicity by finding in it an optical model that can liberate us from our situations. History lies before us much as we might imagine nature to, available to our view. What I want to stress here is that any critique of the 'privileging' of the Italian Renaissance in art history will be empty and merely resentful insofar as it does not recognize that such privileging is not in any simple sense arbitrary. It is not the case that one could take Panofsky's science and correct its untoward privilegings. Its privileges are continuous with its ability to have an object at all. To put it somewhat differently: what we call access to the past is always redescrivable in terms of privilege and appropri-

tion, and to give up one is to give up the other. To step outside of such privilege is to cease to have an object and to fall into the merely empirical or willful.

Panofsky's essay acts, across its manifold difficulties, to forge an art-historical subject whose distance from and responsiveness to his or her objects, is, if not fully natural, at least fully rational. The Renaissance achievement of rational perspective becomes the condition of possibility of the art-historical discipline, and we are compelled to its terms whenever we look to establish another world view that would not, for example, privilege the Renaissance, because we can neither 'look' nor imagine a 'world view' without reinstalling at the heart of our project the terms only the Renaissance can expound for us.

The way to Panofsky's understanding of the objectivity of art history lies through the Renaissance because that Renaissance provides the means to elide questions of the becoming historical of art; his valorization of perspective forges an apparently nonproblematic access of the rationalized space of the past. We are freed then to imagine ourselves henceforth as scientists of a certain kind, and within this imagination the grounds of privilege become invisible and profoundly naturalized. The shift away from Hegel and toward the assumptions and interests of Anglo-American philosophy is an essential part of this reimagining of art history, as is the psychologization of such key inherited terms as 'schema.'<sup>7</sup> With this, Riegl, and Wölfflin, the speculative past of art history itself comes to seem mere prehistory, the proto-science from which art history has elevated itself.

This altogether-too-brief sketch means then to suggest that the achievement of art history can also be thought of—and perhaps must be thought of—as a forgetting of itself and its object. Just as for Heidegger and Derrida philosophy can and must be thought of as a forgetting of itself and its object—which is hardly to say that with them philosophy ends. It is, however, to say that the conditions of its continuation become radically complex and self-critical, something Derrida tries to make explicit by packing Heidegger's interest in both philosophy and the destruction of philosophy into the com-modious portmanteau of 'deconstruction.'

My story has brought the notion of perspective to a position of particular prominence, and I want, in closing, to note some of the ways in which we may now, under the impress of a new inflection of the modern, want to say that the invocation of perspective can and must be thought of as a forgetting of perspective, a forgetting of the fact that we are always situated and presented with a partial view. I will try to bring this back around to some large-scale considerations about the discipline of art history, but it is perhaps worth noting some of the small-scale questions that are here in tow: Why is it natural to us to speak of an introductory survey course as providing 'perspective'? What would it be like to imagine that an introductory course in something in particular could provide 'perspective'—that is, the seeing of something from somewhere, rather than the seeing of everything from nowhere? What if the survey were the achievement and not the precondition? I will shortly be trying to say something about photography and here too there are small questions in tow: What is a slide projector? How simple or complex a tool is it? Is its use a contingent fact about art history, or is it more intimately bound to the structure of the field? I don't have answers for these questions; it is enough

for me, at the moment, that they can find a place within an exploration of the intellectual foundations of art history.

Our ordinary uses of the word 'perspective' are oddly divided: we claim it on the one hand as what gives us the world more or less just as it is, and on the other as a name for what divides us one from another. You have your perspective and I have mine—and yet the perspective rendering has as good a claim on public truth as anything we can imagine. Something of this division surely informs the recurrent, often strangely senseless, arguments about whether perspective is 'natural' or 'conventional'—the moral of these arguments may just be that perspective pushes us up against deep incoherences in our normal sense of these words, which would then also be deep incoherences in our understandings of how we stand with or toward one another.

However we come down on these questions, it is clear that our involvements with the notion of perspective cannot be confined to considerations of pictorial practice; the word haunts our images of knowledge from the moment we imagine that the best model for the grasping of sense lies in the seeing of an idea, an *eidōs*, to the Nietzschean moment in which we appeal explicitly to something named 'perspectivism' as a way of moving beyond the falsification of the world through a vision of its beyond. 'Perspective' never was a practice art history simply found within its purview, which is why Panofsky's formulation of it had the power to wrest a discipline from its historical embeddedness and transform it into a science. This would also be why certain reformulations of it may pose a deep challenge to the terms of that science as a whole and provide an impetus to the rereading of texts whose founding power and radical complexity are half-forgotten.

I am thinking here particularly of the ways in which certain discussions of postmodernism turn crucially on the fact of the camera.

The camera is most simply a machine for producing automatic linear perspective renditions of the world. It can of course do other things, including give the lie to this automatism, but it is for the present enough that it can do this one thing. Because it can do this one thing, it is frequently tempting to see it as spelling out an end of art, or of painting, or of a certain kind of painting. But I don't think this is what is finally interesting about the camera. What matters for at least some recent writing on photography and postmodernism is that in fulfilling a certain dream of vision—the dream, more or less, of an eye gazing out upon its world—the camera exerts effects that go beyond and turn against that dream: it gives us that world as profoundly textual, even in its very moment of appearing, or it gives us that world as a *source* as well as an object of vision.<sup>8</sup> It can compel us to return to, reengage with, the early grapplings with the apparent duplicity and self-division of vision; it can return us even to the baroque and seemingly gratuitous complexity of the models and experiments through which the Renaissance found its way to rational perspective.<sup>9</sup> It may be tempting to say here something familiar like 'postmodernism offers us a new perspective on the past,' but what needs to be said is something more like, 'postmodernism compels a rethinking of the way in which we imagine "perspective" to offer us an access to the past.' It is perhaps worth noting that it follows from this that whatever 'postmodernism' is, it is not quite a period term and it is not quite, within the existing terms of art history, an art-historical object; it is more nearly a way in which attention

can be drawn to certain 'grammatical'—a term I prefer to 'methodological'—difficulties in our talk of periodization and objectivity. What defines the post-modern within an art history curriculum is a certain slippage between it and the received terms of that curriculum.

I have described the camera as a linear perspective machine and I have seemed to make a certain challenge to art history dependent upon its existence. But this mere machine can no more bear such a weight than the mere facts of brush, pigment, and surface could bear the weight of painting in general. It takes a certain history and a certain art history for this description of the camera to become compelling, to let it impose itself not simply as a description but a challenge. The art-historical story about modernism that I follow says that the camera can matter in this way only in the wake of painterly claims to the achievement of something like pure opticality. But my interest lies here with the subject of art history and not its object, so I would like to close by locating the camera on the Heideggerian route not taken by Panofsky.

Heidegger's thought about art, like Hegel's, is tied to a thought about modernity, which Heidegger describes as a sort of fall into what one can only call blinding lucidity—a flat availability of objects to our view, our calculation, and our research, as if we were frozen into a permanent midday, the world freed of its burden of shadow. It names this modernity 'the age of the world as picture' and glosses it in terms of the reign of the 'Ge-stell,' usually rendered as the 'frame.' It is a feature of this flat availability of things that among the things available are, hanging 'on the wall, like a rifle or a hat,' works of art. And because these pictures hang there in just this way, they offer us no access to the fact that our world too has come to hang before us like a picture—but it is also the case that if we could come to understand what a picture is we might come again to understand what a world is.<sup>10</sup> We stand poised for Heidegger between a mere aestheticism and some other grasp of the work of art, and what poses us there Heidegger calls 'technology.' I am calling it, for now, within a certain history of art, 'the camera.' Heidegger's counter-appeals are too often palpably and weakly Romantic—he hears the unalienated voice of the peasant in his proximity to the earth; he hopes for a god and an *eschaton*. In his best moments he knows that none of this will do; that there is nothing saving apart from the very danger itself; that, for example, the very thing that materializes the world as picture might also renew for us a sense of why it is that pictures matter, releasing us from the noontide demon's grasp.

And here I will stop. I have come a certain way toward turning a full circle, ending with the Heidegger from whom Derrida actively translates 'deconstruction' and I have tried to show something about how art history and the history of art history might be at issue within that movement. I have tried to stop at a particular place, a site of textual controversy in which both vision and reading are at stake. On the wall hangs a van Gogh, about whose value we know everything and nothing. Before it, arguing, gesturing, and pointing, stand Martin Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro. Watching it and them, reading it and them, writing, there is now Jacques Derrida, as well. His writing scatters into indefinite and unspecifiable voices. What do 'perspective,' 'frame,' and 'vision' mean here? What kind of history is this? Where do 'we' stand? What discipline, what patience, and what violence is called for here?

# The Origin of the Work of Art

Origin here means that from and by which something is what it is and as it is. What something is, as it is, we call its essence or nature. The origin of something is the source of its nature. The question concerning the origin of the work of art asks about the source of its nature. On the usual view, the work arises out of and by means of the activity of the artist. But by what and whence is the artist what he is? By the work; for to say that the work does credit to the master means that it is the work that first lets the artist emerge as a master of his art. The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work *are* each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names—art.

As necessarily as the artist is the origin of the work in a different way than the work is the origin of the artist, so it is equally certain that, in a still different way, art is the origin of both artist and work. But can art be an origin at all? Where and how does art occur? Art—this is nothing more than a word to which nothing real any longer corresponds. It may pass for a collective idea under which we find a place for that which alone is real in art: works and artists. Even if the word art were taken to signify more than a collective notion, what is meant by the word could exist only on the basis of the actuality of works and artists. Or is the converse the case? Do works and artists exist only because art exists as their origin?

Whatever the decision may be, the question of the origin of the work of art becomes a question about the nature of art. Since the question whether and how art in general exists must still remain open, we shall attempt to discover the nature of art in the place where art undoubtedly prevails in a real way. Art is present in the art work. But what and how is a work of art?

What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the nature of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle. Ordinary understanding demands that this circle be avoided because it violates logic. What art is can be gathered from a comparative examination of actual artworks. But how are we to be certain that we are indeed basing such an examination on art works if we do not know beforehand what art is? And the nature of art can no more be arrived at by a derivation from higher concepts than by a collection of characteristics of

actual artworks. For such a derivation, too, already has in view the characteristics that must suffice to establish that what we take in advance to be an art work is one in fact. But selecting works from among given objects, and deriving concepts from principles, are equally impossible here, and where these procedures are practiced they are a self-deception.

Thus we are compelled to follow the circle. This is neither a makeshift nor a defect. To enter upon this path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming that thinking is a craft. Not only is the main step from work to art a circle like the step from art to work, but every separate step that we attempt circles in this circle.

In order to discover the nature of the art that really prevails in the work, let us go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is.

Works of art are familiar to everyone. Architectural and sculptural works can be seen installed in public places, in churches, and in dwellings. Art works of the most diverse periods and peoples are housed in collections and exhibitions. If we consider the works in their untouched actuality and do not deceive ourselves, the result is that the works are as naturally present as are things. The picture hangs on the wall like a rifle or a hat. A painting, e.g., the one by van Gogh that represents a pair of peasant shoes, travels from one exhibition to another. Works of art are shipped like coal from the Ruhr and logs from the Black Forest. During the First World War Hölderlin's hymns were packed in the soldier's knapsack together with cleaning gear. Beethoven's quartets lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar.

All works have this thingly character. What would they be without it? But perhaps this rather crude and external view of the work is objectionable to us. Shippers or charwomen in museums may operate with such conceptions of the work of art. We, however, have to take works as they are encountered by those who experience and enjoy them. But even the much-vaunted aesthetic experience cannot get around the thingly aspect of the art work. There is something stony in a work of architecture, wooden in a carving, colored in a painting, spoken in a linguistic work, sonorous in a musical composition. The thingly element is so irremovably present in the art work that we are compelled rather to say conversely that the architectural work is in stone, the carving is in wood, the painting in color, the linguistic work in speech, the musical composition in sound. 'Obviously,' it will be replied. No doubt. But what is this self-evident thingly element in the work of art?

Presumably it becomes superfluous and confusing to inquire into this feature, since the art work is something else over and above the thingly element. This something else in the work constitutes its artistic nature. The art work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is, *allo agorenei*. The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made. To bring together is, in Greek, *sumballein*. The work is a symbol.

Allegory and symbol provide the conceptual frame within whose channel of vision the art work has for a long time been characterized. But this one element in a work that manifests another, this one element that joins with another, is the thingly feature in the art work. It seems almost as though the



thingly element in the art work is like the substructure into and upon which the other, authentic element is built. And is it not this thingly feature in the work that the artist really makes by his handicraft?

Our aim is to arrive at the immediate and full reality of the work of art, for only in this way shall we discover real art also within it. Hence we must first bring to view the thingly element of the work. To this end it is necessary that we should know with sufficient clarity what a thing is. Only then can we say whether the art work is a thing, but a thing to which something else adheres; only then can we decide whether the work is at bottom something else and not a thing at all.

### **Thing and Work**

What in truth is the thing, so far as it is a thing? When we inquire in this way, our aim is to come to know the thing-being (thingness) of the thing. The point is to discover the thingly character of the thing. To this end we have to be acquainted with the sphere to which all those entities belong which we have long called by the name of thing.

The stone in the road is a thing, as is the clod in the field. A jug is a thing, as is the well beside the road. But what about the milk in the jug and the water in the well? These too are things if the cloud in the sky and the thistle in the field, the leaf in the autumn breeze and the hawk over the wood, are rightly called by the name of thing. All these must indeed be called things, if the name is applied even to that which does not, like those just enumerated, show itself, i.e., that which does not appear. According to Kant, the whole of the world, for example, and even God himself, is a thing of this sort, a thing that does not itself appear, namely, a 'thing-in-itself.' In the language of philosophy both things-in-themselves and things that appear, all beings that in anyway are, are called things.

Airplanes and radio sets are nowadays among the things closest to us, but when we have ultimate things in mind we think of something altogether different. Death and judgment—these are ultimate things. On the whole the word 'thing' here designates whatever is not simply nothing. In this sense the work of art is also a thing, so far as it is not simply nothing. Yet this concept is of no use to us, at least immediately, in our attempt to delimit entities that have the mode of being of a thing, as against those having the mode of being of a work. And besides, we hesitate to call God a thing. In the same way we hesitate to consider the peasant in the field, the stoker at the boiler, the teacher in the school as things. A man is not a thing. It is true that we speak of a young girl who is faced with a task too difficult for her as being a young thing, still too young for it, but only because we feel that being human is in a certain way missing here and think that instead we have to do here with the factor that constitutes the thingly character of things. We hesitate even to call the deer in the forest clearing, the beetle in the grass, the blade of grass a thing. We would sooner think of a hammer as a thing, or a shoe, or an ax, or a clock. But even these are not mere things. Only a stone, a clod of earth, a piece of wood are for us such mere things. Lifeless beings of nature and objects of use. Natural things and utensils are the things commonly so called.

We thus see ourselves brought back from the widest domain, within which everything is a thing (thing = *res* = *ens* = an entity), including even the highest and last things, to the narrow precinct of mere things. 'Mere' here means, first, the pure thing, which is simply a thing and nothing more; but then, at the same time, it means that which is only a thing, in an almost pejorative sense. It is mere things, excluding even use-objects, that count as things in the strict sense. What does the thingly character of these things, then, consist in? It is in reference to these that the thingness of things must be determinable. This determination enables us to characterize what it is that is thingly as such. Thus prepared, we are able to characterize the almost palpable reality of works, in which something else inheres.

Now it passes for a known fact that as far back as antiquity, no sooner was the question raised as to what entities are in general, than things in their thingness thrust themselves into prominence again and again as the standard type of beings. Consequently we are bound to meet with the definition of the thingness of things already in the traditional interpretations of beings. We thus need only to ascertain explicitly this traditional knowledge of the thing, to be relieved of the tedious labor of making our own search for the thingly character of the thing. The answers to the question 'What is the thing?' are so familiar that we no longer sense anything questionable behind them.

The interpretations of the thingness of the thing which, predominant in the course of Western thought, have long become self-evident and are now in everyday use, may be reduced to three.

This block of granite, for example, is a mere thing. It is hard, heavy, extended, bulky, shapeless, rough, colored, partly dull, partly shiny. We can take note of all these features in the stone. Thus we acknowledge its characteristics. But still, the traits signify something proper to the stone itself. They are its properties. The thing has them. The thing? What are we thinking of when we now have the thing in mind? Obviously a thing is not merely an aggregate of traits, nor an accumulation of properties by which that aggregate arises. A thing, as everyone thinks he knows, is that around which the properties have assembled. We speak in this connection of the core of things. The Greeks are supposed to have called it *to hupokeimenon*. For them, this core of the thing was something lying at the ground of the thing, something always already there. The characteristics, however, are called *la sumbebekota*, that which has always turned up already along with the given core and occurs along with it.

These designations are no arbitrary names. Something that lies beyond the purview of this essay speaks in them, the basic Greek experience of the Being of beings in the sense of the presence. It is by these determinations, however, that the interpretation of the thingness of the thing is established which henceforth becomes standard, and the Western interpretation of the Being of beings stabilized. The process begins with the appropriation of Greek words by Roman-Latin thought. *Hupokeimenon* becomes *subiectum*; *hupostasis* becomes *substantia*; *sumbebekos* becomes *accidens*. However, this translation of Greek names into Latin is in no way the innocent process it is considered to this day. Beneath the seemingly literal and thus faithful translation there is concealed, rather, a *translation* of Greek experience into a different way of thinking. *Roman thought takes over the Greek words*

*without a corresponding, equally authentic experience of what they say, without the Greek word.* The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation.

According to current opinion, this definition of the thingness of the thing as the substance with its accidents seems to correspond to our natural outlook on things. No wonder that the current attitude toward things—our way of addressing ourselves to things and speaking about them—has adapted itself to this common view of the thing. A simple propositional statement consists of the subject, which is the Latin translation, hence already a reinterpretation, of *hupokeimenon* and the predicate, in which the thing's traits are stated of it. Who would have the temerity to assail these simple fundamental relations between thing and statement, between sentence structure and thing-structure? Nevertheless we must ask: Is the structure of a simple propositional statement (the combination of subject and predicate) the mirror image of the structure of the thing (of the union of substance with accidents)? Or could it be that even the structure of the thing as thus envisaged is a projection of the framework of the sentence?

What could be more obvious than that man transposes his propositional way of understanding things into the structure of the thing itself? Yet this view, seemingly critical yet actually rash and ill-considered, would have to explain first how such a transposition of propositional structure into the thing is supposed to be possible without the thing having already become visible. The question which comes first and functions as the standard, proposition structure of thing-structure remains to this hour undecided. It even remains doubtful whether in this form the question is at all decidable.

Actually, the sentence structure does not provide the standard for the pattern of thing-structure, nor is the latter simply mirrored in the former. Both sentence and thing-structure derive, in their typical form and their possible mutual relationship, from a common and more original source. In any case this first interpretation of the thingness of the thing, the thing as bearer of its characteristic traits, despite its currency, is not as natural as it appears to be. What seems natural to us is probably just something familiar in a long tradition that has forgotten the unfamiliar source from which it arose. And yet this unfamiliar source once struck man as strange and caused him to think and to wonder.

Our reliance on the current interpretation of the thing is only seemingly well founded. But in addition this thing-concept (the thing as bearer of its characteristics) holds not only of the mere thing in its strict sense, but also of any being whatsoever. Hence it cannot be used to set apart thingly beings from non-thingly beings. Yet even before all reflection, attentive dwelling within the sphere of things already tells us that this thing-concept does not hit upon the thingly element of the thing, its independent and self-contained character. Occasionally we still have the feeling that violence has long been done to the thingly element of things and that thought has played a part in this violence, for which reason people disavow thought instead of taking pains to make it more thoughtful. But in defining the nature of the thing, what is the use of a feeling, however certain, if thought alone has the right to speak here? Perhaps however what we call feeling or mood, here and in similar instances, is more reasonable—that is, more intelligently perceptive—

because more open to Being than all that reason which, having meanwhile become *ratio*, was misinterpreted as being rational. The hankering after the irrational, as abortive offspring of the un-thought rational, therewith performed a curious service. To be sure, the current thing-concept always fits each thing. Nevertheless it does not lay hold of the thing as it is in its own being, but makes an assault upon it.

Can such an assault perhaps be avoided—and how? Only, certainly, by granting the thing, as it were, a free field to display its thingly character directly. Everything that might interpose itself between the thing and us in apprehending and talking about it must first be set aside. Only then do we yield ourselves to the undisguised presence of the thing. But we do not need first to call or arrange for this situation in which we let things encounter us without mediation. The situation always prevails. In what the senses of sight, hearing, and touch convey, in the sensations of color, sound, roughness, hardness, things move us bodily, in the literal meaning of the word. The thing is the *aistheton*, that which is perceptible by sensations in the senses belonging to sensibility. Hence the concept later becomes a commonplace according to which a thing is nothing but the unity of a manifold of what is given in the senses. Whether this unity is conceived as sum or as totality or as form alters nothing in the standard character of this thing-concept.

Now this interpretation of the thingness of the thing is as correct and demonstrable in every case as the previous one. This already suffices to cast doubt on its truth. If we consider moreover what we are searching for, the thingly character of the thing, then this thing-concept again leaves us at a loss. We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things—as this thing-concept alleges; rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly.

In the thing-concept just mentioned there is not so much an assault upon the thing as rather an inordinate attempt to bring it into the greatest possible proximity to us. But a thing never reaches that position as long as we assign as its thingly feature what is perceived by the senses. Whereas the first interpretation keeps the thing at arm's length from us, as it were, and sets it too far off, the second makes it press too hard upon us. In both interpretations the thing vanishes. It is therefore necessary to avoid the exaggerations of both. The thing itself must be allowed to remain in its self-containment. It must be accepted in its own constancy. This the third interpretation seems to do, which is just as old as the first two.

That which gives things their constancy and pith but is also at the same time the source of their particular mode of sensuous pressure—colored, resonant, hard, massive—is the matter in things. In this analysis of the thing as matter (*hule*), form (*morphe*) is already coposited. What is constant in a thing, its consistency, lies in the fact that matter stands together with a form. The thing is formed matter. This interpretation appeals to the immediate view with which the thing solicits us by its looks (*eidos*). In this synthesis of mat-

ter and form a thing-concept has finally been found which applies equally to things of nature and to use-objects.

This concept puts us in a position to answer the question concerning the thingly element in the work of art. The thingly element is manifestly the matter of which it consists. Matter is the substrate and field for the artist's formative action. But we could have advanced this obvious and well-known definition of the thingly element at the very outset. Why do we make a detour through other current thing-concepts? Because we also mistrust this concept of the thing, which represents it as formed matter.

But is not precisely this pair of concepts, matter-form, usually employed in the domain in which we are supposed to be moving? To be sure. The distinction of matter and form is *the conceptual schema which is used, in the greatest variety of ways, quite generally for all art theory and aesthetics*. This incontestable fact, however, proves neither that the distinction of matter and form is adequately founded, nor that it belongs originally to the domain of art and the art work. Moreover, the range of application of this pair of concepts has long extended far beyond the field of aesthetics. Form and content are the most hackneyed concepts under which anything and everything may be subsumed. And if form is correlated with the rational and matter with the irrational; if the rational is taken to be the logical and the irrational the alogical; if in addition the subject-object relation is coupled with the conceptual pair form-matter; then representation has at its command a conceptual machinery that nothing is capable of withstanding.

If, however, it is thus with the distinction between matter and form, how then shall we make use of it to lay hold of the particular domain of mere things by contrast with all other entities? But perhaps this characterization in terms of matter and form would recover its defining power if only we reversed the process of expanding and emptying these concepts. Certainly, but this presupposes that we know in what sphere of beings they realize their true defining power. That this is the domain of mere things is so far only an assumption. Reference to the copious use made of this conceptual framework in aesthetics might sooner lead to the idea that matter and form are specifications stemming from the nature of the art work and were in the first place transferred from it back to the thing. Where does the matter-form structure have its origin—in the thingly character of the thing or in the workly character of the art work?

The self-contained block of granite is something material in a definite if unshapely form. Form means here the distribution and arrangement of the material parts in spatial locations, resulting in a particular shape, namely that of a block. But a jug, an ax, a shoe are also matter occurring in a form. Form as shape is not the consequence here of a prior distribution of the matter. The form, on the contrary, determines the arrangement of the matter. Even more, it prescribes in each case the kind and selection of the matter—impermeable for a jug, sufficiently hard for an ax, firm yet flexible for shoes. The interfusion of form and matter prevailing here is, moreover, controlled beforehand by the purposes served by jug, ax, shoes. Such usefulness is never assigned or added on afterward to a being of the type of a jug, ax, or pair of shoes. But neither is it something that floats somewhere above it as an end.

Usefulness is the basic feature from which this entity regards us, that is, flashes at us and thereby is present and thus is this entity. Both the formative act and the choice of material—a choice given with the act—and therewith the dominance of the conjunction of matter and form, are all grounded in such usefulness. A being that falls under usefulness is always the product of a process of making. It is made as a piece of equipment for something. As determinations of beings, accordingly, matter and form have their proper place in the essential nature of equipment. This name designates what is produced expressly for employment and use. Matter and form are in no case original determinations of the thingness of the mere thing.

A piece of equipment, a pair of shoes for instance, when finished, is also self-contained like the mere thing, but it does not have the character of having taken shape by itself like the granite boulder. On the other hand, equipment displays an affinity with the art work insofar, as it is something produced by the human hand. However, by its self-sufficient presence the work of art is similar rather to the mere thing which has taken shape by itself and is self-contained. Nevertheless we do not count such works among mere things. As a rule it is the use-objects around us that are the nearest and authentic things. Thus the piece of equipment is half thing, because characterized by thingliness, and yet it is something more; at the same time it is half art work and yet something less, because lacking the self-sufficiency of the art work. Equipment has a peculiar position intermediate between thing and work, assuming that such a calculated ordering of them is permissible.

The matter-form structure, however, by which the being of a piece of equipment is first determined, readily presents itself as the immediately intelligible constitution of every entity, because here man himself as maker participates in the way in which the piece of equipment comes into being. Because equipment takes an intermediate place between mere thing and work, the suggestion is that nonequipmental beings—things and works and ultimately everything that is—are to be comprehended with the help of the being of equipment (the matter-form structure).

The inclination to treat the matter-form structure as *the* constitution of every entity receives a yet additional impulse from the fact that on the basis of a religious faith, namely, the biblical faith, the totality of all beings is represented in advance as something created, which here means made. The philosophy of this faith can of course assure us that all of God's creative work is to be thought of as different from the action of a craftsman. Nevertheless, if at the same time or even beforehand, in accordance with a presumed predetermination of Thomistic philosophy for interpreting the Bible, the *ens creatum* is conceived as a unity of *materia* and *forma*, then faith is expounded by way of a philosophy whose truth lies in an unconcealedness of beings which differs in kind from the world believed in by faith.

The idea of creation, grounded in faith, can lose its guiding power of knowledge of beings as a whole. But the theological interpretation of all beings, the view of the world in terms of matter and form borrowed from an alien philosophy, having once been instituted, can still remain a force. This happens in the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times. The metaphysics of the modern period rests on the form-matter structure devised in the medieval period, which itself merely recalls in its words the buried natures



of *eidos* and *hyle*. Thus the interpretation of 'thing' by means of matter and form, whether it remains medieval or becomes Kantian-transcendental, has become current and self-evident. But for that reason, no less than the other interpretations mentioned of the thingness of the thing, it is an encroachment upon the thing-being of the thing. [...]

We choose as example a common sort of equipment—a pair of peasant shoes. We do not even need to exhibit actual pieces of this sort of useful article in order to describe them. Everyone is acquainted with them. But since it is a matter here of direct description, it may be well to facilitate the visual realization of them. For this purpose a pictorial representation suffices. We shall choose a well-known painting by van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times. But what is there to see here? Everyone knows what shoes consist of. If they are not wooden or bast shoes, there will be leather soles and uppers, joined together by thread and nails. Such gear serves to clothe the feet. Depending on the use to which the shoes are to be put, whether for work in the field or for dancing, matter and form will differ.

Such statements, no doubt correct, only explicate what we already know. The equipmental quality of equipment consists in its usefulness. But what about this usefulness itself? In conceiving it, do we already conceive along with it the equipmental character of equipment? In order to succeed in doing this, must we not look out for useful equipment in its use? The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are all the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them. She stands and walks in them. That is how shoes actually serve. It is in this process of the use of equipment that we must actually encounter the character of equipment.

As long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general, or simply look at the empty, unused shoes as they merely stand there in the picture, we shall never discover what the equipmental being of the equipment in truth is. From van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space. There are not even clods of soil from the field or the field-path sticking to them, which would at least hint at their use. A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet—

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.

But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes. The peasant woman, on the other hand, simply wears them. If only this sim-

ple wearing were so simple. When she takes off her shoes late in the evening, in deep but healthy fatigue, and reaches out for them again in the still dim dawn, or passes them by on the day of rest, she knows all this without noticing or reflecting. The equipmental quality of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential being of the equipment. We call it reliability. By virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is made privy to the silent call of the earth; by virtue of the reliability of the equipment she is sure of her world. World and earth exist for her, and for those who are with her in her mode of being, only thus—in the equipment. We say ‘only’ and therewith fall into error; for the reliability of the equipment first gives to the simple world its security and assures to the earth the freedom of its steady thrust.

The equipmental being of equipment, reliability, keeps gathered within itself all things according to their manner and extent. The usefulness of equipment is nevertheless only the essential consequence of reliability. The former vibrates in the latter and would be nothing without it. A single piece of equipment is worn out and used up; but at the same time the use itself also falls into disuse, wears away, and becomes usual. Thus equipmentality wastes away, sinks into mere stuff. In such wasting, reliability vanishes. This dwindling, however, to which use-things owe their boringly obtrusive usualness, is only one more testimony to the original nature of equipmental being. The worn-out usualness of the equipment then obtrudes itself as the sole mode of being, apparently peculiar to it exclusively. Only blank usefulness now remains visible. It awakens the impression that the origin of equipment lies in a mere fabricating that impresses a form upon some matter. Nevertheless, in its genuinely equipmental being, equipment stems from a more distant source. Matter and form and their distinction have a deeper origin.

The repose of equipment resting within itself consists in its reliability. Only in this reliability do we discern what equipment in truth is. But we still know nothing of what we first sought: the thing’s thingly character. And we know nothing at all of what we really and solely seek: the workly character of the work in the sense of the work of art.

Or have we already learned something unwittingly, in passing so to speak, about the work-being of the work?

The equipment quality of equipment was discovered. But how? Not by a description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present; not by a report about the process of making shoes; and also not by the observation of the actual use of shoes occurring here and there; but only by bringing ourselves before van Gogh’s painting. This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.

The art work let us know what shoes are in truth. It would be the worst self-deception to think that our description, as a subjective action, had first depicted everything thus and then projected it into the painting. If anything is questionable here, it is rather that we experienced too little in the neighborhood of the work and that we expressed the experience too crudely and too literally. But above all, the work did not, as it might seem at first, serve merely for a better visualizing of what a piece of equipment is. Rather, the equipmentality of equipment first genuinely arrives at its appearance through the work and only in the work.

What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings *aletheia*. We say 'truth' and think little enough in using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work.

In the work of art the truth of an entity has set itself to work. 'To set' means here: to bring to a stand. Some particular entity, a pair of peasant shoes, comes in the work to stand in the light of its being. The being of the being comes into the steadiness of its shining.

The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work. But until now art presumably has had to do with the beautiful and beauty, and not with truth. The arts that produce such works are called the beautiful or fine arts, in contrast with the applied or industrial arts that manufacture equipment. In fine art the art itself is not beautiful, but is called so because it produces the beautiful. Truth, in contrast, belongs to logic. Beauty, however, is reserved for aesthetics. [...]

We seek the reality of the art work in order to find there the art prevailing within it. The thingly substructure is what proved to be the most immediate reality in the work. But to comprehend this thingly feature the traditional thing-concepts are not adequate; for they themselves fail to grasp the nature of the thing. The currently predominant thing-concept, thing as formed matter, is not even derived from the nature of the thing but from the nature of equipment. It also turned out that equipmental being generally has long since occupied a peculiar pre-eminence in the interpretation of beings. This pre-eminence of equipmentality, which however did not actually come to mind, suggested that we pose the question of equipment anew while avoiding the current interpretations.

We allowed a work to tell us what equipment is. By this means, almost clandestinely, it came to light what is at work in the work: the disclosure of the particular being in its being, the happening of truth. If, however, the reality of the work can be defined solely by means of what is at work in the work, then what about our intention to seek out the real art work in its reality? As long as we supposed that the reality of the work lay primarily in its thingly substructure we were going astray. We are now confronted by a remarkable result of our considerations—if it still deserves to be called a result at all. Two points become clear:

First: the dominant thing-concepts are inadequate as means of grasping the thingly aspect of the work.

Second: what we tried to treat as the most immediate reality of the work, its thingly substructure, does not belong to the work in that way at all.

As soon as we look for such a thingly substructure in the work, we have unwittingly taken the work as equipment, to which we then also ascribe a superstructure supposed to contain its artistic quality. But the work is not a piece of equipment that is fitted out in addition with an aesthetic value that adheres to it. The work is no more anything of the kind than the bare thing is a piece of equipment that merely lacks the specific equipmental characteristics of usefulness and being made.

Our formulation of the question of the work has been shaken because we asked, not about the work but half about a thing and half about equipment. Still, this formulation of the question was not first developed by us. It is the formulation native to aesthetics. The way in which aesthetics views the art work from the outset is dominated by the traditional interpretation of all beings. But the shaking of this accustomed formulation is not the essential point. What matters is a first opening of our vision to the fact that what is workly in the work, equipmental in equipment, and thingly in the thing comes closer to us only when we think the Being of beings. To this end it is necessary beforehand that the barriers of our preconceptions fall away and that the current pseudo concepts be set aside. That is why we had to take this detour. But it brings us directly to a road that may lead to a determination of the thingly feature in the work. The thingly feature in the work should not be denied; but if it belongs admittedly to the work-being of the work, it must be conceived by way of the work's workly nature. If this is so, then the road toward the determination of the thingly reality of the work leads not from thing to work but from work to thing.

The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the art work, the truth of what is has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work. What is truth itself, that it sometimes comes to pass as art? What is this setting-itself-to-work? [...]

# The Still Life as a Personal Object—A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh

In his essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger interprets a painting by van Gogh [42] to illustrate the nature of art as a disclosure of truth.<sup>1</sup>

He comes to this picture in the course of distinguishing three modes of being: of useful artifacts, of natural things, and of works of fine art. He proposes to describe first, 'without any philosophical theory ... a familiar sort of equipment—a pair of peasant shoes'; and 'to facilitate the visual realization of them' he chooses 'a well-known painting by van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times.' But to grasp 'the equipmental being of equipment,' we must know 'how shoes actually serve.' For the peasant woman they serve without her thinking about them or even looking at them. Standing and walking in the shoes, the peasant woman knows the serviceability in which 'the equipmental being of equipment consists.' But we,

as long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general, or simply look at the empty, unused shoes as they merely stand there in the picture, we shall never discover what the equipmental being of equipment in truth is. In van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong, only an undefined space. There are not even clods from the soil of the field or the path through it sticking to them, which might at least hint at their employment. A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet.

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of birth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth* and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-in-self.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Heidegger is aware that van Gogh painted such shoes several times, but he does not identify the picture he has in mind, as if the different versions are interchangeable, all presenting the same truth. A reader who wishes to compare this account with the original picture or its photograph will have some difficulty in deciding which one to select. Eight paintings





42 Vincent van Gogh  
*Old Shoes with Laces*, 1886.

of shoes by van Gogh are recorded by de la Faille in his catalogue of all the canvasses by the artist that had been exhibited at the time Heidegger wrote his essay.<sup>3</sup> Of these only three show the ‘dark openings of the worn insides’ which speak so distinctly to the philosopher.<sup>4</sup> They are clearly pictures of the artist’s own shoes, not the shoes of a peasant. They might be shoes he had worn in Holland, but the pictures were painted during van Gogh’s stay in Paris in 1886–87; one of them bears the date: ‘87’.<sup>5</sup> From the time before 1886 when he painted Dutch peasants are two pictures of shoes—a pair of clean wooden clogs set on a table beside other objects.<sup>6</sup> Later in *Aries* he represented, as he wrote in a letter of August 1888 to his brother, ‘une paire de vieux souliers’ which are evidently his own.<sup>7</sup> A second still life of ‘vieux souliers de paysan’ is mentioned in a letter of September 1888 to the painter Emile Bernard, but it lacks the characteristic worn surface and dark insides of Heidegger’s description.<sup>8</sup>

In reply to my question, Professor Heidegger has kindly written me that the picture to which he referred is one that he saw in a show at Amsterdam in March 1930.<sup>9</sup> This is clearly de la Faille’s no. 255; there was also exhibited at the same time a painting with three pairs of shoes,<sup>10</sup> and it is possible that the exposed sole of a shoe in this picture inspired the reference to the sole in the philosopher’s account. But from neither of these pictures, nor from any



of the others, could one properly say that a painting of shoes by van Gogh expresses the being or essence of a peasant woman's shoes and her relation to nature and work. They are the shoes of the artist, by that time a man of the town and city.

Heidegger has written: 'The art-work told us what shoes are in truth. It would be the worst self-deception if we were to think that our description, as a subjective action, first imagined everything thus and then projected it into the painting. If anything is questionable here, it is rather that we experienced too little in contact with the work and that we expressed the experience too crudely and too literally. But above all, the work does not, as might first appear, serve merely for a better visualization of what a piece of equipment is. Rather, the equipmental being of equipment first arrives at its explicit appearance through and only in the work.'

'What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasants' shoes, *is* in truth.'<sup>11</sup>

Alas for him, the philosopher has indeed deceived himself. He has retained from his encounter with van Gogh's canvas a moving set of associations with peasants and the soil, which are not sustained by the picture itself but are grounded rather in his own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthy. He has indeed 'imagined everything and projected it into the painting.' He has experienced both too little and too much in his contact with the work.

The error lies not only in his projection which replaces a close and true attention to the work of art. For even if he had seen a picture of a peasant woman's shoes, as he describes them, it would be a mistake to suppose that the truth he uncovered in the painting—the being of the shoes—is something given here once and for all and is unavailable to our perception of shoes outside the painting. I find nothing in Heidegger's fanciful description of the shoes represented by van Gogh that could not have been imagined in looking at a real pair of peasants' shoes. Though he credits to art the power of giving to a represented pair of shoes that explicit appearance in which their being is disclosed—indeed 'the universal essence of things', 'world and earth in their counterplay'—this concept of the metaphysical power of art remains here a theoretical idea.<sup>12</sup> The example on which he elaborates with strong conviction does not support that idea.

Is Heidegger's mistake simply that he chose a wrong example? Let us imagine a painting of a peasant-woman's shoes by van Gogh. Would it not have made manifest just those qualities and that sphere of being described by Heidegger with such pathos?

Heidegger would still have missed an important aspect of the painting: the artist's presence in the work. In his account of the picture he has overlooked the personal and physiognomic in the shoes which made them so absorbing a subject for the artist (not to speak of the intimate connection with the peculiar tones, forms, and brush-made surface of the picture as a painted work). When van Gogh depicted the peasant's wooden sabots, he gave them a clear, unworn shape and surface like the smooth still life objects he had set beside them on the same table: the bowl, the bottles, etc. In the later picture of a peasant's leather slippers he has turned them with their backs to the viewer.<sup>13</sup>

His own shoes he has isolated on the floor and he has rendered them as if facing us, and so individual and wrinkled in appearance that we can speak of them as veridical portraits of aging shoes.

We come closer, I think, to van Gogh's feeling for these shoes in a paragraph written by Knut Hamsun in the 1880s in his novel *Hunger*, describing his own shoes:

'As I had never seen my shoes before, I set myself to study their looks, their characteristics, and when I stir my foot, their shapes and their worn uppers. I discover that their creases and white seams give them expression—impart a physiognomy to them. Something of my own nature had gone over into these shoes; they affected me, like a ghost of my other I—a breathing portion of my very self.'<sup>14</sup>

In comparing van Gogh's painting with Hamsun's text, we are interpreting the painting in a different way from Heidegger's. The philosopher finds in the picture of the shoes a truth about the world as it is lived by the peasant without reflection; Hamsun sees the real shoes as experienced by the self-conscious contemplating wearer who is also the writer. Hamsun's personage, a brooding, self-observant drifter, is closer to van Gogh's situation than to the peasant's. Yet van Gogh is in some ways like the peasant; as an artist he works, he is stubbornly occupied in a persistent task that is for him his inescapable calling, his life. Of course, van Gogh, like Hamsun, has also an exceptional gift of representation; he is able to transpose to the canvas with a singular power the forms and qualities of things; but they are things that have touched him deeply, in this case his own shoes—things inseparable from his body and memorable to his reacting self-awareness. They are not less objectively rendered for being seen as if endowed with his feelings and revery about himself. In isolating his own worn shoes on a canvas, he turns them to the spectator; he makes of them a piece from a self-portrait, that part of the costume with which we tread the earth and in which we locate the strains of movement, fatigue, pressure, heaviness—the burden of the erect body in its contact with the ground. They mark our inescapable position on the earth. To 'be in someone's shoes' is to be in his predicament or his station in life. For a painter to represent his worn shoes as the main subject of a picture is for him to express a concern with the fatalities of his social being. Not the shoes as an instrument of use, though the landscape painter as a worker in the fields shares something of the peasant's life outdoors, but the shoes as 'a portion of the self' (in Hamsun's words) are van Gogh's revealing theme.

Gauguin, who shared van Gogh's quarters in Aries in 1888, sensed a personal history behind his friend's painting of a pair of shoes. He has told in his reminiscences of van Gogh a deeply affecting story linked with van Gogh's shoes.

'In the studio was a pair of big hob-nailed shoes, all worn and spotted with mud; he made of it a remarkable still life painting. I do not know why I suspected that there was a story behind this old relic, and I ventured one day to ask him if he had some reason for preserving with respect what one ordinarily throws out for the rag-picker's basket.

"My father," he said, "was a pastor, and at his urging I pursued theological studies in order to prepare for my future vocation. As a young pastor I left for Belgium one fine morning, without telling my family, to preach the gospel

in the factories, not as I had been taught but as I understood it myself. These shoes, as you see, have bravely endured the fatigue of that trip.”

‘Preaching to the miners in the Borinage, Vincent undertook to nurse a victim of a fire in the mine. The man was so badly burned and mutilated that the doctor had no hope for his recovery. Only a miracle, he thought, could save him. Van Gogh tended him forty days with loving care and saved the miner’s life.

‘Before leaving Belgium I had, in the presence of this man who bore on his brow a series of scars, a vision of the crown of thorns, a vision of the resurrected Christ.’

Gauguin continues: ‘And Vincent took up his palette again; silently he worked. Beside him was a white canvas. I began his portrait. I too had the vision of a Jesus preaching kindness and humility.’<sup>15</sup>

It is not clear which of the paintings with a single pair of shoes Gauguin had seen at Aries. He described it as violet in tone in contrast to the yellow walls of the studio. It does not matter. Though written some years later, and with some literary affectations, Gauguin’s story confirms the essential fact that for van Gogh the shoes were a piece of his own life.

# Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*Pointure*]

POINTURE (Latin *punctura*), sb. fern. Old synonym of prick. Term in printing, small iron blade with a point, used to fix the page to be printed on to the tympan. The hole which it makes in the paper. Term in shoemaking, glovemaking: number of stitches in a shoe or glove.

Littré

I owe you the truth in painting, and I will tell it to you.

Cézanne

But truth is so dear to me, and so is the *seeking to make true*, that indeed I believe, I believe I would still rather be a cobbler than a musician with colors.

van Gogh

[...]—What interested me, was finally to see explained from a certain angle why I had always found this passage of Heidegger's on van Gogh ridiculous and lamentable. So it really was the naïveté of what Schapiro rightly calls a 'projection.' One is not only disappointed when his academic high seriousness, his severity and rigor of tone give way to this 'illustration' (*bildliche Darstellung*). One is not only disappointed by the consumerlike hurry toward the content of a representation, by the heaviness of the pathos, by the coded triviality of this description, which is both overloaded and impoverished, and one never knows if it's busying itself around a picture, 'real' shoes, or shoes that are imaginary but outside painting, not only disappointed by the crudeness of the framing the arbitrary and barbaric nature of the cutting-out, the massive self-assurance of the identification: 'a pair of peasants' shoes,' just like that! Where did he get that from? Where does he explain himself on this matter? So one is not only disappointed, one sniggers. The fall in tension is too great. One follows step by step the moves of a 'great thinker,' as he returns to the origin of the work of art and of truth, traversing the whole history of the West and then suddenly, at a bend in a corridor, here we are on a guided tour, as school-children or tourists. Someone's gone to fetch the guide from the neighboring farm. Full of goodwill. He loves the earth and a certain type of painting when he can find himself in it [*quand il s'y retrouve*]. Giving up his usual activity he goes off to get his key while the visitors wait, slowly getting out of the coach. (There is a Japanese tourist among them, who in a moment will ask a few questions of the guide, in a stage whisper.) Then the tour begins. With his local [Swabian] accent, he tries to get the visitors going [he sometimes manages it and each time this happens he also trembles regularly, in time], he piles

up the associations and immediate projections. From time to time he points out of the window to the fields and nobody notices that he's no longer talking about painting. All right. And one says to oneself that the scene, the choice of the example, the procedure of the treatment, nothing in all this is fortuitous. This casual guide is the very person who, before and after this incredible tirade, carries on with his discourse on the origin of the work of art and on truth. It's the same discourse, it has never been interrupted by the slightest digression (what all these professorial procedures with regard to the shoes are lacking in, moreover, is the sense of digression: the shoes have to make a pair and walk on the road, forwards or backwards, in a circle if pushed, but with no digressions or sidesteps allowed, now there is a link between the detachability of the step and the possibility of the digressive). I see that you are shocked, in your deference, by the scene which I have, how shall I put it —projected.

—Then let's get back into the classroom. All that is classical, class-business, the business of pedagogy and classicity, Professor Heidegger, as Professor Schapiro says in homage to Professor Goldstein, projects a transparency. He wants to capture your interest, through this illustration, right from the beginning of his lecture. For *The Origin* was in the beginning, at a very significant date, a series of lectures delivered before a *kunstwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* and then before a *freie deutsche Hochstift*, and shows it.

—The word 'illustration' has just been uttered. And it had been several times previously. I suggest that that's where we should start, if we must begin and if we must read Schapiro's *Note* against which I intend to defend systematically, at least for the committee exercise, the cause of Heidegger [who, don't forget, also proffers, in this place where it is a question of the thing, an important discourse on the *causa*]. A fair number of difficulties arise from what is translated by *illustration*. In his protocol, Schapiro uses this word which also translates [into French] '*bildliche Darstellung*' ['For this purpose an illustration suffices. We choose for this a famous picture by van Gogh ...']. Schapiro opens his text—and *The Origin*—at this point [by what right?] and he writes: 'In his essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger interprets a painting by van Gogh to illustrate the nature of art as a disclosure of truth.

'He comes to this picture in the course of distinguishing three modes of being: of useful artifacts [products], of natural things, and of works of fine art. He proposes to describe first, 'without any philosophical theory ... a familiar sort of equipment [*Zeug*: product]—a pair of peasant shoes', and 'to facilitate the visual realization [translating *Veranschaulichung*, intuitive sensory presentation] of them' he chooses. 'a well-known painting by van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times' [see 42]. But to grasp the 'equipmental being of equipment,' we must know 'how shoes actually serve.' For the peasant woman they serve without her thinking about them or even looking at them. Standing and walking in the shoes, the peasant woman knows the serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*] in which 'the equipmental being of equipment consists.' But we ...' [Schapiro, p. 203]. And Schapiro quotes these two paragraphs which you all find so ridiculous or so imprudent. Let's reread them first, in German, in French, in English.

.....  
.....  
.....

—It's done.

—Before going any further, I shall pick out from the cutting-out in Schapiro's protocol a certain number of simplifications, not to call them anything worse. They have effects on everything that follows. He simplifies matters by saying that Heidegger interprets a painting to illustrate the nature of art as the unveiling of truth. To prove this, one has no need to refer to what the following page says, i.e., [in translation first]: 'the work in no way served [*diente gar nicht*], as it may have seemed at first, to illustrate more clearly what a product is.' What has here been translated as 'illustrate' is *Veranschaulichung* this time, and not *Darstellung*, which was also translated above as illustration. *Veranschaulichung*, intuitive presentation, as it were, is what had to be facilitated by invoking the example of the picture. But it is also what *was not done*, although it seemed as though that's what was happening. Heidegger makes this quite clear: the work did not serve us to do that, did not do us this service which, all in all, we pretended to expect from it. It did better than illustrating or presenting something to sensory intuition—or worse, depending on the point of view—it showed, it made appear. Heidegger has just recalled that the work did not 'serve' as *Veranschaulichung* or *Darstellung*, and he goes on to specify: 'Much more is it the being-product of the product which arrives, properly [*eigens*] and only through the work, at its appearing.' This appearing of the being-product does not, according to Heidegger, take place in an elsewhere which the work of art could illustrate by referring to it. It takes place properly (and only) in the work. In its very truth. This might seem to aggravate the illusion denounced by Schapiro and to place under the heading of presentation what was marked down only in the name of representation, as if Heidegger thought he could see still more directly what Schapiro reproaches him for inferring too hastily. But things are not yet so simple and we shall have to return to this.

First of all: it is not as *peasant shoes*, but as *product* [*Zeug*] or as *shoes-as-product* that the being-product manifested itself. The manifestation is that of the being-product of the product and not of this or that species of product, such as shoes. Such was the function of the *Darstellung*. It must be carefully demarcated in this passage and its stages differentiated. Heidegger is not simply, as Schapiro claims, in the process of distinguishing between three modes of being of the thing.

—Then what *is* going on when the so-called illustration intervenes?

—Heidegger has just analyzed the system of the three couples of determinations superimposed on the thing. They are connected, associated in a sort of 'conceptual mechanism' [*Begriffsmechanik*] which nothing resists. Among the effects of this system, the matter/form couple and the concept of thing as informed matter have long dominated every theory of art and every aesthetics. And still do so today. From the moment he is interested here in the work of art, Heidegger insists and makes his question more precise: does this (dominant) form-matter complex have its origin in the being-thing of the thing or else in the being-work of the work and in the being-product [with the participation of man, it is understood, whence the temptation to take this matter-form complex to be the immediate structure of the thing] of the product? In other words, would it not be on the basis of the thing as work or as product that this *general* interpretation (or rather one that is claimed to



be general) of the thing as informed matter was secretly constituted? Now reread the chapter: in the course of this questioning about the product as informed matter, the example of the pair of shoes appears at least three times *before and in the absence of the least reference to a work of art*, be it pictorial or otherwise. Twice associated with the example of the ax and the pitcher.

—There's a lot that needs to be said about these examples and about the discourse on the pitcher in Heidegger, with reference to the thing, precisely.

—Yes, in Heidegger and others before him, in his tradition, or after him: Ponge, for example. But let's not let ourselves get sidetracked. Another time. Having been twice associated with the pitcher and the ax, the pair of shoes (the third time it is mentioned but still before there is any question of the picture) detaches itself from the other examples. Suddenly it is alone. No doubt it is responding to a particular need, but Heidegger will never thematize this. Perhaps it is because, unlike the ax and the pitcher, this useful product is also an article of clothing [*Fussbekleidung*] whose mode of attachment to the body of the subject—let's say, more rigorously, to its *Dasein*—involves an element of originality from which more can be got in this context. But let's leave that. In any case this example manages very well, for many pages, to do without any aesthetic or pictorial reference. And it is during its last occurrence before the allusion to the 'famous picture' that an essential schema is set in place. Without it we would understand nothing of the passage about such-and-such a work by van Gogh, nothing of its differential function, and nothing of its irreducible equivocality either. I called it a schema: basically, and in a barely displaced Kantian sense, it's a hybrid, a mediation or a double belonging or double articulation. The product [*Zeug*] seems to be situated between the thing and the work of art (the work is always a work *of art* in this context: *Werk*). It shares in both, even though the work resembles [*gleicht*] the 'simple thing' more than does the product. The example of the shoes guides the analysis of this schematism when it is first set in place. It is only three pages later, in order to take a further step [*un pas de plus*] in this question of the being-product, that Heidegger will take up the same example again: this time 'inside' a work of art, we shall see why and how this 'inside' turns itself inside out, and is crossed with a single step [*d'un seul pas franchi*]. For the moment, the pair of shoes is a paradigm.

—in its status as paradigm, it has a very noble philosophical genealogy, going back to Plato. So we can hear at this point a sort of quotation, as encrypted as it is conventional, in a long discursive chain.

—it is here a paradigm of the thing as 'product.' It is not yet 'painted' or 'painting' and it occupies, in an exemplary way, that 'intermediate place [*Zwischenstellung*, place of the between, the inter-stela or, as Lacoue-Labarthe might say, the inter-posture: see his 'Typographie,' in *Mimesis*]<sup>1</sup> between the mere thing [*blossen Ding*] and the work [*Werk*].' When the 'product' is the subject of a 'work,' when the thing-as-product [shoes] is the 'subject' presented or represented by a thing-as-work (a picture by van Gogh), the thing will be too complicated to be treated as lightly and simply as Schapiro does. For then one will have to deal with a work (which resembles a mere thing more than it does a product, and resembles a mere thing more than a product does), with a work presenting or representing a product the status of which is interme-

diary between the thing and the work, etc. The intermediate mode is *in the middle* of the other two, which it gathers and divides in itself according to a structure of envelopment which is difficult to spread out. Here, first of all, is the schematism of the product. For example: shoes *in general*. I pick out and emphasize a few words: ‘The product [*Zeug*], for example the shoe-product [*Schuhzeug*] rests, as ready [*fertig*, finished] in itself as the thing pure and simple, but it does not have, as does the block of granite, this *Eigenwüchsige* (difficult to translate: not ‘spontaneity,’ as the French translation has it, but compact self-sufficiency, dense propriety referring only to itself, stubborn). On the other hand the product also shows an affinity [*Verwandtschaft*] *with the work of art, inasmuch as it is produced* [*hervorgebracht*] by the hand of man. In spite of this, the work of art in its turn, by its self-sufficient presence [*in seinem selbstgenügsamen Anwesen*], resembles [*gleich*] the thing pure and simple, referring only to itself [*eigenwüchsige*] and constrained to nothing [*zu nichts gedrängten*] [...]. Thus the product is half a thing, because determined by thingliness, and yet more than that, at the same time it is half work of art, and yet less than that

—so a work like the shoe picture *represents* half of itself and yet less than that —and yet less than that, because it lacks the self-sufficiency of the work of art.

—so a work like the shoe-picture exhibits what something lacks in order to be a work, it exhibits—in shoes—its lack of itself, one could almost say its own lack. And that is how it’s supposed to be self-sufficient? Accomplished? Does it complete itself then? Unless it overflows (itself), into inadequation, excess, the supplement?

—Heidegger continues. ‘The product thus has its proper intermediate place [*Zwischenstellung*] *between* the thing and the work, always supposing that it is permissible to give in to such an accountant-like classification.’

What, to Heidegger’s own eyes, limits the legitimacy of this arithmetical triplicity (the one by which Schapiro boldly sums up the whole context: ‘in the course of distinguishing three modes of things ...’), is that if thing 2 (the product) is between thing 1 (naked, pure and simple thing) and thing 3 [the work of art], thus participating in both of them, the fact nonetheless remains that thing 3 is more like thing 1: also, further on, the picture will be presented as a thing and it will be allowed a privilege in the presentation made *in it* (in presence and self-sufficient) of thing 2 (shoes as product). These ‘three’ ‘modes’ do not entertain among themselves a relationship of distinction, as Schapiro thinks. (Tight interlacing, but one which can always be *analyzed*, untied up *to a certain point*. Like a lace, each ‘thing,’ each mode of being of the thing, passes inside then outside the other. From right to left, from left to right. We shall articulate this *strophe* of the lace: in its rewinding passing and repassing through the eyelet of the thing, from outside to inside, from inside to outside, on the external surface and *under* the internal surface (and vice versa when this surface is turned inside out like the top of the left-hand shoe), it remains the ‘same’ right through, between right and left, shows itself and disappears [*fort/da*] in its regular traversing of the eyelet, it makes the thing sure of its gathering, the underneath tied up on top, the inside bound on the outside, by a law of stricture. Hard and flexible at one and the same time). Thus the work, which is more like the thing pure and simple than a product is (shoes, for example), is *also* a product. The shoe picture is a product (of art)

which is like a thing, presenting (and not representing, we shall come to this) a product (shoes), etc.

The recourse to the 'famous picture' is in the first place justified by a question on the being-product and not on the work of art. The work of art as such will be talked about, it seems, only as if in passing and after the event. At the moment when Heidegger proposes to turn toward the picture, he is thus *not* interested in the work, but only in the being-product of which some shoes—any shoes—provide an example. If what matters to him and what he describes at this point are not shoes in painting, one cannot legitimately expect from him a description of the picture *for itself*, nor, in consequence, criticize its appositeness. So what is he up to and why does he insist so much on the being-product? He, too, has a suspicion, and a hypothesis: has not the thing pure and simple, thing 1, been secretly determined on the basis of thing 2, of the product *as* informed matter? Must we not try to think the being-product 'before,' 'outside,' 'under' this supervening determination? 'Thus it is that the interpretation of the thing in terms of matter and form, whether it remains medieval or becomes transcendental in the Kantian sense, has become current and self-evident. But this does not make it any less a superimposition fallen upon [*Überfall*] the being-thing of the thing, than the other interpretations. This situation reveals itself already in the fact of naming things properly speaking [*eigentlichen Dinge*] things pure and simple [*blasse Dinge*, naked things]. This 'naked' [*Das 'bloss'*] does however mean the stripping [*Entblössung*, the denuding which strips of -] away of the character of usefulness [*Dienlichkeit*] and of being made

—If I understand rightly: not the denuding of the foot, for example, but the denuding of the shoes that have become naked things again, without usefulness, stripped of their use-value? Presenting the shoes as things (1 or 3, without 2) would involve exhibiting a certain nudity, or even an obscenity

—obscenity, that's already laying it on a bit thick [*en remettre*], let's say nudity, yes. Heidegger goes on: 'and of being made. The naked thing [*blasse Ding*] is a sort of product [*Zeug*] but a product divested [*entkleidete*] of its being-as-product. Being-thing then consists in what still remains [*was noch übrigbleibt*]. But this remainder [*Rest*] is not properly [*eigens*] determined in itself....'

—The remainder: these naked shoes, these things of uncertain use, returned to their abandonment as things for doing nothing.

—Perhaps saying that still involves thinking of them too much in terms of their use-value. In order to think this 'remainder' and 'properly' [*eigens*] otherwise, Heidegger then takes another step. He wants to interpret the being-product *without* or before the matter-form couple, convinced that this remainder will not be reached by subtraction of the 'product' but by opening up *another* road toward what is properly product in the product, toward the 'Zeughaften des Zeuges.' The reference to van Gogh is inscribed in this movement, in whatever makes it very strictly singular. That said, *inside* this movement, Heidegger's gesture, with all the craftsmanlike subtlety of a cobbler with a short awl, going quickly from inside to outside, speaks *now of the picture, in it, now of something quite different, outside it*. In a first movement and most importantly, the question which provokes the reference to the picture in no way concerns a work of art. In a manner of speaking the primary motivation of the passage does not concern painting. And yet, through this lacing

movement we were talking about (from inside to outside, from outside to inside, his iron point passing through the surface of the leather or the canvas in both directions, pricking and pointing [*par piqure et peinture*]), the trajectory of the reference is divided and multiplied. In a way which is doubtless both wily and naïve, but following a necessity which Schapiro's lawsuit seems to me to overlook.

—is it a matter of rendering justice to Heidegger, of restituting what is his due, his truth, the possibility of his own gait and progress?

—This question comes a little too early. I'm only starting. [...]

—I always get the impression that in commenting on Heidegger, in restituting him in an apparently very strict way, one makes him say something quite other, all the accents are changed, his language is no longer recognizable. The commentary becomes obscene and thinking otherwise becomes thinking otherwise than he, who wants to think the remainder 'properly.' Here, 'otherwise' would be otherwise than properly. But then what would be proper to this other?

—Let us rather return to the 'famous picture.' A product-thing, some shoes, is there as if represented (Heidegger will, moreover, say that it is not represented, re-produced, but let's leave these questions for the moment, we shall pick them up again). This 'product' has at least the following singular characteristics that we can point out immediately: It belongs to the genus 'clothing' (and is in this sense *parergonal*), and this is not the case with all products. It hints at a movement of return to the thing that is said, by metaphor or transference, to be 'naked': insofar as it is a useless product, not in current use, abandoned, unlaced, offered, as thing (1 and 3) and as product (thing 2) in a sort of idleness [*désœuvrement*]. And yet, insofar as it is a usable product, and especially insofar as it is a product of the genus clothing, it is invested, inhabited, informed

—haunted

—by the 'form' of another naked thing from which it is (partially and provisionally?) detached

—'the *parergon* is detached...'

—and to which it seems to be waiting (seems to make us wait for it) to be reattached, reappropriated. It seems to be made to be retied. But the line of detachment (and thus of the out-of-use and the idleness alike) is not only the one which goes around the shoes and thus gives them form, cuts them out. This first line is already a tracing of coming and going between the outside and the inside, notably when it follows the movement of the lace. It is therefore not simple, it has an internal border and an external border which is incessantly turned back in. But there is another line, another system of detaching *traits*: this is the work *qua* picture in its frame. The frame makes a work of supplementary *désœuvrement*. It cuts out but also sews back together. By an invisible lace which pierces the canvas (as the *pointure* 'pierces the paper'), passes into it then out of it in order to sew it back onto its milieu, onto its internal and external worlds. From then on, if these shoes are no longer useful, it is of course because they are detached from naked feet and from their subject of reattachment (their owner, usual holder, the one who wears them and whom they bear). It is also because they are painted: within the limits of a picture, but limits that have to be thought in laces. Hors-d'œuvre in the

*oeuvre*, hors-d'oeuvre as *oeuvre*: the laces go through the eyelets (which also go in pairs) and pass on to the invisible side. And when they come back from it, do they emerge from the other side of the leather or the other side of the canvas? The prick of their iron point, through the metal-edged eyelets, pierces the leather and the canvas simultaneously. How can we distinguish the two textures of invisibility from each other? Piercing them with a single *pointure*—So there'd be *pointure* of the laces, in this other sense—

—piercing them with a single *pointure*

—does the *pointure* belong to the picture? I'm thinking of the points that nail the canvas onto the stretcher. When nails are painted (as they are by Klee in his *Constructif-impresionnant* of 1927), as figure on a ground, what is their place? To what system do they belong?

—the nails do not form part of the 'principal' figure, as the laces do. The functioning of their *pointure* requires another analysis—

—piercing them with a single *pointure*, the figure of the laces will have sewn the leather onto the canvas. If the two textures are traversed by a single doubled blow, then they are henceforth indiscernible. Everything is painted on leather, the canvas is both *shod* [*chaussée*] and unshod, etc. That is how it appears, at least, in this play of appearance/disappearance. [...]

—I'll sharpen up the question: to a peasant or a peasant woman? It's the limen of this debate, let's remain there a little longer: why does Heidegger sometimes say 'a pair of peasants' shoes [*ein Paar Bauernschuhe*] and nothing else [*und nichts weiter*],' without determination of sex or allowing the masculine to gain a footing thanks to this neutrality, and sometimes—more often, in fact—'the peasant woman' [*die Bäuerin*], when designating the 'subject'? He never explains himself on this point, and Schapiro, for his part, never pays the slightest attention to it. To which sex are these shoes due? This is not exactly the same question as that posed earlier, when we were wondering whether or not there was a symbolic equivalence between the supposed 'symbol' 'shoe' and such-and-such a genital organ, or whether only a differential and idiomatic syntax could arrest bisexuality, confer on it some particular leading or dominant value, etc. Here it is not the same question and yet the attribution of shoes (in painting) to a subject-wearer (bearer)

—of shoes and of a sex

—a masculine or feminine sex, this attribution is not without its resonance with the first question. Let us not forget that *The Origin* deals with the essence of truth, the truth of essence and the abyss [*Abgrund*] which plays itself out there like the 'veiled' destiny [*fatum*] which transfixes being.

Graft of sex onto the shoes. This graft is not arrested by *The Origin*: sometimes the indeterminacy slips by force of language toward the masculine, sometimes the feminine wins out. There is *some* peasant (*lines*) and the peasant woman, but never a peasant man. For Schapiro, it comes down without any possible argument on the side of the masculine ('a man of the town and city'), Vincent van Gogh's sex being in no doubt for the signatory of the 'Still Life...'

—It is true that neither Heidegger nor Schapiro seems to give thematic attention to the sex of reattachment. The one reattaches, prior to any examination of the question, to peasantry, but passes without warning from peasantry to the peasant woman. The other, having examined the question, reattaches to

some city-dwelling painter, but never asks himself why they should be men's shoes nor why the other, not content with saying 'peasantry,' sometimes adds 'the peasant woman.' Sometimes, and even most often.

—But what is thematic attention? And does what it seems to exclude (the implicit? the foreclosed? the denied? the unthought? the encrypted? the 'incorporated'?—so many different functions) allow itself to be excluded from the field?

—From what field? Fenced by whom? By what? By peasantry or peasant-womanry? [...]

—All this aggravates Heidegger's referentialist, monoreferential naïveté. This must be emphasized with respect to a discourse on *The Origin of the Work of Art*. It can't not have some relationship with the whole undertaking. And yet:

a. Heidegger 'is well aware,' and Schapiro knows that he is well aware: 'Van Gogh painted such shoes more than once' [*solches Schuhzeug mehrmals gemalt hat*]. Why did he not take this into account? Is his error more serious or less serious for this? Has he arrived by induction at a sort of 'general picture,' retaining, by abstraction or subtraction, the common or supposedly common traits of a whole series? This hypothesis—the least favorable—is ruled out by everything of Heidegger's one can read. He was always very severe on this conceptualism, which would here be doubled by an empiricist barbarity. So?

Heidegger's defence, mitigating circumstances: his 'intention' was not that of concentrating on a given painting of describing and interrogating its singularity as an art critic would do. So let's read once more the opening of this passage. It is indeed a question of 'simply describing' [*einfach beschreiben*] not a picture but 'a product,' without philosophical theory. 'We choose as an example a common sort of product: a pair of peasants' shoes.' *Not yet a picture, not a work of art, but a product*. Let's go on. 'In order to describe them, we do not need to have in front of us real samples of useful objects of this type. Everyone is familiar with them. But since it is a matter here of an immediate description, it maybe as well to facilitate intuitive presentation [*Veranschaulichung*]. By way of an accessory aid [*Für diese Nachhilfe*, omitted in the French (and English) translation], a pictorial representation [*bildliche Darstellung*] suffices. For this purpose we choose a famous picture by van Gogh who painted such shoes more than once.'

—It's clear, the picture is, *for the moment*, as a hypothesis, an intuitive accessory. One can reproach Heidegger for this illustrative procedure, but that would be a different matter from behaving as though he were trying to describe the picture for itself, and then, in this hypothesis which for the moment is not his, reproaching him for mistakes in the reading. *For the moment*, the object to be described, to be interpreted, is not the picture or even the object insofar as it is painted ([re]presented), but a familiar product well known to everyone. None of what follows concerns, or pretends to delimit, the pictorial specificity of the shoes or even their specificity insofar as they may be different from other shoes. With a picture in front of you to keep up attention and facilitate intuition, a picture of a pair of shoes, whatever pair it may be, peasants' shoes or not, painted or not, you could bring out the same features: the being-product, the usefulness, the belonging to the world and to the earth, in the very definite sense that Heidegger accords to these two words which do not interest



Schapiro and to which we shall have to return. But in that case, you'll say, why choose a painting? Why explicate so heavily what stems from the problematical identification of these shoes as peasants' shoes? At the stage where we are at the moment, and Heidegger says so, some real shoes (peasants' or not) or shoes drawn vaguely in chalk on the blackboard would have rendered the same service. The blackboard would have sufficed.

—That's what Schapiro reproaches Heidegger with.

—But Heidegger says it ('But what more is there to see there? Everybody knows what belongs to shoes'), and you can only reproach him for it by assuming that he was *primarily* interested in a picture, that he was trying to analyze it as such, which is not the case. For the use to which he wanted to put it at first, the various canvases were indeed interchangeable, with no harm done. If his attribution of the thing to peasantry is indeed (and we shall still have to examine to what point it is) imprudent and precipitate, we do at least know that he could have produced, for what mattered to the analysis of the being-product, the same discourse on town shoes: the relationship of the wearer to this strange product (very close to, and yet detachable from, his body), the relationship with walking, with work, with the ground, the earth, and the world. Everything that comes down to the 'peasant' world is in this respect an accessory variable even if it does come massively under 'projection' and answers to Heidegger's pathetic-fantasmatic-ideological-political investments.

b. The 'same truth,' that 'presented' by the picture, is not for Heidegger 'peasant' truth, a truth the essential content of which would depend on the attribution (however imprudent) of the shoes to peasantry. The 'peasant' characteristic remains secondary here. The 'same truth' could be 'presented' by any shoe painting, or even by any experience of shoes and even of any 'product' in general: the truth being that of a being-product coming back from 'further away' than the matter-form couple, further away even than a 'distinction between the two.' This truth is due to a 'more distant origin.' It is not the truth of a *relationship* (of adequation or attribution) between such-and-such a product and such-and-such an owner, user, holder, bearer/wearer-borne. The belonging of the product 'shoes' does not relate to a given *subjectum*, or even to a given world. What is said of belonging to the world and the earth is valid for the town and for the fields. Not indifferently, but equally.

Thus Schapiro is mistaken about the primary function of the pictorial reference. He also gets wrong a Heideggerian argument which should ruin in advance his own restitution of the shoes to van Gogh: art as 'putting to work of truth' is neither an 'imitation,' nor a 'description' copying the 'real,' nor a 'reproduction,' whether it represents a singular thing or a general essence. For the whole of Schapiro's case, on the other hand, calls on real shoes: the picture is supposed to imitate them, represent them, reproduce them. Their belonging has then to be determined as a belonging to a real or supposedly real subject, to an individual whose extremities, outside the picture, should not remain bare [*déchaussées*; also, 'loose' (of teeth)] for long.

—loose like old teeth. But he won't be able to avoid the bridge. He doesn't know that the shoe already forms a prosthesis. And perhaps the foot does too. It can always be someone else's. So many sayings pass through here to

speak of the dislocation of the inadequate, like when one is ‘à côté de ses pompes’ (literally, ‘beside one’s shoes (with fatigue)’), or the usurper’s abuse: ‘to be in someone’s shoes.’<sup>2</sup> Thrown into the abyss, the sphynx, from the moment the turgidity

—Schapiro tightens the picture’s laces around ‘real’ feet. I underline: ‘*They are clearly* pictures of the artist’s *own* shoes, not the shoes of a peasant.... Later in Arles he *represented*, as he wrote in a letter of August 1888 to his brother, “une paire de vieux souliers,” which are *evidently his own*....’ *They are*: the lace passes here, in the copula, it couples the painted shoes and the painter’s feet. It is drawn out of the picture, which presupposes a hole in the canvas.

—And besides, did we have to wait for Heidegger before being on our guard? Before we could avoid considering a painted object as a copy? Worse, before we could avoid attributing it an adequate model (real shoes) and what’s more attributing to this model an adequate subject (van Gogh), which makes two capitalized attributions? Then there is the word *evidently*, the word *clearly* which comes in again later, when a picture is identified in a catalog, the words *his own* which several times so calmly declare property, propositions of the type ‘this is that’ in which the copula ties a ‘real’ predicate to a ‘painted’ object. One is surprised that an expert should use all this dogmatic and precritical language. It all looks as though the hammering of the notions of self-evidence, clarity, and property was meant to resound very loudly to prevent us from hearing that nothing here is clear, or self-evident, or proper to anyone or anything whatsoever. And doubtless Schapiro knows this or says it to himself more or less clearly. But it is only at this price that he can have the shoes, acquire them with a view to a restitution, snatch them from the one to give them to the other. That other to whom he believes he is no stranger. To slip them on, then. On his own feet and on the other’s feet. Like a garment or an object that one puts on [*qu’on se passe*]. The *se passer* of this thrust [*cette passe*] is also what the shoes in *restance* are doing. That’s what’s happening here.<sup>3</sup>

—I would distinguish three dogmas in Schapiro’s credo, when he speculates in this way on the occasion of these old shoes. Three dogmas with structures that are distinct from one another but analogous in their functional finality. 1. Painted shoes can belong really and really be restituted to a real, identifiable, and nameable subject. This illusion is facilitated by the closest identification between the alleged holder of the shoes and the so-called signatory of the picture. 2. Shoes are shoes, be they painted or ‘real,’ solely and simply shoes which are what they are, adequate to themselves and in the first place fittable onto feet. Shoes belong properly. In their structure as replaceable product, in the standard nature of their size, in the detachability of this clothing-type instrument, they do not have what it would take to make all *strict* belonging and propriety drift. 3. Feet (painted, ghostly, or real) belong to a body proper. They are not detachable from it. These three assurances can’t stand up to the slightest question. They are in any case immediately dismantled by what *happens* [*se passe*] by what *there is* in this painting.

—Although they bear on three distinct articulations, these three assurances tend to efface them in the interests of one and the same continuum. To reattach the detachables according to an absolute stricture.




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**43 René Magritte**

*The Red Model,*  
(*Le Modèle rouge*), 1935.

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**44 René Magritte**

*Philosophy in the Boudoir,*  
(*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*), 1947.

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—No more laces, what, no longer even a knot to be seen, or holes or eyelets, but full shoes, absolutely adherent to the foot.

—Like in Magritte's *Le Modèle rouge* [43]. But there, too, one must take into account an effect of series and citationality. Magritte painted several of them. There, not counting *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1947) [44], or *Le Puits de vérité* (1963) [45], there is incontestably a pair, you can see the disposition of the toes which form one and the same body with the boots. They form both the pair and the join.

—*Le Modèle rouge* also mimics this lure and mocks it. It also cuts off the shoe-foot at the ankle, at the neck, indicating by this trait or stroke, added to the horizontal and regular lines of the wooden background, then added to the lines of the frame, that this pair of rising-sided (rising toward what?) shoes, now out of use, with empty unlaced neck (unlaced differently from one model to another), then summoning van Gogh's witnesses to appear, are still deferring their supplement of property, the revenue on their usury [*usure*: also 'wear']. Their silence makes the expert speak, and he will not take long to say, like Heidegger speaking of van Gogh's picture: 'it has spoken.' Two psychoanalysts—from London, of course, that sort of thing would never get across the English Channel—said to Magritte: '*The Red Model* is a case of castration.' The painter then sent them 'a real psycho-analytical drawing' which inspired the same discourse from them.

—But why so cutting in this verdict against Schapiro? If he were so credulous in the identification of this picture

—I haven't demonstrated that yet, I've stuck to the general premises. Later, with respect to this picture

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**45 René Magritte**

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*The Well of Truth,*  
(Le Puits de vérité), 1963.

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—All right, let's say credulous in the attribution, in general, of painted shoes to a determinable subject and, which is indeed more serious, to one that is determinable *in reality*: isn't Heidegger's naïveté still more massive! He also attributes the painted shoes, without the slightest examination, to peasantry, or even to the peasant woman. This attribution appears to be incompatible with what he says further on against imitation, copy, representative reproduction, etc., against the notion of adequation or *homoiosis*. For example: 'Or else would the proposition according to which art is the putting-itself-to-work of truth give new life to a fortunately outdated opinion according to which art is an imitation or a descriptive copy of the real? The replica of the given doubtless demands conformity with being, a regulated measuring against it; *adaequatio*, say the Middle Ages, *ὁμοίωσις* said Aristotle already. For a long time, conformity with being has been considered to be equivalent to the essence of truth. But do we really believe that this picture by van Gogh copies [*male ab*, depicta] a given [*present*, *vorhandenes*] pair of peasants' shoes, and that it is a work because it has succeeded in doing so? Do we wish to say that the picture has taken a copy of the real and that it has transformed the real into a product [*Produkt*] of artistic production? Nowise.' This reply ['Nowise'] also holds, in the next paragraph, for the reproduction of a general essence which some tried to substitute for the singular given, keeping the same schema. Now I understand well enough how that hits Schapiro's preoccupations and disqualifies his assurances (Schapiro who seems to believe in the reproduction of 'given' shoes, those of van Gogh and even of a 'given' van Gogh, in a given time and place, 'by that time a man of the town and city!'), and I also understand well enough how the proof itself is in this case *a priori* irrelevant. But what I

do not understand is why Heidegger should escape from the same suspicion, from his own suspicion basically, from the moment he says, without proof this time, without even looking for a proof: they are peasants' shoes. He does not even say *they are* in order to reply to a possible question, he names them, 'Ein Paar Bauernschuhe,' without even imagining the first murmur of a question.

—That's the whole dissymmetry, the innocent outbidding of this correspondence. One claim is more naïve, more excessive, if one can say that, than the other. One attribution exceeds the other. Imagine an auctioneer who is both an expert and a buyer, pushing up the bidding in the empty room. Bidding for second-hand, more or less unmatched shoes on a framed canvas. On the one hand, Schapiro's attribution remains in the aesthetics of representation, and even of the most empiricist kind: either short of (precritical), or going beyond (excessive), the movement carried out by *The Origin* in the passage just translated. But on his side, by saying 'Bauernschuhe' without asking himself any questions about this, Heidegger falls short of his discourse on the truth in painting, and is even more naïve than Schapiro. Excessive to the extent of talking about peasants' shoes even before any question of 'representation,' and already in the order of a 'presentative' truth. The fact is that the step backwards from a truth of adequation to a truth of unveiling, whatever its necessity and its 'critical' force, can also leave one practically disarmed in the face of the ingenuous, the precritical, the dogmatic, in the face of any 'preinvestment' (be it 'fantasmatic,' 'ideological,' etc., or whatever name you call it). There's a law here. This is perhaps one of the secrets of this correspondence, of its dissymmetry or its excessive symmetry: in the contract of truth ('I owe you the truth in painting'), between truth as adequation (of a representation, here an attributive one, on Schapiro's side) and the truth of unveiled presence (Heidegger's side). For the moment let us leave this truth contract, between the two truths. (What is *doing* the *contracting* there has to do with a *trait* [*Riss*] and an attraction [*attrait*] [*Zug*] of the work, with a *Gezüge*, which will draw us much further into Heidegger's text.) The truth of the shoes as things due (the object of the subject) constrains this correspondence and we ought (supposing one ever has to ought) to reexamine its terms later. One of the innumerable difficulties in reading *The Origin* and especially this passage, is that of grasping the furtive moment when a certain line is crossed, and of grasping too the step with which it is crossed.

—In the sense of *über die Linie* [*trans linear* or *de linear*] and of the topology of being in *Zur Seinsfrage*

—No. Well, yes. But this connection passes through detours we don't have time for here. Or space. I was simply designating, close at hand here, the crossing of certain lines, of certain *traits* in the picture (the outline of the 'product,' for example the line of the collar or the line of the lace). And above all, first of all, the crossing of the lines of framing, the *traits* which detach the picture from the real milieu. Where, at what moment, in what direction [*sens*] does this transgression take place? And is this crossing a transgression? Transgression of what law? Which comes down to wondering notably whether and within what limits Heidegger intended to speak of the 'famous picture.'

—Which one?

—We don't know yet. We have verified that at the precise moment when in this chapter he takes the example of a pair of peasants' shoes, no picture has yet been necessary. None has even been invoked. And it's been going on like that for several pages. Now even at the moment when the 'famous picture' provides what is basically an example of an example, its status leaves us in a definitive uncertainty. We can always say, challenging proof to be produced, that Heidegger does not intend to speak of the picture, does not describe it *as such*, and passes regularly from an example of a product (peasants' shoes) to the example of the example (some particular shoes in some particular picture), in both directions, then from exemplarity to the being-product, picking out the predicates of the being-product and letting the others drop —like old shoes.



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# Authorship and Identity

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, in Heidegger's essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', the author observed at the outset that 'The question concerning the origin of the work of art asks about the source of its nature. On the usual view, the work arises out of and by means of the activity of the artist. But by what and whence is the artist what he is? By the work; for to say that the work does credit to the master means that *it is the work that first lets the artist emerge* as a master of his art.' Artwork and artist are thus linked as *co-constructions*: as *effects* of a strategy of reading which aligns together *in a certain light* the designated maker (the individual artist-genius or by extension an entire milieu or mentality) and what is staged as its effects or products. This has dominated disciplinary practice since well before art history's institutionalization in Europe in the nineteenth century, for example in early semiotic practices known under the name of connoisseurship, concerned with interpreting palpable signs of authenticity and authorship.

Modern art historical and museum practices have been grounded in attempts to maintain and consistently apply certain theories of authorship, consonant with particular Western philosophical and theological concepts of the individual subject and its ethical, legal, religious, and political responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> Western art history was traditionally dominated by the promulgation of a paradigm of the normally singular, unique, inspired (and usually male) artist, and the uniquely original artefact of that inspiration, indissolubly linked as originating cause and effective product. But, following upon Heidegger's remarks cited above, is the idea of the artist a product or alternatively a function of the discursive and museological system itself—or both? And if both, exactly how?

What benefits accrue to different notions of authorship or artistic identity? If notions of authorship and artistry are co-constructed with notions of artwork and objecthood, should we expect there to be as many artistic personae as artistic styles and modes of production? Where does responsibility for the ostensible appearance of a work belong? And how should we distinguish between different modes of causality in the interpretation of works—formal, effective, or final causes, for example—where the person or group commissioning a work might be regarded by a society or a particular time and place as its true, originating, or effective 'author'. From such a perspective, is the maker or producer framed as the co-author or as merely its material realizer on behalf of a patron to whom might accrue the ultimate conceptual 'originality' and responsibility?

The seven texts making up this chapter offer a variety of perspectives on these issues. The chapter begins with the 1969 essay by Michel Foucault (1926–84) 'What is an Author', which at the time of its publication was seen

as deeply problematizing and historically contextualizing recent conventional Western notions of authorship as fixed and constant. For not a few observers at the time, the essay effectively reopened a wider historical and critical awareness of the actual complexity of changing ideas of authorial and artistic identity in the West. If the idea of authorship was historically contingent, then the death of that idea was also conceivable. Foucault argued that much of the inherited importance of what he termed the *author function* was inextricably rooted in early European religious discourse, and specifically in the techniques of textual exegesis of the Bible in the early years of the Christian religion.<sup>2</sup>

He argued that the criteria of authenticity of sacred texts articulated by the translator of the Christian sacred text from Greek and Hebrew into Latin, St Jerome (347–420), underlay many modern assumptions in literary and cultural study which arguably function in structurally similar ways.<sup>3</sup> The author function was essential to what Foucault termed ‘the fundamental critical category of “the man and his work”’ a structural construct which has underlain the professionalization of art history in the modern period.<sup>4</sup>

The essay reinvigorated debates on the nature of the individual subject in a number of academic fields by persuasively arguing that it too was neither universal nor constant, even within the parochial history of Western institutions themselves. But while Foucault’s essay problematized conventional modern notions of authorship (to a certain extent echoing some of the arguments of Heidegger in the 1935 essay cited above), seen by hindsight nearly four decades later, Foucault’s critical destabilizations remained largely circumscribed within the academic discourses of Western theory and European social and cultural history.

The other texts collected in this and the following chapter could be seen as *over and against* Foucault’s seminal essay in their interrogations of issues and problems regarding authorship, artistries, and subjectivities unengaged by the latter’s Eurocentrist (and, for some, abstractly universalizing) preoccupations. And yet Foucault is nonetheless engaged with and *read through* by many of the following selections, and not least by these ‘introductions’. I have not staged these assortments of texts as ‘illustrations’ of principles which my introductions of each chapter would highlight and explicate as the texts that bear them unfold in your reading and discussing. That position is not without its implications for understanding power relations that are never not gendered and classed, all human knowledge being partial or perspectival. Such partiality structurally exists in a dialectical tension with what is simultaneously co-constructed. Walter Benjamin was acutely aware of these ironies and paradoxes, and addressed them ‘performatively’ in and by his (unfinished and posthumously published) manuscript known by the name *The Arcades Project*,<sup>5</sup> where he dreamt of a text composed entirely of citations or excerpts from others’ texts.

All of which is precisely to the point of many of the arguments raised (and contested), overtly or implicitly, in and by the texts in the present chapter. All of the subsequent readings here, by Owens, Kelly, Butler, Chow, Jones, and Doyle, deal with the multiple inflections of these questions and represent a spectrum of voices spanning some four decades, from the late 1960s to the early twenty-first century, with the majority spanning a two-decade period from the early 1980s onwards. As with all of the texts collected in this volume, these present issues and problems to reckon with, in both senses of that term, with implications for one’s own interests and practices. The selections chart

diversifying interests in identity formation and the position(s) of the subject in various modalities. In the first piece, from 1983, Owens considers some recent vicissitudes of binary thought insofar as feminist theory and artistic practice of the 1980s constituted a 'postmodernist' attention to hegemonic power, with implications for what at the time appeared (largely from the perspectives of New York art practice) to be certain ambivalence towards theory in the feminisms then current. Much of Owens's critique of these developments is grounded in a Foucauldian perspective on the indignity of speaking for others.

Mary Kelly's 1984 text 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism' considers the construction of the artistic text and of authenticity in the discourse on modernism and its challenges, comparing painting and film with respect to the erasure of or emphasis upon the actual gesture of construction. The latter is linked by the modern needs of the market for artistic or authorial legibility, emphasizing the 'presence' of the artist in the work—a situation ironized not only by cinema but by postmodern practices of a wide variety of types and genres.

The 1988 text by Judith Butler, originally published in *Theatre Journal*, discusses the phenomenological construction of gender through the repetition of gendered acts, whose production can simultaneously be read as problematizing or ironizing the absolute fixities of any such construction. It is precisely in the production of the 'compelling illusion' of gender as an object of belief that the possibility of contesting its fixities lies—a point emphasized in a different register in the Coda to this volume. Butler's linkage of theatre, philosophy, and art provides an expanded field of implications for the questions of the modern and postmodern fabrications of artistic texts and artistic authenticity.

The latter issue is taken up four years later in Rey Chow's 1992 meditation on the political implications of postmodern text and performance, in which the 'modernism—postmodernism' problem is displaced from the realms both of opposition and historical sequence, and is made more complex by being reconfigured as a network of ideas, concepts, and artistic legacies at different stages of development. At the same time, the implications of both terms are seen as functions of real historical and cultural contexts: what is modern and what is postmodern are functions of time, place, gender, class, and social development.

Amelia Jones's 2002 essay, originally presented in 1997, denaturalizes the notion of beauty in relation to the politics of gender and race and of the gendered gaze. Her investigation suggests some of the ways in which the modern discourse on beauty is linked to the complex legacy of Kant's notions of disinterested pleasure. Her 'excavations' of the psychic and social structures of desire—occasioned by a close reading of the subtexts of neoconservative art writings prominent in the early 1990s—allow a contemporary observer to appreciate what interests were and may still be served by the discourse on beauty.

Jennifer Doyle's 2006 essay interrogates the conflation of notions of gay and queer art and artists, and makes a case for 'queer art' as marking an 'integration of art into life'. In a reversal of the early twentieth-century constructivist idea that the essence of art or artistry lay in its capacity for 'making strange' the ordinary world of everyday life, where in a sense art is already 'queer', Doyle suggests that queerness and its apparent opposite(s) are continually shifting positions, itself a perspective with resonances in many of the selections in this chapter.

Any chapter whose selections cover issues as diverse and complex as authorship, identity, gender, sexuality, or class at the present time is bound to be idiosyncratic and reflective of any compiler's most recent interests and the benefits and deficits of hindsight. Nonetheless, a cogent case might be made for questions of authorship and identity in the discourses on art and artistry as having consistently been, over the past four decades, a continually evolving discourse about the fixity or fluidity of subject positions of all kinds; the functions of contexts that themselves are continually evolving and shifting. The selections in this chapter, drawn from very diverse sources, would seem to confirm such an impression—and that, in addition, disciplinarity itself is always itself in question, and this is no less the case with what we call art history.

## What is an Author?

In proposing this slightly odd question, I am conscious of the need for an explanation. To this day, the 'author' remains an open question both with respect to its general function within discourse and in my own writings; that is, this question permits me to return to certain aspects of my own work which now appear ill-advised and misleading. In this regard, I wish to propose a necessary criticism and reevaluation.

For instance, my objective in *The Order of Things* had been to analyse verbal clusters as discursive layers which fall outside the familiar categories of a book, a work, or an author. But while I considered 'natural history,' the 'analysis of wealth,' and 'political economy' in general terms, I neglected a similar analysis of the author and his works; it is perhaps due to this omission that I employed the names of authors throughout this book in a naive and often crude fashion. I spoke of Buffon, Cuvier, Ricardo, and others as well, but failed to realize that I had allowed their names to function ambiguously. This has proved an embarrassment to me in that my oversight has served to raise two pertinent objections.

It was argued that I had not properly described Buffon or his work and that my handling of Marx was pitifully inadequate in terms of the totality of his thought.<sup>1</sup> Although these objections were obviously justified, they ignored the task I had set myself: I had no intention of describing Buffon or Marx or of reproducing their statements or implicit meanings, but, simply stated, I wanted to locate the rules that formed a certain number of concepts and theoretical relationships in their works.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it was argued that I had created monstrous families by bringing together names as disparate as Buffon and Linnaeus or in placing Cuvier next to Darwin in defiance of the most readily observable family resemblances and natural ties.<sup>3</sup> This objection also seems inappropriate since I had never tried to establish a genealogical table of exceptional individuals, nor was I concerned in forming an intellectual daguerreotype of the scholar or naturalist of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In fact, I had no intention of forming any family, whether holy or perverse. On the contrary, I wanted to determine—a much more modest task—the functional conditions of specific discursive practices.

Then why did I use the names of authors in *The Order of Things*? Why not avoid their use altogether, or, short of that, why not define the manner in which they were used? These questions appear fully justified and I have tried to gauge their implications and consequences in a book that will appear shortly.<sup>4</sup> These questions have determined my effort to situate comprehensive discursive units, such as 'natural history' or 'political economy,' and to establish the methods and instruments for delimiting, analysing, and describing these unities. Nevertheless, as a privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, and literature, or in the history of philosophy and science, the question



of the author demands a more direct response. Even now, when we study the history of a concept, a literary genre, or a branch of philosophy, these concerns assume a relatively weak and secondary position in relation to the solid and fundamental role of an author and his works.

For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside a sociohistorical analysis of the author as an individual and the numerous questions that deserve attention in this context: how the author was individualized in a culture such as ours; the status we have given the author, for instance, when we began our research into authenticity and attribution; the systems of valorization in which he was included; or the moment when the stories of heroes gave way to an author's biography; the conditions that fostered the formulation of the fundamental critical category of 'the man and his work.' For the time being, I wish to restrict myself to the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it.

Beckett supplies a direction: 'What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking.'<sup>5</sup> In an indifference such as this we must recognize one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing. It is not simply 'ethical' because it characterizes our way of speaking and writing, but because it stands as an immanent rule, endlessly adopted and yet never fully applied. As a principle, it dominates writing as an ongoing practice and slights our customary attention to the finished product.<sup>6</sup> For the sake of illustration, we need only consider two of its major themes. First, the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of 'expression'; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority. On the contrary, we recognize it in its exterior deployment.<sup>7</sup> This reversal transforms writing into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier. Moreover, it implies an action that is always testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates. Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.<sup>8</sup>

The second theme is even more familiar: it is the kinship between writing and death. This relationship inverts the age-old conception of Greek narrative or epic, which was designed to guarantee the immortality of a hero. The hero accepted an early death because his life, consecrated and magnified by death, passed into immortality; and the narrative redeemed his acceptance of death. In a different sense, Arabic stories, and *The Arabian Nights* in particular, had as their motivation, their theme and pretext, this strategy for defeating death. Storytellers continued their narratives late into the night to forestall death and to delay the inevitable moment when everyone must fall silent. Scheherazade's story is a desperate inversion of murder; it is the effort, throughout all those nights, to exclude death from the circle of existence.<sup>9</sup> This conception of a spoken or written narrative as a protection against death has been transformed by our culture. Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself; it is a voluntary obliteration of the self that does not require representation in books because it takes place in the everyday existence of the writer. Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to

become the murderer of its author. Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka are obvious examples of this reversal.<sup>10</sup> In addition, we find the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer; the quibbling and confrontations that a writer generates between himself and his text cancel out the signs of his particular individuality. If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing. While all of this is familiar in philosophy, as in literary criticism, I am not certain that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author have been fully explored or that the importance of this event has been appreciated. To be specific, it seems to me that the themes destined to replace the privileged position accorded the author have merely served to arrest the possibility of genuine change. Of these, I will examine two that seem particularly important.

To begin with, the thesis concerning a work. It has been understood that the task of criticism is not to reestablish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works and, further, that criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships.<sup>11</sup> Yet, what of a context that questions the concept of a work? What, in short, is the strange unit designated by the term, work? What is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an 'author'? Difficulties arise on all sides if we raise the question in this way. If an individual is not an author, what are we to make of those things he has written or said, left among his papers or communicated to others? Is this not properly a work? What, for instance, were Sade's papers before he was consecrated as an author? Little more, perhaps, than rolls of paper on which he endlessly unravelled his fantasies while in prison.

Assuming that we are dealing with an author, is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work? This problem is both theoretical and practical. If we wish to publish the complete works of Nietzsche, for example, where do we draw the line? Certainly, everything must be published, but can we agree on what 'everything' means? We will, of course, include everything that Nietzsche himself published, along with the drafts of his works, his plans for aphorisms, his marginal notations and corrections. But what if, in a notebook filled with aphorisms, we find a reference, a remainder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill, should this be included in his works? Why not? These practical considerations are endless once we consider how a work can be extracted from the millions of traces left by an individual after his death. Plainly, we lack a theory to encompass the questions generated by a work and the empirical activity of those who naively undertake the publication of the complete works of an author often suffers from the absence of this framework. Yet more questions arise. Can we say that *The Arabian Nights*, and *Stromates* of Clement of Alexandria, or the *Lives* of Diogenes Laertes constitute works? Such questions only begin to suggest the range of our difficulties, and, if some have found it convenient to bypass the individuality of the writer or his status as an author to concentrate on a work, they have failed to appreciate the equally problematic nature of the word 'work' and the unity it designates.

Another thesis has detained us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance. It avoids confronting the specific event that makes it possible and, in subtle ways, continues to preserve the existence of the author. This is the notion of *écriture*.<sup>12</sup> Strictly speaking, it should allow us not only to circumvent references to an author, but to situate his recent absence. The conception of *écriture*, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indications, as symptoms or signs within a text, of an author's meaning; rather, it stands for a remarkably profound attempt to elaborate the conditions of any text, both the conditions of its spatial dispersion and its temporal deployment.

It appears, however, that this concept, as currently employed, has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity. The extremely visible signs of the author's empirical activity are effaced to allow the play, in parallel or opposition, of religious and critical modes of characterization. In granting a primordial status to writing, do we not, in effect, simply reinscribe in transcendental terms the theological affirmation of its sacred origin or a critical belief in its creative nature? To say that writing, in terms of the particular history it made possible, is subjected to forgetfulness and repression, is this not to reintroduce in transcendental terms the religious principle of hidden meanings (which require interpretation) and the critical assumption of implicit significations, silent purposes, and obscure contents (which give rise to commentary)? Finally, is not the conception of writing as absence a transposition into transcendental terms of the religious belief in a fixed and continuous tradition or the aesthetic principle that proclaims the survival of the work as a kind of enigmatic supplement of the author beyond his own death?<sup>13</sup>

This conception of *écriture* sustains the privileges of the author through the safeguard of the a priori; the play of representations that formed a particular image of the author is extended within a gray neutrality. The disappearance of the author—since Mallarmé, an event of our time—is held in check by the transcendental. Is it not necessary to draw a line between those who believe that we can continue to situate our present discontinuities within the historical and transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century and those who are making a great effort to liberate themselves, once and for all, from this conceptual framework?<sup>14</sup>

It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death.<sup>15</sup> Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance. In this context we can briefly consider the problems that arise in the use of an author's name. What is the name of an author? How does it function? Far from offering a solution, I will attempt to indicate some of the difficulties related to these questions.

The name of an author poses all the problems related to the category of the proper name. (Here, I am referring to the work of John Searle,<sup>16</sup> among others.) Obviously not a pure and simple reference, the proper name (and the author's name as well) has other than indicative functions. It is more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description. When we say 'Aristotle,' we are using a word that means one or a series of

definite descriptions of the type: 'the author of the *Analytiks*,' or 'the founder of ontology,' and so forth.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, a proper name has other functions than that of signification: when we discover that Rimbaud has not written *La Chasse spirituelle*, we cannot maintain that the meaning of the proper name or this author's name has been altered. The proper name and the name of an author oscillate between the poles of description and designation, and, granting that they are linked to what they name, they are not totally determined either by their descriptive or designative functions.<sup>18</sup> Yet—and it is here that the specific difficulties attending an author's name appear—the link between a proper name and the individual being named and the link between an author's name and that which it names are not isomorphous and do not function in the same way; and these differences require clarification.

To learn, for example, that Pierre Dupont does not have blue eyes, does not live in Paris, and is not a doctor does not invalidate the fact that the name, Pierre Dupont, continues to refer to the same person; there has been no modification of the designation that links the name to the person. With the name of an author, however, the problems are far more complex. The disclosure that Shakespeare was not born in the house that tourists now visit would not modify the functioning of the author's name, but, if it were proved that he had not written the sonnets that we attribute to him, this would constitute a significant change and affect the manner in which the author's name functions. Moreover, if we establish that Shakespeare wrote Bacon's *Organon* and that the same author was responsible for both the works of Shakespeare and those of Bacon, we would have introduced a third type of alteration which completely modifies the functioning of the author's name. Consequently, the name of an author is not precisely a proper name among others.

Many other factors sustain this paradoxical singularity of the name of an author. It is altogether different to maintain that Pierre Dupont does not exist and that Homer or Hermes Trismegistes have never existed. While the first negation merely implies that there is no one by the name of Pierre Dupont, the second indicates that several individuals have been referred to by one name or that the real author possessed none of the traits traditionally associated with Homer or Hermes. Neither is it the same thing to say that Jacques Durand, not Pierre Dupont, is the real name of *X* and that Stendhal's name was Henri Beyle. We could also examine the function and meaning of such statements as 'Bourbaki is this or that person,' and 'Victor Eremita, Climacus, Anticlimacus, Frater Taciturnus, Constantin Constantius, all of these are Kierkegaard.'

These differences indicate that an author's name is not simply an element of speech (as a subject, a complement, or an element that could be replaced by a pronoun or other parts of speech). Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts. Neither Hermes nor Hippocrates existed in the sense that we can say Balzac existed, but the fact that a number of texts were attached to a single name implies that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization were established among them. Finally, the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary

attention given to ordinary, fleeting words. Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates.

We can conclude that, unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the author remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture. The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, we can say that in our culture, the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others: a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and, similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author. In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.

In dealing with the 'author' as a function of discourse, we must consider the characteristics of a discourse that support this use and determine its difference from other discourses. If we limit our remarks to only those books or texts with authors, we can isolate four different features.

First, they are objects of appropriation; the form of property they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago. It is important to notice, as well, that its status as property is historically secondary to the penal code controlling its appropriation. Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. In our culture—undoubtedly in others as well—discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values.<sup>20</sup> But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature.<sup>21</sup> It is as if the author, at the moment he was accepted into the social order of property which governs our culture, was compensating for his new status by reviving the older bipolar field of discourse in a systematic practice of transgression and by restoring the danger of writing which, on another side, had been conferred the benefits of property.

Secondly, the 'author-function'<sup>22</sup> is not universal or constant in all discourse. Even within our civilization, the same types of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity. Texts, however, that we now call 'scientific' (dealing with cosmology and

the heavens, medicine or illness, the natural sciences or geography) were only considered truthful during the Middle Ages if the name of the author was indicated. Statements on the order of 'Hippocrates said ...' or 'Pliny tells us that ...' were not merely formulas for an argument based on authority; they marked a proven discourse. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a totally new conception was developed when scientific texts were accepted on their own merits and positioned within an anonymous and coherent conceptual system of established truths and methods of verification. Authentification no longer required reference to the individual who had produced them; the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness and, where it remained as an inventor's name, it was merely to denote a specific theorem or proposition, a strange effect, a property, a body, a group of elements, or pathological syndrome.

At the same time, however, 'literary' discourse was acceptable only if it carried an author's name; every text of poetry or fiction was obliged to state its author and the date, place, and circumstance of its writing. The meaning and value attributed to the text depended on this information. If by accident or design a text was presented anonymously, every effort was made to locate its author. Literary anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved as, in our day, literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author. (Undoubtedly, these remarks are far too categorical. Criticism has been concerned for some time now with aspects of a text not fully dependent on the notion of an individual creator; studies of genre or the analysis of recurring textual motifs and their variations from a norm other than the author. Furthermore, where in mathematics the author has become little more than a handy reference for a particular theorem or group of propositions, the reference to an author in biology and medicine, or to the date of his research has a substantially different bearing. This latter reference, more than simply indicating the source of information, attests to the 'reliability' of the evidence, since it entails an appreciation of the techniques and experimental materials available at a given time and in a particular laboratory.)

The third point concerning this 'author-function' is that it is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author. Undoubtedly, this construction is assigned a 'realistic' dimension as we speak of an individual's 'profundity' or 'creative' power, his intentions or the original inspiration manifested in writing. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice. In addition, all these operations vary according to the period and the form of discourse concerned. A 'philosopher' and a 'poet' are not constructed in the same manner; and the author of an eighteenth-century novel was formed differently from the modern novelist. There are, nevertheless, transhistorical constants in the rules that govern the construction of an author.

In literary criticism, for example, the traditional methods for defining an author—or, rather, for determining the configuration of the author from existing texts—derive in large part from those used in the Christian tradition



to authenticate (or to reject) the particular texts in its possession. Modern criticism, in its desire to 'recover' the author from a work, employs devices strongly reminiscent of Christian exegesis when it wished to prove the value of a text by ascertaining the holiness of its author. In *De Viris Illustribus*, Saint Jerome maintains that homonymy is not proof of the common authorship of several works, since many individuals could have the same name or someone could have perversely appropriated another's name. The name, as an individual mark, is not sufficient as it relates to a textual tradition. How, then, can several texts be attributed to an individual author? What norms, related to the function of the author, will disclose the involvement of several authors? According to Saint Jerome, there are four criteria: the texts that must be eliminated from the list of works attributed to a single author are those inferior to the others (thus, the author is defined as a standard level of quality); those whose ideas conflict with the doctrine expressed in the others (here the author is defined as a certain field of conceptual or theoretical coherence); those written in a different style and containing words and phrases not ordinarily found in the other works (the author is seen as a stylistic uniformity); and those referring to events or historical figures subsequent to the death of the author (the author is thus a definite historical figure in which a series of events converge). Although modern criticism does not appear to have these same suspicions concerning authentication, its strategies for defining the author present striking similarities. The author explains the presence of certain events within a text, as well as their transformations, distortions, and their various modifications (and this through an author's biography or by reference to his particular point of view, in the analysis of his social preferences and his position within a class or by delineating his fundamental objectives). The author also constitutes a principle of unity in writing where any unevenness of production is ascribed to changes caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence. In addition, the author serves to neutralize the contradictions that are found in a series of texts. Governing this function is the belief that there must be—at a particular level of an author's thought, of his conscious or unconscious desire—a point where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating contradiction. Finally, the author is a particular source of expression who, in more or less finished forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in a text, in letters, fragments, drafts, and so forth. Thus, even while Saint Jerome's four principles of authenticity might seem largely inadequate to modern critics, they, nevertheless, define the critical modalities now used to display the function of the author.<sup>23</sup>

However, it would be false to consider the function of the author as a pure and simple reconstruction after the fact of a text given as passive material, since a text always bears a number of signs that refer to the author. Well known to grammarians, these textual signs are personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and the conjugation of verbs.<sup>24</sup> But it is important to note that these elements have a different bearing on texts with an author and on those without one. In the latter, these 'shifters' refer to a real speaker and to an actual deictic situation, with certain exceptions such as the case of indirect speech in the first

person. When discourse is linked to an author, however, the role of 'shifters' is more complex and variable. It is well known that in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing; rather, they stand for a 'second self'<sup>25</sup> whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the 'author-function' arises out of their scission—in the division and distance of the two. One might object that this phenomenon only applies to novels or poetry, to a context of 'quasi-discourse,' but, in fact, all discourse that supports this 'author-function' is characterized by this plurality of egos. In a mathematical treatise, the ego who indicates the circumstances of composition in the preface is not identical, either in terms of his position or his function, to the 'I' who concludes a demonstration within the body of the text. The former implies a unique individual who, at a given time and place, succeeded in completing a project, whereas the latter indicates an instance and plan of demonstration that anyone could perform provided the same set of axioms, preliminary operations, and an identical set of symbols were used. It is also possible to locate a third ego: one who speaks of the goals of his investigation, the obstacles encountered, its results, and the problems yet to be solved and this 'I' would function in a field of existing or future mathematical discourses. We are not dealing with a system of dependencies where a first and essential use of the 'I' is reduplicated, as a kind of fiction, by the other two. On the contrary, the 'author-function' in such discourses operates so as to effect the simultaneous dispersion of the three egos.<sup>26</sup>

Further elaboration would, of course, disclose other characteristics of the 'author-function,' but I have limited myself to the four that seemed the most obvious and important. They can be summarized in the following manner: the 'author-function' is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy.

I am aware that until now I have kept my subject within unjustifiable limits; I should also have spoken of the 'author-function' in painting, music, technical fields, and so forth. Admitting that my analysis is restricted to the domain of discourse, it seems that I have given the term 'author' an excessively narrow meaning. I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. However, it is obvious that even within the realm of discourse a person can be the author of much more than a book—of a theory, for instance, of a tradition or a discipline within which new books and authors can proliferate. For convenience, we could say that such authors occupy a 'transdiscursive' position.

Homer, Aristotle, and the Church Fathers played this role, as did the first mathematicians and the originators of the Hippocratic tradition. This type of author is surely as old as our civilization. But I believe that the nineteenth century in Europe produced a singular type of author who should not be confused with 'great' literary authors, or the authors of canonical religious texts, and the founders of sciences. Somewhat arbitrarily, we might call them 'initiators of discursive practices.'

The distinctive contribution of these authors is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts. In this sense, their role differs entirely from that of a novelist, for example, who is basically never more than the author of his own text. Freud is not simply the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or of *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* and Marx is not simply the author of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital*: they both established the endless possibility of discourse. Obviously, an easy objection can be made. The author of a novel may be responsible for more than his own text; if he acquires some 'importance' in the literary world, his influence can have significant ramifications. To take a very simple example, one could say that Ann Radcliffe did not simply write *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and a few other novels, but also made possible the appearance of Gothic Romances at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To this extent, her function as an author exceeds the limits of her work. However, this objection can be answered by the fact that the possibilities disclosed by the initiators of discursive practices (using the examples of Marx and Freud, whom I believe to be the first and the most important) are significantly different from those suggested by novelists. The novels of Ann Radcliffe put into circulation a certain number of resemblances and analogies patterned on her work—various characteristic signs, figures, relationships, and structures that could be integrated into other books. In short, to say that Ann Radcliffe created the Gothic Romance means that there are certain elements common to her works and to the nineteenth-century Gothic romance: the heroine ruined by her own innocence, the secret fortress that functions as a counter-city, the outlaw-hero who swears revenge on the world that has cursed him, etc. On the other hand, Marx and Freud, as 'initiators of discursive practices,' not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly, they also made possible a certain number of differences. They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which, nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated. In saying that Freud founded psychoanalysis, we do not simply mean that the concept of libido or the techniques of dream analysis reappear in the writings of Karl Abraham or Melanie Klein, but that he made possible a certain number of differences with respect to his books, concepts, and hypotheses, which all arise out of psychoanalytic discourse.

Is this not the case, however, with the founder of any new science or of any author who successfully transforms an existing science? After all, Galileo is indirectly responsible for the texts of those who mechanically applied the laws he formulated, in addition to having paved the way for the production of statements far different from his own. If Cuvier is the founder of biology and Saussure of linguistics, it is not because they were imitated or that an organic concept

or a theory of the sign was uncritically integrated into new texts, but because Cuvier, to a certain extent, made possible a theory of evolution diametrically opposed to his own system and because Saussure made possible a generative grammar radically different from his own structural analysis. Superficially, then, the initiation of discursive practices appears similar to the founding of any scientific endeavor, but I believe there is a fundamental difference.

In a scientific program, the founding act is on an equal footing with its future transformations: it is merely one among the many modifications that it makes possible. This interdependence can take several forms. In the future development of a science, the founding act may appear as little more than a single instance of a more general phenomenon that has been discovered. It might be questioned, in retrospect, for being too intuitive or empirical and submitted to the rigors of new theoretical operations in order to situate it in a formal domain. Finally, it might be thought a hasty generalization whose validity should be restricted. In other words, the founding act of a science can always be rechanneled through the machinery of transformations it has instituted.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, the initiation of a discursive practice is heterogeneous to its ulterior transformations. To extend psychoanalytic practice, as initiated by Freud, is not to presume a formal generality that was not claimed at the outset; it is to explore a number of possible applications. To limit it is to isolate in the original texts a small set of propositions or statements that are recognized as having an inaugurative value and that mark other Freudian concepts or theories as derivative. Finally, there are no 'false' statements in the work of these initiators; those statements considered inessential or 'prehistoric,' in that they are associated with another discourse, are simply neglected in favor of the more pertinent aspects of the work. The initiation of a discursive practice, unlike the founding of a science, overshadows and is necessarily detached from its later developments and transformations. As a consequence, we define the theoretical validity of a statement with respect to the work of the initiator, whereas in the case of Galileo or Newton, it is based on the structural and intrinsic norms established in cosmology or physics. Stated schematically, the work of these initiators is not situated in relation to a science or in the space it defines; rather, it is science or discursive practice that relate to their works as the primary points of reference.

In keeping with this distinction, we can understand why it is inevitable that practitioners of such discourses must 'return to the origin.' Here, as well, it is necessary to distinguish a 'return' from scientific 'rediscoveries' or 'reactivations.' 'Rediscoveries' are the effects of analogy or isomorphism with current forms of knowledge that allow the perception of forgotten or obscured figures. For instance, Chomsky in his book on Cartesian grammar<sup>28</sup> 'rediscovered' a form of knowledge that had been in use from Cordemoy to Humboldt. It could only be understood from the perspective of generative grammar because this later manifestation held the key to its construction: in effect, a retrospective codification of an historical position. 'Reactivation' refers to something quite different: the insertion of discourse into totally new domains of generalization, practice, and transformations. The history of mathematics abounds in examples of this phenomenon as the work of Michel Serres on mathematical anamnesis shows.<sup>29</sup>

The phrase, 'return to,' designates a movement with its proper specificity, which characterizes the initiation of discursive practices. If we return, it is because of a basic and constructive omission, an omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension.<sup>30</sup> In effect, the act of initiation is such, in its essence, that it is inevitably subjected to its own distortions; that which displays this act and derives from it is, at the same time, the root of its divergences and travesties. This nonaccidental omission must be regulated by precise operations that can be situated, analysed, and reduced in a return to the act of initiation. The barrier imposed by omission was not added from the outside; it arises from the discursive practice in question, which gives it its law. Both the cause of the barrier and the means for its removal, this omission—also responsible for the obstacles that prevent returning to the act of initiation—can only be resolved by a return. In addition, it is always a return to a text in itself, specifically, to a primary and unadorned text with particular attention to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences. We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in a false and misleading plenitude. In these rediscoveries of an essential lack, we find the oscillation of two characteristic responses: 'This point was made—you can't help seeing it if you know how to read'; or, inversely, 'No, that point is not made in any of the printed words in the text, but it is expressed through the words, in their relationships and in the distance that separates them.' It follows naturally that this return, which is a part of the discursive mechanism, constantly introduces modifications and that the return to a text is not a historical supplement that would come to fix itself upon the primary discursivity and redouble it in the form of an ornament which, after all, is not essential. Rather, it is an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice. A study of Galileo's works could alter our knowledge of the history, but not the science, of mechanics; whereas, a re-examination of the books of Freud or Marx can transform our understanding of psychoanalysis or Marxism.

A last feature of these returns is that they tend to reinforce the enigmatic link between an author and his works. A text has an inaugurative value precisely because it is the work of a particular author, and our returns are conditioned by this knowledge. The rediscovery of an unknown text by Newton or Cantor will not modify classical cosmology or group theory; at most, it will change our appreciation of their historical genesis. Bringing to light, however, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, to the extent that we recognize it as a book by Freud, can transform not only our historical knowledge, but the field of psychoanalytic theory—if only through a shift of accent or of the center of gravity. These returns, an important component of discursive practices, form a relationship between 'fundamental' and mediate authors, which is not identical to that which links an ordinary text to its immediate author.

These remarks concerning the initiation of discursive practices have been extremely schematic, especially with regard to the opposition I have tried to trace between this initiation and the founding of sciences. The distinction between the two is not readily discernible; moreover, there is no proof that the two procedures are mutually exclusive. My only purpose in setting up this

opposition, however, was to show that the 'author-function,' sufficiently complex at the level of a book or a series of texts that bear a definite signature, has other determining factors when analysed in terms of larger entities—groups of works or entire disciplines.

Unfortunately, there is a decided absence of positive propositions in this essay, as it applies to analytic procedures or directions for future research, but I ought at least to give the reasons why I attach such importance to a continuation of this work. Developing a similar analysis could provide the basis for a typology of discourse. A typology of this sort cannot be adequately understood in relation to the grammatical features, formal structures, and objects of discourse, because there undoubtedly exist specific discursive properties or relationships that are irreducible to the rules of grammar and logic and to the laws that govern objects. These properties require investigation if we hope to distinguish the larger categories of discourse. The different forms of relationships (or non-relationships) that an author can assume are evidently one of these discursive properties.

This form of investigation might also permit the introduction of an historical analysis of discourse. Perhaps the time has come to study not only the expressive value and formal transformations of discourse, but its mode of existence: the modifications and variations, within any culture, of modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation. Partially at the expense of themes and concepts that an author places in his work, the 'author-function' could also reveal the manner in which discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships.

Is it not possible to reexamine, as a legitimate extension of this kind of analysis, the privileges of the subject? Clearly, in undertaking an internal and architectonic analysis of a work (whether it be a literary text, a philosophical system, or a scientific work) and in delimiting psychological and biographical references, suspicions arise concerning the absolute nature and creative role of the subject. But the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.

The author—or what I have called the 'author-function'—is undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject and, considering past historical transformations, it appears that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of this function are far from immutable. We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of



handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity. No longer the tiresome repetitions:

‘Who is the real author?’

‘Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?’

‘What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?’

New questions will be heard:

‘What are the modes of existence of this discourse?’

‘Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?’

‘What placements are determined for possible subjects?’

‘Who can fulfill these diverse functions of the subject?’

Behind all these questions we would hear little more than the murmur of indifference:

‘What matter who’s speaking?’

# The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism

*Postmodern knowledge [le savoir postmoderne] is not simply an instrument of power. It refines our sensitivity to differences and increases our tolerance of incommensurability.*

J.F. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*

Decentered, allegorical, schizophrenic...—however we choose to diagnose its symptoms, postmodernism is usually treated, by its protagonists and antagonists alike, as a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions. That the hegemony of European civilization is drawing to a close is hardly a new perception; since the mid-1950s, at least, we have recognized the necessity of encountering different cultures by means other than the shock of domination and conquest. Among the relevant texts are Arnold Toynbee's discussion, in the eighth volume of his monumental *Study in History*, of the end of the modern age (an age that began, Toynbee contends, in the late 15th century when Europe began to exert its influence over vast land areas and populations not its own) and the beginning of a new, properly postmodern age characterized by the coexistence of different cultures. Claude Lévi-Strauss's critique of Western ethnocentrism could also be cited in this context, as well as Jacques Derrida's critique of this critique in *Of Grammatology*. But perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the end of Western sovereignty has been that of Paul Ricœur, who wrote in 1962 that 'the discovery of the plurality of cultures is never a harmless experience.'

When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others. All meaning and every goal having disappeared, it becomes possible to wander through civilizations as if through vestiges and ruins. The whole of mankind becomes an imaginary museum: where shall we go this weekend—visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in the Tivoli of Copenhagen? We can very easily imagine a time close at hand when any fairly well-to-do person will be able to leave his country indefinitely in order to taste his own national death in an interminable, aimless voyage.<sup>1</sup>

Lately, we have come to regard this condition as postmodern. Indeed, Ricœur's account of the more dispiriting effects of our culture's recent loss of mastery anticipates both the melancholia and the eclecticism that pervade current cultural production—not to mention its much-touted pluralism. Pluralism, however, reduces us to being an other among others; it is not a recognition, but a reduction to difference to absolute indifference, equivalence, interchangeability (what Jean Baudrillard calls 'implosion'). What is at stake, then, is not only the hegemony of Western culture, but also (our sense of) our identity as a culture. These two stakes, however, are so inextricably intertwined (as Foucault has taught us, the positing of an Other is a necessary moment in the consolidation, the incorporation of any cultural body) that it is possible to speculate that what has toppled our claims to sovereignty is actually the realization that our culture is neither as homogeneous nor as monolithic as we once believed it to be. In other words, the causes of modernity's demise—at least as Ricœur describes its effects—lie as much within as without. Ricœur, however, deals only with the difference without. What about the difference within?

In the modern period the authority of the work of art, its claim to represent some authentic vision of the world, did not reside in its uniqueness or singularity, as is often said; rather, that authority was based on the universality modern aesthetics attributed to the *forms* utilized for the representation of vision, over and above differences in content due to the production of works in concrete historical circumstances.<sup>2</sup> (For example, Kant's demand that the judgment of taste be universal—i.e., universally communicable—that it derive from 'grounds deep-seated and shared alike by all men, underlying their agreement in estimating the forms under which objects are given to them.') Not only does the postmodernist work claim no such authority, it also actively seeks to undermine all such claims; hence, its generally deconstructive thrust. As recent analyses of the 'enunciative apparatus' of visual representation—its poles of emission and reception—confirm, the representational systems of the West admit only one vision—that of the constitutive male subject—or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine.<sup>3</sup>

The postmodernist work attempts to upset the reassuring stability of that mastering position. This same project has, of course, been attributed by writers like Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes to the *modernist* avant-garde, which through the introduction of heterogeneity, discontinuity, glossolalia, etc., supposedly put the subject of representation in crisis. But the avant-garde sought to transcend representation in favor of presence and immediacy; it proclaimed the autonomy of the signifier, its liberation from the 'tyranny of the signified'; postmodernists instead expose the tyranny of the *signifier*, the violence of its law.<sup>4</sup> (Lacan spoke of the necessity of submitting to the 'defiles' of the signifier; should we not ask rather who in our culture is defiled by the signifier?) Recently, Derrida has cautioned against a wholesale condemnation of representation, not only because such a condemnation may appear to advocate a rehabilitation of presence and immediacy and thereby serve the interests of the most reactionary political tendencies, but more importantly, perhaps, because that which exceeds, 'transgresses the figure of all possible representation,' may ultimately be none other than... the law. Which obliges us, Derrida concludes, 'to thinking altogether *differently*.'<sup>5</sup>

It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged—not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for—a representation of—the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc.). This prohibition bears primarily on woman as the subject, and rarely as the object of representation, for there is certainly no shortage of images *of* women. Yet in being represented by, women have been rendered an absence within the dominant culture as Michèle Montrelay proposes when she asks ‘whether psychoanalysis was not articulated precisely in order to repress femininity (in the sense of producing its symbolic representation).’<sup>6</sup> In order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position; perhaps this is why femininity is frequently associated with masquerade, with false representation, with simulation and seduction. Montrelay, in fact, identifies women as the ‘ruin of representation’: not only have they nothing to lose; their exteriority to Western representation exposes its limits.

Here, we arrive at an apparent crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation; this essay is a provisional attempt to explore the implications of that intersection. My intention is not to posit identity between these two critiques; nor is it to place them in a relation of antagonism or opposition. Rather, if I have chosen to negotiate the treacherous course between postmodernism and feminism, it is in order to introduce the issue of sexual difference into the modernism/postmodernism debate—a debate which has until now been scandalously in-different.<sup>7</sup>

### ‘A Remarkable Oversight’<sup>8</sup>

Several years ago I began the second of two essays devoted to an allegorical impulse in contemporary art—an impulse that I identified as postmodernist—with a discussion of Laurie Anderson’s multi-media performance *Americans on the Move*.<sup>9</sup> Addressed to transportation as a metaphor for communication—the transfer of meaning from one place to another—*Americans on the Move* proceeded primarily as verbal commentary on visual images projected on a screen behind the performers. Near the beginning Anderson introduced the schematic image of a nude man and woman, the former’s right arm raised in greeting, that had been emblazoned on the Pioneer spacecraft. Here is what she had to say about this picture; significantly, it was spoken by a distinctly male voice (Anderson’s own processed through a harmonizer, which dropped it an octave—a kind of electronic vocal transvestism):

In our country, we send pictures of our sign language into outer space. They are speaking our sign language in these pictures. Do you think they will think his hand is permanently attached that way? Or do you think they will read our signs? In our country, good-bye looks just like hello.

Here is my commentary on this passage:

Two alternatives: either the extraterrestrial recipient of this message will assume that it is simply a picture, that is, an analogical likeness of the human figure, in which case he might logically conclude that male inhabitants of Earth walk around with their right arms permanently raised. Or he will somehow divine that this gesture is addressed to him and attempt to read it, in which case he will be stymied, since a single gesture signifies both greeting and farewell, and any reading of it must oscillate between these two extremes. The same gesture could also mean 'Halt!' or represent the taking of an oath, but if Anderson's text does not consider these two alternatives that is because it is not concerned with ambiguity, with multiple meanings engendered by a single sign; rather, two *clearly defined but mutually incompatible* readings are engaged in blind confrontation in such a way that it is impossible to choose between them.

This analysis strikes me as a case of gross critical negligence. For in my eagerness to rewrite Anderson's text in terms of the debate over determinate versus indeterminate meaning, I had overlooked something—something that is so obvious, so 'natural' that it may at the time have seemed unworthy of comment. It does not seem that way to me today. For this is, of course, an image of sexual difference or, rather, of sexual differentiation according to the distribution of the phallus—as it is marked and then re-marked by the man's right arm, which appears less to have been raised than erected in greeting. I was, however, close to the 'truth' of the image when I suggested that men on Earth might walk around with something permanently raised—close, perhaps, but no cigar. (Would my reading have been different—or less in-different—had I known then that, earlier in her career, Anderson had executed a work which consisted of photographs of men who had accosted her in the street?)<sup>10</sup> Like all representations of sexual difference that our culture produces, this is an image not simply of anatomical difference, but of the values assigned to it. Here, the phallus is a signifier (that is, it represents the subject for another signifier); it is, in fact, the privileged signifier, the signifier of privilege, of the power and prestige that accrue to the male in our society. As such, it designates the effects of signification in general. For in this (Lacanian) image, chosen to represent the inhabitants of Earth for the extraterrestrial Other, it is the man who speaks, who represents mankind. The woman is only represented; she is (as always) already spoken for.

If I return to this passage here, it is not simply to correct my own remarkable oversight, but more importantly to indicate a blind spot in our discussions of postmodernism in general: our failure to address the issue of sexual difference—not only in the objects we discuss, but in our own enunciation as well.<sup>11</sup> However restricted its field of inquiry may be, every discourse on postmodernism—at least insofar as it seeks to account for certain recent mutations within that field—aspires to the status of a general theory of contemporary culture. Among the most significant developments of the past decade—it may well turn out to have been *the* most significant—has been the emergence, in nearly every area of cultural activity, of a specifically feminist practice. A great deal of effort has been devoted to the recovery and revaluation of previously marginalized or underestimated work; everywhere this project has been accompanied by energetic new production. As one engaged in these activities—Martha Rosler—observes, they have contributed significantly to debunking the privileged status modernism claimed for the work of art: "The interpretation of the meaning and social origin and rootedness of those [earlier] forms helped undermine the modernist tenet of the separateness of the aesthetic from the rest of human

life, and an analysis of the oppressiveness of the seemingly unmotivated forms of high culture was companion to this work.<sup>12</sup>

Still, if one of the most salient aspects of our postmodern culture is the presence of an insistent feminist voice (and I use the terms *presence* and *voice* advisedly), theories of postmodernism have tended either to neglect or to repress that voice. The absence of discussions of sexual difference in writings about postmodernism, as well as the fact that few women have engaged in the modernism/postmodernism debate, suggest that postmodernism may be another masculine invention engineered to exclude women. I would like to propose, however, that women's insistence on difference and incommensurability may not only be compatible with, but also an instance of postmodern thought. Postmodern thought is no longer binary thought (as Lyotard observes when he writes, "Thinking by means of oppositions does not correspond to the liveliest modes of postmodern knowledge [*le savoir postmoderne*]").<sup>13</sup> The critique of binarism is sometimes dismissed as intellectual fashion; it is, however, an intellectual imperative, since the hierarchical opposition of marked and unmarked terms (the decisive/divisive presence/absence of the phallus) is the dominant form both of representing difference and justifying its subordination in our society. What we must learn, then, is how to conceive difference without opposition.

Although sympathetic male critics respect feminism (an old theme: respect for women)<sup>14</sup> and wish it well, they have in general declined the dialogue in which their female colleagues are trying to engage them. Sometimes feminists are accused of going too far, at others, not far enough.<sup>15</sup> The feminist voice is usually regarded as one among many, its insistence on difference as testimony to the pluralism of the times. Thus, feminism is rapidly assimilated to a whole string of liberation or self-determination movements. Here is one recent list, by a prominent male critic: 'ethnic groups, neighborhood movements, feminism, various "countercultural" or alternative life-style groups, rank-and-file labor dissidence, student movements, single-issue movements.' Not only does this forced coalition treat feminism itself as monolithic, thereby suppressing its multiple internal differences (essentialist, culturalist, linguistic, Freudian, anti-Freudian . . .); it also posits a vast, undifferentiated category, 'Difference,' to which all marginalized or oppressed groups can be assimilated, and for which women can then stand as an emblem, a *pars totalis* (another old theme: woman is incomplete, not whole). But the specificity of the feminist critique of patriarchy is thereby denied, along with that of all other forms of opposition to sexual, racial and class discrimination. (Rosler warns against using woman as 'a token for all markers of difference,' observing that 'appreciation of the work of women whose subject is oppression exhausts consideration of all oppressions.')

Moreover, men appear unwilling to address the issues placed on the critical agenda by women unless those issues have first been neut(e)ralized—although this, too, is a problem of assimilation: to the already known, the already written. In *The Political Unconscious*, to take but one example, Fredric Jameson calls for the 'reaudition of the oppositional voices of black and ethnic cultures, women's or gay literature, "naive" or marginalized folk art and the like' (thus, women's cultural production is anachronistically identified as folk art), but he immediately modifies this petition: "The affirmation of such non-hegemonic cultural voices remains ineffective," he argues, if they are not first *rewritten* in terms of



their proper place in 'the dialogical system of the social classes.'<sup>16</sup> Certainly, the class determinants of sexuality—and of sexual oppression—are too often overlooked. But sexual inequality cannot be reduced to an instance of economic exploitation—the exchange of women among men—and explained in terms of class struggle alone; to invert Rosler's statement, exclusive attention to economic oppression can exhaust consideration of other forms of oppression.

To claim that the division of the sexes is irreducible to the division of labor is to risk polarizing feminism and Marxism; this danger is real, given the latter's fundamentally patriarchal bias. Marxism privileges the characteristically masculine activity of production as the *definitively human* activity (Marx: men 'begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence');<sup>17</sup> women, historically consigned to the spheres of nonproductive or reproductive labor, are thereby situated outside the society of male producers, in a state of nature. (As Lyotard has written, 'The frontier passing between the sexes does not separate two parts of the same social entity.'<sup>18</sup> What is at issue, however, is not simply the oppressiveness of Marxist discourse, but its totalizing ambitions, its claim to account for every form of social experience. But this claim is characteristic of all theoretical discourse, which is one reason women frequently condemn it as phallogocentric.<sup>19</sup> It is not always theory *per se* that women repudiate, nor simply, as Lyotard has suggested, the priority men have granted to it, its rigid opposition to practical experience. Rather, what they challenge is the distance it maintains between itself and its objects—a distance which objectifies and masters.

Because of the tremendous effort of reconceptualization necessary to prevent a phallogocentric relapse in their own discourse, many feminist artists have, in fact, forged a new (or renewed) alliance with theory—most profitably, perhaps, with the writing of women influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis (Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Monreay...). Many of these artists have themselves made major theoretical contributions: film-maker Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' for example, has generated a great deal of critical discussion on the masculinity of the cinematic gaze.<sup>20</sup> Whether influenced by psychoanalysis or not, feminist artists often regard critical or theoretical writing as an important arena of strategic intervention: Martha Rosler's critical texts on the documentary tradition in photography—among the best in the field—are a crucial part of her activity *as an artist*. Many modernist artists, of course, produced texts about their own production, but writing was almost always considered supplementary to their primary work as painters, sculptors, photographers, etc.,<sup>21</sup> whereas the kind of simultaneous activity on multiple fronts that characterizes many feminist practices is a postmodern phenomenon. And one of the things it challenges is modernism's rigid opposition of artistic practice and theory.

At the same time, postmodern feminist practice may question theory—and not only *aesthetic* theory. Consider Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), a 6-part, 165-piece art work (plus footnotes) that utilizes multiple representational modes (literary, scientific, psychoanalytic, linguistic, archeological and so forth) to chronicle the first six years of her son's life. Part archive, part exhibition, part case history, the *Post-Partum Document* is also a contribution to as well as a critique of Lacanian theory. Beginning as it does with a series of diagrams taken from *Ecrits* (diagrams which Kelly presents as *pictures*), the

work might be (mis)read as a straightforward application or illustration of psychoanalysis. It is, rather, a mother's interrogation of Lacan, an interrogation that ultimately reveals a remarkable oversight within the Lacanian narrative of the child's relation to the mother—the construction of the mother's fantasies vis-à-vis the child. Thus, the *Post-Partum Document* has proven to be a controversial work, for it appears to offer evidence of *female* fetishism (the various substitutes the mother invests in order to disavow separation from the child); Kelly thereby exposes a lack within the theory of fetishism, a perversion heretofore reserved for the male. Kelly's work is not anti-theory; rather, as her use of multiple representational systems testifies, it demonstrates that no one narrative can possibly account for all aspects of human experience. Or as the artist herself has said, 'There's no single theoretical discourse which is going to offer an explanation for all forms of social relations or for every mode of political practice.'<sup>22</sup>

### A la recherche du récit perdu

'No single theoretical discourse...'—this feminist position is also a postmodern condition. In fact, Lyotard diagnoses *the* postmodern condition as one in which the *grands récits* of modernity—the dialectic of Spirit, the emancipation of the worker, the accumulation of wealth, the classless society—have all lost credibility. Lyotard defines a discourse as modern when it appeals to one or another of these *grands récits* for its legitimacy; the advent of postmodernity, then, signals a crisis in narrative's legitimizing function, its ability to compel consensus. Narrative, he argues, is out of its element(s)—'the great dangers, the great journeys, the great goal.' Instead, 'it is dispersed into clouds of linguistic particles—narrative ones, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, etc.—each with its own pragmatic valence. Today, each of us lives in the vicinity of many of these. We do not necessarily form stable linguistic communities, and the properties of those we do form are not necessarily communicable.'<sup>23</sup>

Lyotard does not, however, mourn modernity's passing, even though his own activity as a philosopher is at stake. 'For most people,' he writes, 'nostalgia for the lost narrative [*le récit perdu*] is a thing of the past.'<sup>24</sup> 'Most people' does not include Fredric Jameson, although he diagnoses the postmodern condition in similar terms (as a loss of narrative's social function) and distinguishes between modernist and postmodernist works according to their different relations to the "truth-content" of art, its claim to possess some truth or epistemological value.' His description of a crisis in modernist literature stands metonymically for the crisis in modernity itself:

At its most vital, the experience of modernism was not one of a single historical movement or process, but of a 'shock of discovery,' a commitment and an adherence to its individual forms through a series of 'religious conversions.' One did not simply read D. H. Lawrence or Rilke, see Jean Renoir or Hitchcock, or listen to Stravinsky as distinct manifestations of what we now term modernism. Rather one read all the works of a particular writer, learned a style and a phenomenological world, to which one converted.... This meant, however, that the experience of one form of modernism was incompatible with another, so that one entered one world only at the price of abandoning another.... The crisis of modernism came, then, when it suddenly became clear that 'D. H. Lawrence' was not an absolute after all, not the final achieved figuration of the truth of the world, but only one art-language among others, only one shelf of works in a whole dizzying library.<sup>25</sup>

Although a reader of Foucault might locate this realization at the origin of modernism (Flaubert, Manet) rather than at its conclusion,<sup>26</sup> Jameson's account of the crisis of modernity strikes me as both persuasive and problematic—problematic because persuasive. Like Lyotard, he plunges us into a radical Nietzschean perspectivism: each oeuvre represents not simply a different view of the same world, but corresponds to an entirely different world. Unlike Lyotard, however, he does so only in order to extricate us from it. For Jameson, the loss of narrative is equivalent to the loss of our ability to locate ourselves historically; hence, his diagnosis of postmodernism as 'schizophrenic,' meaning that it is characterized by a collapsed sense of temporality.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in *The Political Unconscious* he urges the resurrection not simply of narrative—as a 'socially symbolic act'—but specifically of what he identifies as the Marxist 'master narrative'—the story of mankind's 'collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity.'<sup>28</sup>

*Master narrative*—how else to translate Lyotard's *grand récit*? And in this translation we glimpse the terms of another analysis of modernity's demise, one that speaks not of the incompatibility of the various modern narratives, but instead of their fundamental solidarity. For what made the *grands récits* of modernity master narratives if not the fact that they were all narratives of mastery, of man seeking his telos in the conquest of nature? What function did these narratives play other than to legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image? And what form did this mission take if not that of man's placing of his stamp on everything that exists—that is, the transformation of the world into a representation, with man as its subject? In this respect, however, the phrase *master narrative* seems tautologous, since all narrative, by virtue of 'its power to master the dispiriting effects of the corrosive force of the temporal process,'<sup>29</sup> may be narrative of mastery.<sup>30</sup>

What is at stake, then, is not only the status of narrative, but of representation itself. For the modern age was not only the age of the master narrative, it was also the age of representation—at least this is what Martin Heidegger proposed in a 1938 lecture delivered in Freiburg im Breisgau, but not published until 1952 as 'The Age of the World Picture' [*Die Zeit die Weltbildes*].<sup>31</sup> According to Heidegger, the transition to modernity was not accomplished by the replacement of a medieval by a modern world picture, 'but rather the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age.' For modern man, everything that exists does so only in and through representation. To claim this is also to claim that the world exists only in and through a *subject* who believes that he is producing the world in producing its representation:

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word 'picture' [*Bild*] now means the structured image [*Gebild*] that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is.

Thus, with the 'interweaving of these two events'—the transformation of the world into a picture and man into a subject—'there begins that way of being human which mans the realm of human capability given over to measuring and

executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery of that which is as a whole.' For what is representation if not a 'laying hold and grasping' (appropriation), a 'making-stand-over-against, an objectifying that goes forward and masters'?<sup>32</sup>

Thus, when in a recent interview Jameson calls for 'the *reconquest* of certain forms of representation' (which he equates with narrative: "Narrative," he argues, 'is, I think, generally what people have in mind when they rehearse the usual post-structuralist "critique of representation"'),<sup>33</sup> he is in fact calling for the rehabilitation of the entire social project of modernity itself. Since the Marxist master narrative is only one version among many of the modern narrative of mastery (for what is the 'collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity' if not mankind's progressive exploitation of the Earth?), Jameson's desire to resurrect (this) narrative is a modern desire, a desire *for* modernity. It is one symptom of our postmodern condition, which is experienced everywhere today as a tremendous loss of mastery and thereby gives rise to therapeutic programs, from both the Left and the Right, for recuperating that loss. Although Lyotard warns—correctly, I believe—against explaining transformations in modern/postmodern culture primarily as effects of social transformations (the hypothetical advent of a postindustrial society, for example),<sup>34</sup> it is clear that what has been lost is not primarily a cultural mastery, but an economic, technical and political one. For what if not the emergence of Third-World nations, the 'revolt of nature' and the women's movement—that is, the voices of the conquered—has challenged the West's desire for ever-greater domination and control?

Symptoms of our recent loss of mastery are everywhere apparent in cultural activity today—nowhere more so than in the visual arts. The modernist project of joining forces with science and technology for the transformation of the environment after rational principles of function and utility (Productivism, the Bauhaus) has long since been abandoned; what we witness in its place is a desperate, often hysterical attempt to recover some sense of mastery via the resurrection of heroic large-scale easel painting and monumental cast-bronze sculpture—mediums themselves identified with the cultural hegemony of Western Europe. Yet contemporary artists are able at best to *simulate* mastery, to manipulate its signs; since in the modern period mastery was invariably associated with human labor, aesthetic production has degenerated today into a massive deployment of the signs of artistic labor—violent, 'impassioned' brushwork, for example. Such simulacra of mastery testify, however, only to its loss; in fact, contemporary artists seem engaged in a collective act of disavowal—and disavowal always pertains to a loss ... of virility, masculinity, potency.<sup>35</sup>

This contingent of artists is accompanied by another which refuses the simulation of mastery in favor of melancholic contemplation of its loss. One such artist speaks of 'the impossibility of passion in a culture that has institutionalized self-expression;' another, of 'the aesthetic as something which is really about longing and loss rather than completion.' A painter unearths the discarded genre of landscape painting only to borrow for his own canvases, through an implicit equation between their ravaged surfaces and the barren fields he depicts, something of the exhaustion of the earth itself (which is thereby glamorized); another dramatizes his anxieties through the most conventional figure men have conceived for the threat of castration—Woman ... aloof, remote, unapproachable. Whether they disavow or advertise their own

powerlessness, pose as heroes or as victims, these artists have, needless to say, been warmly received by a society unwilling to admit that it has been driven from its position of centrality; theirs is an 'official' art which, like the culture that produced it, has yet to come to terms with its own impoverishment.

Postmodernist artists speak of impoverishment—but in a very different way. Sometimes the postmodernist work testifies to a deliberate *refusal* of mastery, for example, Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–75), in which photographs of Bowery storefronts alternate with clusters of typewritten words signifying inebriety [46,47]. Although her photographs are intentionally flat-footed, Rosler's refusal of mastery in this work is more than technical. On the one hand, she denies the caption/text its conventional function of supplying the image with something it lacks; instead, her juxtaposition of two representational systems, visual and verbal, is calculated (as the title suggests) to 'undermine' rather than 'underline' the truth value of each.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, Rosler has refused to photograph the inhabitants of Skid Row, to speak on their behalf, to illuminate them from a safe distance (photography as social work in the tradition of Jacob Riis). For 'concerned' or what Rosler calls 'victim' photography overlooks the constitutive role of its own activity, which is held to be merely representative (the 'myth' of photographic transparency and objectivity). Despite his or her benevolence in representing those who have been denied access to the means of representation, the photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced these people in the first place. Thus, they are twice victimized: first by society, and then by the photographer who presumes the right to speak on their behalf. In fact, in such photography it is the photographer rather than the 'subject' who poses—as the subject's consciousness, indeed, as conscience itself. Although Rosler may not, in this work, have initiated a counter-discourse of drunkenness—which would consist of the drunks' own theories about their conditions of existence—she has nevertheless pointed negatively to the crucial issue of a politically motivated art practice today: 'the indignity of speaking for others.'<sup>37</sup>

Rosler's position poses a challenge to criticism as well, specifically, to the critic's substitution of his own discourse for the work of art. At this point in my text, then, my own voice must yield to the artist's; in the essay 'in, around and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)' which accompanies *The Bowery ...*, Rosler writes:

If impoverishment is a subject here, it is more certainly the impoverishment of representational strategies tottering about alone than that of a mode of surviving. The photographs are powerless to *deal with* the reality that is yet totally comprehended-in-advance by ideology, and they are as diversionary as the word formations—which at least are closer to being located within the culture of drunkenness rather than being framed on it from without.<sup>38</sup>

### The Visible and the Invisible

A work like *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* not only exposes the 'myths' of photographic objectivity and transparency; it also upsets the (modern) belief in vision as a privileged means of access to certainty and truth ('Seeing is believing'). Modern aesthetics claimed that vision was superior to the other senses because of its detachment from its objects: 'Vision,' Hegel tells us



plastered      stuccoed  
rosined      shellacked  
                vulcanized  
inebriated  
polluted

in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, 'finds itself in a purely theoretical relationship with objects, through the intermediary of light, that immaterial matter which truly leaves objects their freedom, lighting and illuminating them without consuming them.'<sup>39</sup> Postmodernist artists do not deny this detachment, but neither do they celebrate it. Rather, they investigate the particular interests it serves. For vision is hardly disinterested; nor is it indifferent, as Luce Irigaray has observed: 'Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations.... The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.'<sup>40</sup> That is, it is transformed into an image.



That the priority our culture grants to vision is a sensory impoverishment is hardly a new perception; the feminist critique, however, links the privileging of vision with sexual privilege. Freud identified the transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society with the simultaneous devaluation of an olfactory sexuality and promotion of a more mediated, sublimated visual sexuality.<sup>41</sup> What is more, in the Freudian scenario it is by looking that the child discovers sexual difference, the presence or absence of the phallus according to which the child's sexual identity will be assumed. As Jane Gallop reminds us in her recent book *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, 'Freud articulated the "discovery of castration" around a sight: sight of a phallic presence in the boy, sight of a phallic absence in the girl, ultimately sight of a phallic absence in the mother. *Sexual difference takes its decisive significance from a sighting*.'<sup>42</sup> Is it not because the phallus is the most visible sign of sexual difference that it has become the 'privileged signifier'? However, it is not only the discovery of difference, but also its denial that hinges upon vision (although the reduction of difference to a common measure—woman judged according to the man's standard and found lacking—is already a denial). As Freud proposed in his 1926 paper on 'Fetishism,' the male child often takes the last visual impression prior to the 'traumatic' sighting as a substitute for the mother's 'missing' penis:

Thus the foot or the shoe owes its attraction as a fetish, or part of it, to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy used to peer up at the woman's legs towards her genitals. Velvet and fur reproduce—as has long been suspected—the sight of the pubic hair which ought to have revealed the longed-for penis; the underlines so often adopted as a fetish reproduces the scene of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.<sup>43</sup>

What can be said about the visual arts in a patriarchal order that privileges vision over the other senses? Can we not expect them to be a domain of masculine privilege—as their histories indeed prove them to be—a means, perhaps, of mastering through representation the 'threat' posed by the female? In recent years there has emerged a visual arts practice informed by feminist theory and addressed, more or less explicitly, to the issue of representation and sexuality—both masculine and feminine. Male artists have tended to investigate the social construction of masculinity (Mike Glier, Eric Bogosian, the early work of Richard Prince); women have begun the long-overdue process of deconstructing femininity. Few have produced new, 'positive' images of a revised femininity; to do so would simply supply and thereby prolong the life of the existing representational apparatus. Some refuse to represent women at all, believing that no representation of the female body in our culture can be free from phallic prejudice. Most of these artists, however, work with the existing repertory of cultural imagery—not because they either lack originality or criticize it—but because their subject, feminine sexuality, is always constituted in and as representation, a representation of difference. It must be emphasized that these artists are not primarily interested in what representations say about women; rather, they investigate what representation *does* to women (for example, the way it invariably positions them as objects of the male gaze). For, as Lacan wrote, 'Images and symbols *for* the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols *of* the woman. . . . It is representation, the representation of feminine sexuality whether repressed or not, which conditions how it comes into play.'<sup>44</sup>

Critical discussions of this work have, however, assiduously avoided—skirted—the issue of gender. Because of its generally deconstructive ambition, this practice is sometimes assimilated to the modernist tradition of demystification. (Thus, the critique of representation in this work is collapsed into ideological critique.) In an essay devoted (again) to allegorical procedures in contemporary art, Benjamin Buchloh discusses the work of six women artists—Dara Birnbaum, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Martha Rosler—claiming them for the model of ‘secondary mythification’ elaborated in Roland Barthes’s 1957 *Mythologies*. Buchloh does not acknowledge the fact that Barthes later repudiated this methodology—a repudiation that must be seen as part of his increasing refusal of mastery from *The Pleasure of the Text* on.<sup>45</sup> Nor does Buchloh grant any particular significance to the fact that all these artists are women; instead, he provides them with a distinctly male genealogy in the dada tradition of collage and montage. Thus, all six artists are said to manipulate the languages of popular culture—television, advertising, photography—in such a way that ‘their ideological functions and effects become *transparent*,’ or again, in their work, ‘the minute and seemingly inextricable interaction of behavior and ideology’ supposedly becomes an ‘*observable* pattern.’<sup>46</sup>

But what does it mean to claim that these artists render the invisible visible, especially in a culture in which visibility is always on the side of the male, invisibility on the side of the female? And what is the critic really saying when he states that these artists reveal, expose, ‘unveil’ (this last word is used throughout Buchloh’s text) hidden ideological agendas in mass-cultural imagery? Consider, for the moment, Buchloh’s discussion of the work of Dara Birnbaum, a video artist who re-edits footage taped directly from broadcast television. Of Birnbaum’s *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79), based on the popular television series of the same name, Buchloh writes that it ‘unveils the puberty fantasy of Wonder Woman.’ Yet, like all of Birnbaum’s work, this tape is dealing not simply with mass-cultural imagery, but with mass-cultural *images of women*. Are not the activities of unveiling, stripping, laying bare in relation to a female body unmistakably male prerogatives?<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the women Birnbaum re-presents are usually athletes and performers absorbed in the display of their own physical perfection. They are without defect, without lack, and therefore with neither history nor desire. (Wonder Woman is the perfect embodiment of the phallic mother.) What we recognize in her work is the Freudian trope of the narcissistic woman, or the Lacanian ‘theme’ of femininity as contained spectacle, which exists only as a representation of masculine desire.<sup>48</sup>

The deconstructive impulse that animates this work has also suggested affinities with poststructuralist textual strategies, and much of the critical writing about these artists—including my own—has tended simply to translate their work into French. Certainly, Foucault’s discussion of the West’s strategies of marginalization and exclusion, Derrida’s charges of ‘phallogentrism,’ Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘body without organs’ would all seem to be congenial to a feminist perspective. (As Irigaray has observed, is not the ‘body without organs’ the historical condition of woman?)<sup>49</sup> Still, the affinities between poststructuralist theories and postmodernist practice can blind a critic to the fact that, when women are concerned, similar techniques have very different meanings. Thus, when Sherrie Levine appropriates—literally takes—Walker Evans’s



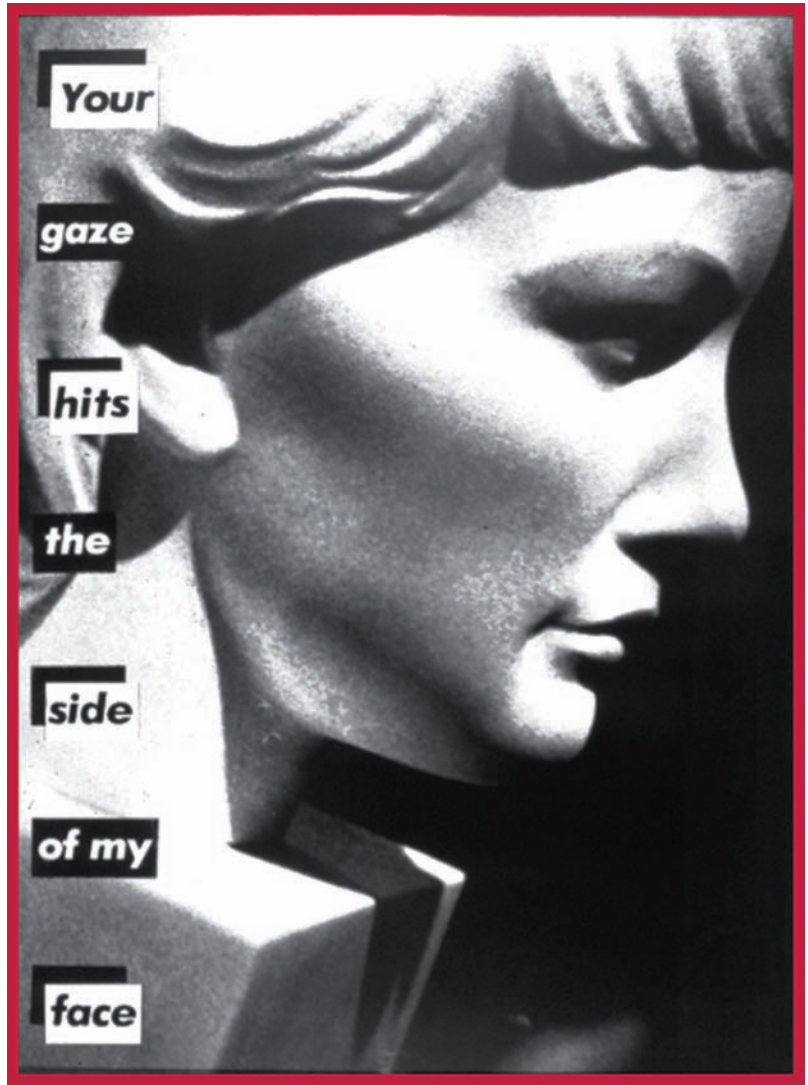
photographs of the rural poor or, perhaps more pertinently, Edward Weston's photographs of his *son* Neil posed as a classical Greek torso [48], is she simply dramatizing the diminished possibilities for creativity in an image-saturated culture, as is often repeated? Or is her refusal of authorship not in fact a refusal of the role of creator as 'father' of his work, of the paternal rights assigned to the author by law?<sup>50</sup> (This reading of Levine's strategies is supported by the fact that the images she appropriates are invariably images of the Other: women, nature, children, the poor, the insane. ...)<sup>51</sup> Levine's disrespect for paternal authority suggests that her activity is less one of appropriation—a laying hold and grasping—and more one of expropriation: she expropriates the appropriators.

Sometimes Levine collaborates with Louise Lawler under the collective title 'A Picture is No Substitute for Anything'—an unequivocal critique of rep-



resentation as traditionally defined. (E.H. Gombrich: 'All art is image-making, and all image-making is the creation of substitutes.') Does not their collaboration move us to ask what the picture is supposedly a substitute for, what it replaces, what absence it conceals? And when Lawler shows 'A Movie without the Picture,' as she did in 1979 in Los Angeles and again in 1983 in New York, is she simply soliciting the spectator as a collaborator in the production of the image? Or is she not also denying the viewer the kind of visual pleasure which cinema customarily provides—a pleasure that has been linked with the masculine perversions voyeurism and scopophilia?<sup>52</sup> It seems fitting, then, that in Los Angeles she screened (or didn't screen) *The Misfits*—Marilyn Monroe's last completed film. So that what Lawler withdrew was not simply a picture, but the archetypal image of feminine desirability.

When Cindy Sherman, in her untitled black-and-white studies for film stills (made in the late '70s and early '80s), first costumed herself to resemble heroines of grade-B Hollywood films of the late '50s and early '60s and then photographed herself in situations suggesting some immanent danger lurking just beyond the frame [49], was she simply attacking the rhetoric of 'auteurism by equating the known artifice of the actress in front of the camera with the supposed authenticity of the director behind it?'<sup>53</sup> Or was her play-acting not also an acting out of the psychoanalytic notion of femininity as masquerade, that is, as a representation of male desire? As Hélène Cixous has written, 'One is always in representation, and when a woman is asked to take place in this representation, she is, of course, asked to represent man's desire.'<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Sherman's photographs themselves function as mirror-masks that reflect back at the viewer his own desire (and the spectator posited by this work is invariably male)—specifically, the masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity. But this is precisely what Sherman's work denies: for while her photographs are always self-portraits, in them the artist never appears to be the same, indeed, not even the same model; while we can presume to recognize the same person, we are forced at the same time to recognize a trembling around



the edges of that identity.<sup>55</sup> In a subsequent series of works, Sherman abandoned the film-still format for that of the magazine centerfold, opening herself to charges that she was an accomplice in her own objectification, reinforcing the image of the woman bound by the frame.<sup>56</sup> This may be true; but while Sherman may pose as a pin-up, she still cannot be pinned down.

Finally, when Barbara Kruger collages the words 'Your gaze hits the side of my face' over an image culled from a '50s photo-annual of a female bust [50], is she simply 'making an equation... between aesthetic reflection and the alienation of the gaze: both reify'?<sup>57</sup> Or is she not speaking instead of the *masculinity* of the look, the ways in which it objectifies and masters? Or when the words 'You invest in the divinity of the masterpiece' appear over a blown-up detail of the creation scene from the Sistine ceiling, is she simply parodying our reverence for works of art, or is this not a commentary on artistic production as

a contract between fathers and sons? The address of Kruger's work is always gender-specific; her point, however, is not that masculinity and femininity are fixed positions assigned in advance by the representational apparatus. Rather, Kruger uses a term with no fixed content, the linguistic shifter ('I/you'), in order to demonstrate that masculine and feminine themselves are not stable identities, but subject to ex-change.

There is irony in the fact that all these practices, as well as the theoretical work that sustains them, have emerged in a historical situation supposedly characterized by its complete indifference. In the visual arts we have witnessed the gradual dissolution of once fundamental distinctions—original/copy, authentic/inauthentic, function/ornament. Each term now seems to contain its opposite, and this indeterminacy brings with it an impossibility of choice or, rather, the absolute equivalence and hence interchangeability of choices. Or so it is said.<sup>58</sup> The existence of feminism, with its insistence on difference, forces us to reconsider. For in our country good-bye may look just like hello, but only from a masculine position. Women have learned—perhaps they have always known—how to recognize the difference.



# Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism

## Exhibition and System

Critical writing on art which places emphasis on the analysis of signifying practice rather than on the exhortation or description of artistic auteurs, generally acknowledges that art forms are inscribed within the social context that gives rise to them. Nevertheless, there is a problematic tendency to constitute the pictorial text as the paradigmatic insistence of that inscription in a way which forecloses the question of its institutional placing. The pictorial paradigm constructs the artistic text as both essentially singular and as centrally concerned with the practice of painting; but, as Hubert Damisch has pointed out, when painting is considered at the semiotic level, that is with reference to its internal system, it functions as an epistemological obstacle—an obstacle never surmounted, only prodded by an endless redefinition of the sign or averted altogether by taking the semantic route.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps to some extent this accounts for what appears to be a certain impasse in the area of art criticism when compared, for instance, with developments in film theory.

Critical texts have focused either on analysis of the individual *tableau* (sometimes an individual artist's *oeuvre*) or on the construction of general cultural categories and typologies of art. This work has been both necessary and important. The arguments outlined here are not so much against such contributions as for a reconsideration of what might constitute appropriate terms for the analysis of current practices in art. This reconsideration is prompted firstly by developments within particular practices. Feminist art, for instance, cannot be posed in terms of cultural categories, typologies, or even certain insular forms of textual analysis, precisely because it entails the assessment of political interventions, campaigns, and commitments as well as artistic strategies. In this instance, interpretation is not simply a matter of what can be discovered at the interior of a composition. Secondly, a reconsideration of critical methods is required if one takes account of the specific conditions which determine the organization of artistic texts and their readings at the present time; that is, *the temporary exhibition and its associated field of publications—the catalogue, the art book, and the magazine*. From this point of view, 'art' is never given in the form of individual works but is constructed as a category in relation to a complex configuration of texts.

In terms of analysis, the exhibition system marks a crucial intersection of discourses, practices, and sites which define the institutions of art within a definite social formation. Moreover, it is exactly here, within this inter-textual, inter-discursive network, that the work of art is produced as text.

Rather schematically, it can be said that at one level an exhibition is a discursive practice involving the selection, organization, and evaluation of artistic texts according to a particular genre (the one-person show, the group show, the theme exhibition, the historical survey, and the Annual, Biennial, etc.), displayed in certain types of institutions (museums, galleries), within specific legal structures (contractual agreements, fees, insurance), and preserved by definite material techniques in a number of ways (catalogues, art books, magazines). At another level, an exhibition is a system of meanings—a discourse—which, taken as a complex unit or enunciative field, can be said to constitute a group of statements; the individual works comprising fragments of imaged discourse or utterances which are anchored by the exhibition's titles, subheadings, and commentary, but at the same time unsettled, exceeded, or dispersed in the process of their articulation as events.

An exhibition takes place; its spatio-temporal disposition, conventions of display, codes of architecture, construct a certain passage; not the continuous progression of images unfolding on the cinema screen, but the flickering, fragmented frames of the editing machine; a passage very much at the disposal of the spectator to stop frame, rewind, push forward; it displays discernible openness, a radical potential for self-reflexivity. There is nevertheless a logic of that passage, of partition and naming, and in a sense there is a narrative organization of what is seen in the exhibition catalogue; its written (editorial/critical) commentary fixes the floating meaning, erodes the apparent polysemy of the exhibition's imaged discourse. Within a specific order of the book, the catalogue confers an authorship, an authority, on the exhibition events. In it, positions and statuses are assigned for 'agents' defined as artists, organizers, critics, and 'the public.' The authors/organizers impose a declarative order on the exhibition's evasive discursivity (artists, it should be noted are often the subjects of exhibition statements, but rarely the authors of its formulation). The catalogue constructs a specific reading, opens the space of a possible reworking or perhaps effects a closure; but it always has definite political consequences. This suggests that the catalogue is also an important site for interventions. Catalogue and exhibition constitute what could be called a *dia-text*, that is, two separate signifying systems which function together; more precisely, it is at the point of their intersection and crucially in their difference, that the production of a certain knowledge takes place.

The exhibition has a definite substantive duration. In its phenomenal form the installation is subject to the constraints of a definite site, it is only reproducible in a limited sense, but the catalogue remains. It is infinitely reproducible and, moreover, it constitutes the determinant means of institutional control over the continued distribution of works of art. In this context, the absence of a catalogue also becomes significant. Artists generally maintain that the catalogue is more important than the exhibition itself. It gives a particular permanence to temporary events, an authenticity in the form of historical testimony. Together with art books and magazines, exhibition catalogues constitute the predominant forms of receiving and, in a certain sense, possessing images of art. The exhibition remains the privileged mode of reception in terms of the viewer's access to the 'original' work, but far more often the reader's knowledge of art is based on reproductions in books and magazines. Critical theories of art founded on the notion of artisanal production fail to recognize that these

historically specific means of organization, circulation, distribution, not only determine the reception—reading, viewing, reviewing, reworking—of artistic texts, but also have an effect on the signifying practices themselves. The phenomenon of artists' books, together with the emergence of specialist publishers, is now well known; this is often commented on, but rarely analyzed in terms of the particular relations of representation it prescribes.

How is the work of art, now reproduced as photographic image, produced as the artistic text within the system of the book? What kind of readers and authors are positioned there? Obviously, there is the loss of material specificity—problems of black-and-white reproduction, aspect ratios, etc.—the characteristic homogenizing tendency of the book; but the difference between the reproduction in the catalogue and the original in the exhibition is not merely a question of photographic techniques. It is a question of particular practices of writing, of the gaps, omissions, and points of emphasis through which certain images are outlined and others erased. The authorial discourse (organizer, critic, or artist) constructs a pictorial textuality which pertains more to the readable than to the visible.

In this sense it would be appropriate to speak of quoting rather than illustrating artistic texts (although this is not to say they are essentially quotable). At one level the signifying structure of the pictorial quotation has something in common with the press photograph insofar as it presumes to 'record' the exhibition events or to identify the object to which the reproduction supposedly refers. This process of identification appears to be immediately fixed by the denominative function of the linguistic text which accompanies it: name, title, dimensions, medium. More crucially, however, it depends on a certain cultural knowledge, as Barthes suggested, a body of techniques and practices already-read as art.<sup>2</sup> This reading is grounded in the academic discourse of Fine Art and circumscribed by the limits of its traditional regimes: Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture.

The quotation subscribes to a form of pictorial rhetoric which defines those regimes (and the varied practices they subsume) in terms of medium: thus painting's pictorial quality, its one-dimensionality, is signified by the correspondence of frame to edge of photograph; video by the framing edge of the monitor and the 'grain' of an electronically transmitted image; sculpture's three-dimensionality by lighting or architectural setting; performance, similarly, by an establishing shot (i.e., performer in context of audience, camera, etc.); photography also relies on an installation shot or the repetition of units to signify its fine art context. But the pictorial quotation seems to be subject to a double imperative which repeats the dilemma of modernist criticism; while identifying the art object in terms of medium, at the same time it must establish the unique and individuating style of a particular artist's work. Hence there is also the 'artistic photograph': the detail, the interesting composition which displaces the record. It gives the appearance of transgression, but effectively it is a fragment, a metonymy, enveloped by the all-pervasive pictorial metaphor, addressing the reader with continued reference to the grand regime of Painting.

However, if the work of art is extracted from the discursive system in which it is established as statement, as event, then it is possible not only to construct a rather utopian view of the pictorial text as essentially concerned with a single picture, but also to assume, as Raymond Bellour does in 'The Unattainable Text,'

that unlike the filmic text 'the pictorial text is in fact a quotable text.'<sup>3</sup> The concept of pictorial quotability suppresses the diversity of artistic practices insofar as it foregrounds a particular system of representation, the painting. Moreover, when he adds, 'From the critical point of view it has one advantage that only painting possesses: one can see and take in the work at one glance,' another problem is posed: Precisely what forms of painting possess this advantage of being taken in at a glance? Here Bellour's perceptual emphasis implicates his arguments with those of modernist criticism by constructing a similar object, namely, the purely visual, uniquely flat, abstractionist painting which illustrates Greenberg's pictorial paradigm.

Consequently, even if, at the center of that paradigm, it is not the truth of an author but that of the signifier itself which is sought, as long as the site of that search is designated as the object or even the system 'Painting,' a problem remains. On the one hand the pictorial text, with reference to the object, is too easily attained—taken in at a glance; on the other hand, as Damisch describes it, pictorial textuality is constituted in a divergence between the register of the visible and that of the readable, 'A divergence by way of which it is appropriate, in relation to the system Painting to pose the question of the signifier.' But since the signifier cannot be produced or even recognized by way of a position of exteriority, the effect of painting, like that of the dream-work, is created 'outside any relation of interpretation.'<sup>4</sup> The truth of painting, like that of the signifier, is the impossibility of knowing it. And the pictorial text remains in a certain sense unknowable, impossible, unattainable. That is why it now seems more appropriate, in relation to the signifying system of the artistic text, to pose, not the question of the signifier but that of the *statement*: as Foucault suggests, 'to situate these meaningful units in a space in which they breed and multiply.'<sup>5</sup>

# Performative Acts and Gender Constitution

## An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory

**Philosophers rarely think about acting** in the theatrical sense, but they do have a discourse of 'acts' that maintains associative semantic meanings with theories of performance and acting. For example, John Searle's 'speech acts,' those verbal assurances and promises which seem not only to refer to a speaking relationship, but to constitute a moral bond between speakers, illustrate one of the illocutionary gestures that constitutes the stage of the analytic philosophy of language. Further, 'action theory,' a domain of moral philosophy, seeks to understand what it is 'to do' prior to any claim of what one *ought* to do. Finally, the phenomenological theory of 'acts,' espoused by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead, among others, seeks to explain the mundane way in which social agents *constitute* social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign. Though phenomenology sometimes appears to assume the existence of a choosing and constituting agent prior to language (who poses as the sole source of its constituting acts), there is also a more radical use of the doctrine of constitution that takes the social agent as an *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts.

When Simone de Beauvoir claims, 'one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman,' she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation

between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.

Through the conception of gender acts sketched above, I will try to show some ways in which reified and naturalized conceptions of gender might be understood as constituted and, hence, capable of being constituted differently. In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*. In the course of making my argument, I will draw from theatrical, anthropological, and philosophical discourses, but mainly phenomenology, to show that what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status.

### I. Sex/gender: feminist and phenomenological views

Feminist theory has often been critical of naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality that assume that the meaning of women's social existence can be derived from some fact of their physiology. In distinguishing sex from gender, feminist theorists have disputed causal explanations that assume that sex dictates or necessitates certain social meanings for women's experience. Phenomenological theories of human embodiment have also been concerned to distinguish between the various physiological and biological causalities that structure bodily existence and the *meanings* that embodied existence assumes in the context of lived experience. In Merleau-Ponty's reflections in *The Phenomenology of Perception* on 'the body in its sexual being,' he takes issue with such accounts of bodily experience and claims that the body is 'an historical idea' rather than 'a natural species.'<sup>2</sup> Significantly, it is this claim that Simone de Beauvoir cites in *The Second Sex* when she sets the stage for her claim that 'woman,' and by extension, any gender, is an historical situation rather than a natural fact.<sup>3</sup>

In both contexts, the existence and facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body are not denied, but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings. For both de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation which any phenomenological theory of embodiment needs to describe. In order to describe the gendered body, a phenomenological theory of constitution requires an expansion of the conventional view of acts to mean both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted. In other words, the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts. My task, then, is to examine in what ways gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts, and what possibilities exist for the cultural transformation of gender through such acts.

Merleau-Ponty maintains not only that the body is an historical idea but a set of possibilities to be continually realized. In claiming that the body is an historical idea, Merleau-Ponty means that it gains its meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world. That the body is a set of possibilities signifies (a) that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, and (b) that its concrete



expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities. Hence, there is an agency which is understood as the process of rendering such possibilities determinate. These possibilities are necessarily constrained by available historical conventions. The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well.

It is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a 'we' or an 'I' that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior. More appropriate, I suggest, would be a vocabulary that resists the substance metaphysics of subject-verb formations and relies instead on an ontology of present participles. The 'I' that is its body is, of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the 'what' that it embodies is possibilities. But here again the grammar of the formulation misleads, for the possibilities that are embodied are not fundamentally exterior or antecedent to the process of embodying itself. As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation, as de Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation.

To do, to dramatize, to reproduce, these seem to be some of the elementary structures of embodiment. This doing of gender is not merely a way in which embodied agents are exterior, surfaced, open to the perception of others. Embodiment clearly manifests a set of strategies or what Sartre would perhaps have called a style of being or Foucault, 'a stylistics of existence.' This style is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential.'

When de Beauvoir claims that 'woman' is a historical idea and not a natural fact, she clearly underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity. To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. The notion of a 'project,' however, suggests the originating force of a radical will, and because gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term '*strategy*' better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs. Hence, as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished. Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those

acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions that are alternatively embodied and disguised under duress.

How useful is a phenomenological point of departure for a feminist description of gender? On the surface it appears that phenomenology shares with feminist analysis a commitment to grounding theory in lived experience, and in revealing the way in which the world is produced through the constituting acts of subjective experience. Clearly, not all feminist theory would privilege the point of view of the subject (Kristeva once objected to feminist theory as 'too existentialist'),<sup>4</sup> and yet the feminist claim that the personal is political suggests, in part, that subjective experience is not only structured by existing political arrangements, but effects and structures those arrangements in turn. Feminist theory has sought to understand the way in which systemic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual acts and practices, and how the analysis of ostensibly personal situations is clarified through situating the issues in a broader and shared cultural context. Indeed, the feminist impulse, and I am sure there is more than one, has often emerged in the recognition that my pain or my silence or my anger or my perception is finally not mine alone, and that it delimits me in a shared cultural situation which in turn enables and empowers me in certain unanticipated ways. The personal is thus implicitly political inasmuch as it is conditioned by shared social structures, but the personal has also been immunized against political challenge to the extent that public/private distinctions endure. For feminist theory, then, the personal becomes an expansive category, one which accommodates, if only implicitly, political structures usually viewed as public. Indeed, the very meaning of the political expands as well. At its best, feminist theory involves a dialectical expansion of both of these categories. My situation does not cease to be mine just because it is the situation of someone else, and my acts, individual as they are, nevertheless reproduce the situation of my gender, and do that in various ways. In other words, there is, latent in the personal is political formulation of feminist theory, a supposition that the life-world of gender relations is constituted, at least partially, through the concrete and historically mediated *acts* of individuals. Considering that 'the' body is invariably transformed into his body or her body, the body is only known through its gendered appearance. It would seem imperative to consider the way in which this gendering of the body occurs. My suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic.

The feminist appropriation of the phenomenological theory of constitution might employ the notion of an *act* in a richly ambiguous sense. If the personal is a category which expands to include the wider political and social structures, then the *acts* of the gendered subject would be similarly expansive.

Clearly, there are political acts which are deliberate and instrumental actions of political organizing, resistance collective intervention with the broad aim of instating a more just set of social and political relations. There are thus acts which are done in the name of women, and then there are acts in and of themselves, apart from any instrumental consequence, that challenge the category of women itself. Indeed, one ought to consider the futility of a political program which seeks radically to transform the social situation of women without first determining whether the category of woman is socially constructed in such a way that to be a woman is, by definition, to be in an oppressed situation. In an understandable desire to forge bonds of solidarity, feminist discourse has often relied upon the category of woman as a universal presupposition of cultural experience which, in its universal status, provides a false ontological promise of eventual political solidarity. In a culture in which the false universal of 'man' has for the most part been presupposed as coextensive with humanness itself, feminist theory has sought with success to bring female specificity into visibility and to rewrite the history of culture in terms which acknowledge the presence, the influence, and the oppression of women. Yet, in this effort to combat the invisibility of women as a category feminists run the risk of rendering visible a category which may or may not be representative of the concrete lives of women. As feminists, we have been less eager, I think, to consider the status of the category itself and, indeed, to discern the conditions of oppression which issue from an unexamined reproduction of gender identities which sustain discrete and binary categories of man and woman.

When de Beauvoir claims that woman is an 'historical situation,' she emphasizes that the body suffers a certain cultural construction, not only through conventions that sanction and proscribe how one acts one's body, the 'act' or performance that one's body is, but also in the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally perceived. Indeed, if gender is the cultural significance that the sexed body assumes, and if that significance is codetermined through various acts and their cultural perception, then it would appear that from within the terms of culture it is not possible to know sex as distinct from gender. The reproduction of the category of gender is enacted on a large political scale, as when women first enter a profession or gain certain rights, or are reconceived in legal or political discourse in significantly new ways. But the more mundane reproduction of gendered identity takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence. Consider that there is a sedimentation of gender norms that produces the peculiar phenomenon of a natural sex, or a real woman, or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in a binary relation to one another.

## **II. Binary genders and the heterosexual contract**

To guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well-established in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage

which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system. As Foucault and others have pointed out, the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural 'attraction' to the opposing sex/gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests.<sup>5</sup> Feminist cultural anthropology and kinship studies have shown how cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which require taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end. Lévi-Strauss has shown how the incest taboo works to guarantee the channeling of sexuality into various modes of heterosexual marriage.<sup>6</sup> Gayle Rubin has argued convincingly that the incest taboo produces certain kinds of discrete gendered identities and sexualities.<sup>7</sup> My point is simply that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions. Although the ethnocentric conceit suggests a progression beyond the mandatory structures of kinship relations as described by Lévi-Strauss, I would suggest, along with Rubin, that contemporary gender identities are so many marks or 'traces' of residual kinship. The contention that sex, gender, and heterosexuality are historical products which have become conjoined and reified as natural over time has received a good deal of critical attention not only from Michel Foucault, but Monique Wittig, gay historians, and various cultural anthropologists and social psychologists in recent years.<sup>8</sup> These theories, however, still lack the critical resources for thinking radically about the historical sedimentation of sexuality and sex-related constructs if they do not delimit and describe the mundane manner in which these constructs are produced, reproduced, and maintained within the field of bodies.

Can phenomenology assist a feminist reconstruction of the sedimented character of sex, gender, and sexuality at the level of the body? In the first place, the phenomenological focus on the various acts by which cultural identity is constituted and assumed provides a felicitous starting point for the feminist effort to understand the mundane manner in which bodies get crafted into genders. The formulation of the body as a mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities offers a way to understand how a cultural convention is embodied and enacted. But it seems difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a way to conceptualize the scale and systemic character of women's oppression from a theoretical position which takes constituting acts to be its point of departure. Although individual acts do work to maintain and reproduce systems of oppression and, indeed, any theory of personal political responsibility presupposes such a view, it doesn't follow that oppression is a sole consequence of such acts. One might argue that without human beings whose various acts, largely construed, produce and maintain oppressive conditions, those conditions would fall away, but note that the relation between acts and conditions is neither unilateral nor unmediated. There are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts at all. The transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions. Indeed, one runs the risk of addressing the merely indirect, if not

epiphenomenal, reflection of those conditions if one remains restricted to a politics of acts.

But the theatrical sense of an 'act' forces a revision of the individualist assumptions underlying the more restricted view of constituting acts within phenomenological discourse. As a given temporal duration within the entire performance, 'acts' are a shared experience and 'collective action.' Just as within feminist theory the very category of the personal is expanded to include political structures, so is there a theatrically-based and, indeed, less individually-oriented view of acts that goes some of the way to defusing the criticism of act theory as 'too existentialist.' The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it *in accord with* certain sanctions and prescriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter. Here again, I don't mean to minimize the effect of certain gender norms which originate within the family and are enforced through certain familial modes of punishment and reward and which, as a consequence might be construed as highly individual, for even there family relations recapitulate, individualize, and specify pre-existing cultural relations; they are rarely, if even radically original. The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it; but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. The complex components that go into an act must be distinguished in order to understand the kind of acting in concert and acting in accord which acting one's gender invariably is.

In what senses, then, is gender an act? As anthropologist Victor Turner suggests in his studies of ritual social drama, social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.<sup>9</sup> When this conception of social performance is applied to gender, it is clear that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this 'action' is immediately public as well. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public nature is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame. Understood in pedagogical terms, the performance renders social laws explicit.

As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual, as some post-structuralist displacements of the subject would contend. The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.

Although the links between a theatrical and a social role are complex and the distinctions not easily drawn (Bruce Wilshire points out the limits of the comparison in *Role-Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor*<sup>10</sup>), it seems clear that, although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence. The conventions which mediate proximity and identification in these two instances are clearly quite different. I want to make two different kinds of claims, regarding this tentative distinction. In the theatre, one can say, 'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real. Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life. On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed, on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation. Clearly, there is theatre which attempts to contest or, indeed, break down those conventions that demarcate the imaginary from the real (Richard Schechner brings this out quite clearly in *Between Theatre and Anthropology*<sup>11</sup>). Yet in those cases one confronts the same phenomenon, namely, that the act is not contrasted with the real, but *constitutes* a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality. From the point of view of those established categories, one may want to claim, but oh, this is *really* a girl or a woman, or this is *really* a boy or a man, and further that the *appearance* contradicts the *reality* of the gender, that the discrete and familiar reality must be there, nascent, temporarily unrealized, perhaps realized at other times or other places. The transvestite, however, can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity. If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express. Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations.

Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. That expectation, in turn, is based upon the perception of sex, where sex is understood to be the discrete and factic datum of primary sexual characteristics. This implicit and popular theory of acts and gestures as *expressive* of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known; indeed, gender appears to the popular imagination as a substantial core which might



well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex.<sup>12</sup> If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed.

As a consequence, gender cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. As opposed to a view such as Erving Goffman's which posits a self which assumes and exchanges various 'roles' within the complex social expectations of the 'game' of modern life,<sup>13</sup> I am suggesting that this self is not only irretrievably 'outside,' constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publically regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication. Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable. In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. That this reassurance is so easily displaced by anxiety, that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated.<sup>14</sup>

### III. Feminist theory: beyond an expressive model of gender

This view of gender does not pose as a comprehensive theory about what gender is or the manner of its construction, and neither does it prescribe an explicit feminist political program. Indeed, I can imagine this view of gender being used for a number of discrepant political strategies. Some of my friends may fault me for this and insist that any theory of gender constitution has political presuppositions and implications, and that it is impossible to separate a theory of gender from a political philosophy of feminism. In fact, I would agree, and argue that it is primarily political interests which create the social phenomena of gender itself, and that without a radical critique of gender constitution feminist theory fails to take stock of the way in which oppression structures the ontological categories through which gender is conceived. Gayatri Spivak has argued that feminists need to rely on an operational essentialism, a false ontology of women as a universal in order to advance a feminist political pro-

gram.<sup>15</sup> She knows that the category of 'women' is not fully expressive, that the multiplicity and discontinuity of the referent mocks and rebels against the univocity of the sign, but suggests it could be used for strategic purposes. Kristeva suggests something similar, I think, when she prescribes that feminists use the category of women as a political tool without attributing ontological integrity to the term, and adds that, strictly speaking, women cannot be said to exist.<sup>16</sup> Feminists might well worry about the political implications of claiming that women do not exist, especially in light of the persuasive arguments advanced by Mary Anne Warren in her book, *Gendercide*.<sup>17</sup> She argues that social policies regarding population control and reproductive technology are designed to limit and, at times, eradicate the existence of women altogether. In light of such a claim, what good does it do to quarrel about the metaphysical status of the term, and perhaps, for clearly political reasons, feminists ought to silence the quarrel altogether.

But it is one thing to use the term and know its ontological insufficiency and quite another to articulate a normative vision for feminist theory which celebrates or emancipates an essence, a nature, or a shared cultural reality which cannot be found. The option I am defending is not to redescribe the world from the point of view of women. I don't know what that point of view is, but whatever it is, it is not singular, and not mine to espouse. It would only be half-right to claim that I am interested in how the phenomenon of a men's or women's point of view gets constituted, for while I do think that those points of view are, indeed, socially constituted, and that a reflexive genealogy of those points of view is important to do, it is not primarily the gender episteme that I am interested in exposing, deconstructing, or reconstructing. Indeed, it is the presupposition of the category of woman itself that requires a critical genealogy of the complex institutional and discursive means by which it is constituted. Although some feminist literary critics suggest that the presupposition of sexual difference is necessary for all discourse, that position reifies sexual difference as the founding moment of culture and precludes an analysis not only of how sexual difference is constituted to begin with but how it is continuously constituted, both by the masculine tradition that preempts the universal point of view, and by those feminist positions that construct the univocal category of 'women' in the name of expressing or, indeed, liberating a subjected class. As Foucault claimed about those humanist efforts to liberate the criminalized subject, the subject that is freed is even more deeply shackled than originally thought.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, though, I envision the critical genealogy of gender to rely on a phenomenological set of presuppositions, most important among them the expanded conception of an 'act' which is both socially shared and historically constituted, and which is performative in the sense I previously described. But a critical genealogy needs to be supplemented by a politics of performative gender acts, one which both redescribes existing gender identities and offers a prescriptive view about the kind of gender reality there ought to be. The redescription needs to expose the reifications that tacitly serve as substantial gender cores or identities, and to elucidate both the act and the strategy of disavowal which at once constitute and conceal gender as we live it. The prescription is invariably more difficult, if only because we need to think a world in which acts, gestures, the visual body, the clothed body, the various physical attributes usually associated with gender, *express nothing*. In a sense, the prescription is not

utopian, but consists in an imperative to acknowledge the existing complexity of gender which our vocabulary invariably disguises and to bring that complexity into a dramatic cultural interplay without punitive consequences.

Certainly, it remains politically important to represent women, but to do that in a way that does not distort and reify the very collectivity the theory is supposed to emancipate. Feminist theory which presupposes sexual difference as the necessary and invariant theoretical point of departure clearly improves upon those humanist discourses which conflate the universal with the masculine and appropriate all of culture as masculine property. Clearly, it is necessary to reread the texts of western philosophy from the various points of view that have been excluded, not only to reveal the particular perspective and set of interests informing those ostensibly transparent descriptions of the real, but to offer alternative descriptions and prescriptions; indeed, to establish philosophy as a cultural practice, and to criticize its tenets from marginalized cultural locations. I have no quarrel with this procedure, and have clearly benefited from those analyses. My only concern is that sexual difference not become a reification which unwittingly preserves a binary restriction on gender identity and an implicitly heterosexual framework for the description of gender, gender identity, and sexuality. There is, in my view, nothing about femaleness that is waiting to be expressed; there is, on the other hand, a good deal about the diverse experiences of women that is being expressed and still needs to be expressed, but caution is needed with respect to that theoretical language, for it does not simply report a pre-linguistic experience, but constructs that experience as well as the limits of its analysis. Regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy and the prevalence of sexual difference as an operative cultural distinction, there is nothing about a binary gender system that is given. As a corporeal field of cultural play, gender is a basically innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations. Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds.

# Postmodern Automatons

*for A ...*

## Modernism and Postmodernism: Restating the Problem of 'Displacement'

If everyone can agree with Fredric Jameson that the unity of the 'new impulse' of postmodernism 'is given not in itself but in the very modernism it seeks to displace,'<sup>1</sup> exactly how modernism is displaced still remains the issue. In this paper, I follow an understanding of 'modernism' that is embedded in and inseparable from the globalized and popularized usages of terms such as 'modernity' and 'modernization,' which pertain to the increasing technologization of culture. I examine this technologization in terms of the technologies of visibility. In the twentieth century, the preoccupation with the 'visual'—in a field like psychoanalysis, for instance—and the perfection of technologies of visibility such as photography and film take us beyond the merely physical dimension of vision. The visual as such, as a kind of dominant discourse of modernity, reveals epistemological problems that are inherent in social relations and their reproduction. Such problems inform the very ways social difference—be it in terms of class, gender, or race—is constructed. In this sense, the more narrow understanding of modernism as the sum total of artistic innovations that erupted in Europe and North America in the spirit of a massive cultural awakening—an emancipation from the habits of perception of the past—needs to be bracketed within an understanding of modernity as a force of cultural expansionism whose foundations are not only emancipatory but also Eurocentric and patriarchal. The displacement of 'modernism' in what we now call the postmodern era must be addressed with such foundations in mind.

Generally speaking, there is, I think, a confusion over the status of modernism as theoretical determinant and modernism as social effect. The disparagement of modernism that we hear in First World circles—a disparagement that stems from the argument of modernism as 'mythical,' as 'narrative,' or as what continues the progressive goals of the European Enlightenment—regards modernism more or less as a set of beliefs, a particular mode of cognition, or a type of subjectivity. The rewriting of history by way of the postmodern would hence follow such lines to say: such and such were the governing *ideas* that characterize modernism which have been proven to be grand illusions in the postmodern era, and so on. If 'modernity' is incomplete, then, postmodernism supplements it by shaking up its foundations. Therefore, if one of the key characteristics of modernism is the clear demarcation of cognitive boundaries—a demarcation that occurs with the perceptual hegemony of physical vision in the modern period—then postmodernism is full of talk about boundaries dissolving, so that that which sees and that which is seen, that which is active and that

which is passive, and so forth, become interchangeable positions. The profusion of discourse and the illusion that every discourse has become permissible make it possible to associate postmodernism with a certain abandonment, such as is suggested in the title of a recent anthology edited by Andrew Ross, *Universal Abandon?*<sup>2</sup>

Once we view the modernism-postmodernism problematic not in terms of a succession of ideas and concepts only, but as the staggering of legacies and symptoms at their different stages of articulation, then the 'displacement' of modernism by postmodernism becomes a complex matter, and can vary according to the objectives for which that displacement is argued. For instance, for the cultures outside the Berlin—Paris—London—New York axis, it is not exactly certain that modernism has exhausted its currency or, therefore, its imperialistic efficacy. Because these 'other' cultures did not dominate the generation of modernism theoretically or cognitively, 'displacement' needs to be posed on very different terms.

On the one hand, modernism is, for these other cultures, always a displaced phenomenon, the sign of an alien imprint on indigenous traditions. In Asia and Africa, modernism is not a set of beliefs but rather a foreign body whose physicality must be described as a Derridean 'always already'—whose omnipresence, in other words, must be responded to as a given whether one likes it or not. On the other hand, the displacement of modernism in postmodernity as it is currently argued in the West, in the writings of François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, Jameson, and so on, does not seem right either, for modernism is still around as ideological legacy, as habit, and as familiar, even coherent, way of seeing. If the First World has rejected modernism, such rejection is not so easy for the world which is still living through it as cultural trauma and devastation. In the words of Masao Mioshi and H. D. Harootunian:

The black hole that is formed by the rejection of modernism is also apt to obliterate the trace of historical Western expansionism that was at least cofunctional, if not instrumental, in producing epistemological hegemonism. Thus a paradox: as postmodernism seeks to remedy the modernist error of Western, male, bourgeois domination, it simultaneously vacates the ground on which alone the contours of modernism can be seen. Furthermore, colonialism and imperialism are ongoing enterprises, and in distinguishing late post-industrial capitalism from earlier liberal capitalism and by tolerating the former while condemning the latter, postmodernism ends up by consenting to the first world economic domination that persists in exploiting the wretched of the earth.<sup>3</sup>

In the Third World, the displacement of modernism is not simply a matter of criticizing modernism as theory, philosophy, or ideas of cognition; rather it is the emergence of an entirely different problematic, a displacement of a displacement that is in excess of what is still presented as the binarism of modernism-postmodernism. It is in the light of this double or multiple displacement that a feminist intervention, in alliance with other marginalized groups, can be plotted in the postmodern scene. If what is excluded by the myth-making logic of modernism articulates its 'existence' in what looks like a radically permissive postmodern era where anything goes, postmodernism (call it periodizing concept, cultural dominant, if you will, after Jameson) is only a belated articulation of what the West's 'others' have lived all along.<sup>4</sup>

Because vis-à-vis the dominant modern culture of the West, feminism shares the status with other marginalized discourses as a kind of 'other' whose

power has been the result of historical struggle, the relationship between feminism and postmodernism has not been an easy one. Even though feminists partake in the postmodernist ontological project of dismantling claims of cultural authority that are housed in specific representations, feminism's rootedness in overt political struggles against the subordination of women makes it very difficult to accept the kind of postmodern 'universal abandon' in Ross's title. For some, the destabilization of conceptual boundaries and concrete beliefs becomes the sign of danger that directly threatens their commitment to an agenda of social progress based on the self and reason.<sup>5</sup> While I do not agree with the espousal of humanistic thinking as such for feminist goals, I think the distrust of postmodern 'abandon' can be seen as a strategic resistance against the dismantling of feminism's 'critical regionalism' (to use a term from postmodern architectural criticism<sup>6</sup>) and its local politics.

In the collection *Universal Abandon?*, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson voice this understanding of the conflict between postmodernism and feminism in terms of philosophy and social criticism. While they criticize the essentialist moves feminists have had to make to stage the primacy of gender in social struggles, they are equally distrustful of the abstract philosophical frameworks in which theorists of postmodernism often begin their inquiry. Lyotard's 'suspicion of the large,' for instance, leads him to reject 'the project of social theory *tout court*'; and yet 'despite his strictures against large, totalizing stories, he narrates a fairly tall tale about a large-scale social trend.'<sup>7</sup>

The conflicts as to what constitutes *the social* amount to one of the most significant contentions between postmodernism and feminism. *Post-structuralism* plays a role in both's relation to the social. For those interested in postmodernism, the decentering of the logos and the untenability of structuralism as a mode of cognition provide the means of undoing modernism's large architectonic claims. Once such claims and their hierarchical power are undone, the meaning of the 'social' bursts open. It is no longer possible to assume a transparent and universal frame of reality. Instead, 'tropes' and 'reality' become versions of each other,<sup>8</sup> while aporias and allegories play an increasingly important role in the most 'natural' acts of reading. And yet, precisely because the subversive thrust of poststructuralism consists in its refusal to name its own politics (since naming as such, in the context of political hegemony, belongs to the tactics of doctrinaire official culture) even as it deconstructs the language of established power from within, it does not provide postmodernism with a well-defined agenda nor with a clear object of criticism other than 'the prison house of language.' Instead, the persistently negative critique of dominant culture in total terms produces a vicious circle that repeats itself as what Jean Baudrillard calls 'implosion'—the 'reduction of difference to absolute indifference, equivalence, interchangeability.'<sup>9</sup> Since positions are now infinitely interchangeable, many feel that postmodernism may be little more than a 'recompensatory "I'm OK, you're OK" inclusion or a leveling attribution of subversive "marginality" to all.'<sup>10</sup>

The difficulty feminists have with postmodernism is thus clear. Although feminists share postmodernism's poststructuralist tendencies in dismantling universalist claims, which for them are more specifically defined as the claims of the white male subject, they do not see their struggle against patriarchy as



quite over. The social for feminists is therefore always marked by a clear horizon of the inequality between men and women; the social, because it is mediated by gender with its ideological manipulations of biology as well as symbolic representations, is never quite 'implosive' in the Baudrillardian sense. With this fundamental rejection of indifference by an insistence on the cultural effects of sexual and gendered difference,<sup>11</sup> feminists always begin, as the non-Western world must begin, with the legacy of the constellation of modernism *and* something more. While for the non-Western world that something is imperialism, for feminists it is patriarchy. They must begin, as Fraser and Nicholson put it, with 'the nature of the social object one wished to criticize' rather than with the condition of philosophy. This object is 'the oppression of women in its "endless variety and monotonous similarity."<sup>12</sup>

### Visuality, or the Social Object 'Ridden with Error'<sup>13</sup>

One of the chief sources of the oppression of women lies in the way they have been consigned to visuality. This consignment is the result of an epistemological mechanism which produces social difference by a formal distribution of positions and which modernism magnifies with the availability of technology such as cinema. To approach visuality as the object of criticism, we cannot therefore simply attack the *fact* that women have been reduced to objects of the 'male gaze,' since that reifies the problem by reifying its most superficial manifestation.<sup>14</sup>

If we take visuality to be, precisely, the nature of the social object that feminism should undertake to criticize, then it is incumbent upon us to analyze the epistemological foundation that supports it. It is, indeed, a foundation in the sense that the production of the West's 'others' depends on a logic of visuality that bifurcates 'subjects' and 'objects' into the incompatible positions of intellectuality and spectularity.

### From Object to Strategy

Be it the repudiation of or the abandonment to the feminized mass, then, the modernism-postmodernism problematic continues the polarized thinking produced by the logic of visuality. Visuality in Freud works by displacement, which makes explicit (turns into external form) what are interiorized states called 'neuroses' and 'complexes.' The site occupied by woman, by the lower classes, by the masses, is that of excess; in Freud's reading their specularity—their status as the visual—is what allows the clarification of problems which lie outside them and which need them for their objectification. Beyond this specularity, what can be known about the feminized 'object'?

The answer to this question is 'nothing' if we insist that this object is a pure phenomenon, a pure existence. However, if this object is indeed a *social* object which is by nature 'ridden with error,' then criticizing it from within would amount to criticizing the social sources of its formation. Albeit in fragmented forms, such criticisms can lead to subversions which do not merely reproduce the existing mechanism but which offer an alternative for transformation.

For feminists working in the First World, where relatively stable material conditions prevail, criticism of the oppression of women can adopt a more flamboyantly defiant tone as the affirmation of female power *tout court*. The

availability of food, living space, mechanical and electronic forms of communication, institutionalized psychoanalytic treatment, and general personal mobility means that 'automatization' *can* turn into autonomy and independence. Hélène Cixous's challenge to Freud's reading of Hoffmann, for instance, represents this defiant automaton power: 'what if the doll became a woman? What if she *were* alive? What if, in looking at her, we animated her?'<sup>15</sup>

These First World feminist questions short-circuit Freud's neurotic pessimism by rejecting, as it were, the reductionism of the modernist logic of visibility and the polarity of masculine-human-subject-versus-feminized-automaton it advances. It retains the notion of the automaton—the mechanical doll—but changes its fate by giving it life with another look. This is the look of the feminist critic. Does her power of animation take us back to the language of God, a superior being who bestows life upon an inferior? Or is it the power of a woman who bears the history of her own dehumanization on her as she speaks for other women? The idealism of First World feminism would have us believe the latter. The mythical being of this idealism is the 'cyborg,' that half-machine, half-animal creature, at once committed and transgressive, spoken of by Donna Haraway.<sup>16</sup>

For those feminists who have lived outside the First World as 'natives' of 'indigenous cultures' (for such are the categories in which they are put, regardless of their level of education), the defiance of a Cixous is always dubious, suggesting not only the subversiveness of woman but also the more familiar, oppressive discursive prowess of the 'First World.' The 'postmodern' cultural situation in which non-Western feminists now find themselves is a difficult and cynical one. Precisely because of the modernist epistemological mechanism which produces the interest in the Third World, the great number of discourses that surround this 'area' are now treated, one feels, as so many Olympias saying 'Ah, ah!' to a Western subject demanding repeated uniform messages. For the Third World feminist, the question is never that of asserting power as woman alone, but of showing how the concern for women is inseparable from other types of cultural oppression and negotiation. In a more pronounced, because more technologized/automatized manner, her status as postmodern automaton is both the subject and object of her critical operations.

In this light, it is important to see that the impasse inherent in Freud's analytic insights has to do not only with visibility and the ontological polarities it entails, but also with the *instrumentalism* to which such a construction of the visual field lends itself. Because Freud privileges castration as a model, he is trapped in its implications, by which the 'other' that is constructed is always constructed as what completes what is missing from our 'own' cognition. But the roots of 'lack' lie beyond the field of vision,<sup>17</sup> which is why the privileging of vision as such is always the privileging of a fictive mode, a veil which remains caught in an endless repetition of its own logic.

On the other hand, Freud's analysis of the comic remains instructive because in it we find a resistance to the liberalist illusion of the autonomy and independence we can 'give' the other. It shows that social knowledge (and the responsibility that this knowledge entails) is not simply a matter of empathy or identification with the 'other' whose sorrows and frustrations are being made part of the spectacle. Repetition, which is now visibly recognized in the field of the other, mechanistically establishes and intensifies the distinctions between

spectacular (kinetic) labor and cognitive labor, while the surplus created by their difference materializes not only in emotional (or imaginary) terms but also in economic terms. This means that *our* attempts to 'explore the "other" point of view' and 'to give it a chance to speak for itself,' as the passion of many current discourses goes, must always be distinguished from the other's struggles, no matter how enthusiastically we assume the nonexistence of that distinction. 'Letting the "other" live' with a liveliness never visible before is a kind of investment whose profits return, as it were, to those who watch. Freud puts it this way:

In 'trying to understand,' therefore, in apperceiving this movement [the comic], I make a certain expenditure, and in this portion of the mental process I behave exactly as though I were putting myself in the place of the person I am observing. But at the same moment, probably, I bear in mind the aim of this movement, and my earlier experience enables me to estimate the scale of expenditure required for reaching that aim. In doing so I disregard the person whom I am observing and behave as though I myself wanted to reach the aim of the movement. These two possibilities in my imagination amount to a comparison between the observed movement and my own. If the other person's movement is exaggerated and inexpedient, my increased expenditure in order to understand it is inhibited in *statu nascendi*, as it were in the act of being mobilized ...; it is declared superfluous and is free for use elsewhere or perhaps for discharge by laughter. This would be the way in which, other circumstances being favorable, pleasure in a comic movement is generated—an innervatory expenditure which has become an unusable surplus when a comparison is made with a movement of one's own.<sup>18</sup>

The task that faces Third World feminists is thus not simply that of 'animating' the oppressed women of their cultures, but of making the automatized and animated condition of their own voices the conscious point of departure in their intervention. This does not simply mean they are, as they must be, speaking across cultures and boundaries; it also means that they speak with the awareness of 'cross-cultural' speech as a limit, and that their very own use of the victimhood of women and Third World cultures is both symptomatic of and inevitably complicitous with the First World. As Gayatri Spivak says of the American university context: 'the invocation of the pervasive oppression of Woman in every class and race stratum, indeed in the lowest sub-cast, cannot help but justify the institutional interests of the (female) academic.'<sup>19</sup> Feminists' upward mobility in the institution, in other words, still follows the logic of the division of labor and of social difference depicted by Freud in his analysis of the comic. The apparent receptiveness of our curricula to the Third World, a receptiveness which makes full use of non-Western human specimens as instruments for articulation, is something we have to practice and deconstruct at once. The Third World feminist speaks of, speaks to, and speaks as this disjuncture:

The privileged Third World informant crosses cultures within the network made possible by socialized capital, or from the point of view of the indigenous intellectual or professional elite in actual Third World countries. Among the latter, the desire to 'cross' cultures means accession, left *or* right, feminist *or* masculinist, into the elite culture of the metropolis. This is done by the commodification of the particular "Third World culture" to which they belong. Here entry into consumerism and entry into 'Feminism' (the proper named movement) have many things in common.<sup>20</sup>

By the logic of commodified culture, feminism shares with other marginalized discourses which have been given 'visibility' the same type of destiny—that of reification and subordination under such terms, currently popular in the U.S. academy, as 'cultural diversity.' As all groups speak like automatons to the neurotic subject of the West, an increasing momentum of instrumentalism, such as is evident in anthologies about postmodernism and feminism, seeks to reabsorb the differences among them. Our educational apparatuses produce ever 'meta' systems, programs, and categories in this direction. Feminism has already become one type of knowledge to be controlled expediently through traditional epistemological frameworks such as the genre of the 'history of ideas.'

Awareness of such facts does not allow one to defend the purity of feminism against its various *uses*. Here, the Third World feminist, because she is used as so many types of automatons at once, occupies a space for strategic alliances.

One such alliance is worked out by foregrounding the political significance of theoretical feminist positions, even if they may have ostensibly little to do with politics in the narrower sense of political economy. The refusal, on the part of many feminists, to give up what may be designated as 'feminine' areas, including the close attention to texts, can in this regard be seen as a refusal to give up the local as a base, a war front, when the cannon shots of patriarchal modernism are still heard everywhere. Although this base is also that 'social object' which feminists must criticize, to abandon it altogether would mean a complete surrender to the enemy. Naomi Schor puts it this way:

Whether or not the 'feminine' is a male construct, a product of a phallogentric culture destined to disappear, in the present order of things we cannot afford not to press its claims even as we dismantle the conceptual systems which support it.<sup>21</sup>

Elizabeth Weed comments:

Schor's insistence on the need for a feminine specificity is political. It represents a recognition on the part of some feminists ... that much of post-structural theory which is not explicitly feminist is simply blind to sexual difference or, in its desire to get beyond the opposition male/female, underestimates the full political weight of the categories.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the 'social object' for feminist discourse in general—the oppression of women—becomes both object and agent of criticism. *Vis-à-vis* postmodernism, the question that feminists must ask *repeatedly* is: how do we deal with the local? Instead of the local, accounts of postmodernism usually provide us with lists that demonstrate what Jean-François Lyotard says literally: 'Not only can one speak of everything, one must.'<sup>23</sup> The impossibility of dealing with the local except by letting everyone speak/everything be spoken at the same time leads to a situation in which hegemony in the Gramscian sense always remains a danger. But with this danger also arises a form of opportunity, which feminists take hold of by way of situating themselves at every point in a constellation of political forces without ever losing sight of women's historical subordination.

Pressing the claims of the local therefore does not mean essentializing one position; instead it means using that position as a parallel for allying with others. For the Third World feminist, especially, the local is never 'one.' Rather, her own 'locality' as construct, difference, and automaton means that pressing its claims is always pressing the claims of a form of existence which is, by origin, coalitional.

By contrast, the postmodernist list neutralizes the critical nature of such coalitional existences. The list allows 'the others' to be seen, but would not pay attention to what they say. In the American university today, the rationale of the list manifests itself in the wholehearted *enlisting* of women, blacks, Asians, and so forth, into employment for their 'offerings' of materials from non-Western cultures. Those who have been hired under such circumstances know to what extent their histories and cultures manage to make it to significant international forums, which are by and large still controlled by topics such as 'modernism' and 'postmodernism.' Those who want to address the local must therefore always proceed by gesturing toward the forum at large, or by what we nowadays call, following the language of the market, 'packaging.' One knows that as long as one deals in First World abstractions—what Fraser and Nicholson mean by 'philosophy'—one would have an audience. As for local specificities—even though such are buzz words for a politics of abandonment—audiences usually nod in good will and turn a deaf ear, and readers skip the pages.

It is in resistance against postmodernist enlistment, then, that various strategies for coalition between feminism and postmodernism, which all partake of a 'critical regionalism,' have been explored. Donna Haraway and Teresa Ebert define postmodern feminist cultural theory as 'oppositional' practice;<sup>24</sup> Craig Owens argues the necessity to genderize the formalisms of postmodern aesthetics and to revamp the substance of postmodern thought;<sup>25</sup> Jane Flax speaks of 'the embeddedness of feminist theory in the very social processes we are trying to critique.'<sup>26</sup> Perhaps what is most crucial about the meeting of feminism and postmodernism is that, after refusing to be seduced into abandonment, feminists do not put down the 'pulp novel' that is postmodernism, either. Instead, they extract from the cries of abandonment the potential of social criticism that might have been lost in the implosions of simulacra. The careful rejection of postmodernist abandon as a universalist politics goes hand in hand with its insistence on the need to *detail* history, in the sense of cutting it up, so that as it gains more ground in social struggle, sexual difference becomes a way of engaging not simply with women but with other types of subjugation. The future of feminist postmodern automatons is described in this statement by Weed: 'If sexual difference becomes ever more destabilized, living as a female will become an easier project, but that will result from the continued displacement of "women," not from its consolidation.'<sup>27</sup>

# ‘Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure’

## Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics

There can be no rule by which someone could be compelled to acknowledge that something is beautiful...

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

Beauty is one of those great mysteries of nature, whose influence we all see and feel; but a general, distinct idea of its essential must be classed among the truths yet undiscovered. If this idea were geometrically clear, men would not differ in their opinions upon the beautiful, and it would be easy to prove what true beauty is.

Johann Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*

Every man knows where and how beauty gives him pleasure...

John Ruskin, ‘The Lamp of Beauty’

Each of these great figures in the history of aesthetics—Immanuel Kant, Johann Winckelmann, and John Ruskin—acknowledges the profound instability of *beauty* as a mode of appreciating objects and images that seduce us (in texts from 1790, 1764, and 1849, respectively).<sup>1</sup> There is tension in their acknowledgments, however; while proclaiming the contingency of beauty, each goes on to attempt to recuperate some kind of authority for himself as its arbiter. By stating that ‘every man knows where and how beauty gives him pleasure,’ for example, Ruskin blithely and self-confidently naturalizes the determination of ‘beauty’; at the same time, he explicitly acknowledges the extent to which beauty’s obviousness is always subjective (‘every man knows...’). This dual gesture, which affirms universality even as it admits particularity, structures the aesthetic in its dominant forms of articulation within Western art discourse.

We can at least historicize Ruskin’s comment, which was issued in the midst of the heatedly romantic, simultaneously self-assured, and culturally anxious moment of mid-nineteenth-century Europe, with its cultural imperialism and burgeoning capitalist markets. Such hubris in the matter of claiming absolute personal authority for aesthetic judgments is, however, troubling in its renewed



formulations in the current era of late-capitalist neonationalist, multicultural, and contentious public vs. private funding debates. Nonetheless, a group of art critics supported by the Los Angeles-based venues the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Art issues* magazine and press has won awards and gained international acclaim for repeating just such authoritative—and, one would have thought, outmoded—claims.

This essay focuses on the writings of this group, most notably Dave Hickey's influential and award-winning book, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, published with Art issues Press,<sup>2</sup> bringing to bear on Hickey's arguments a critique of his perpetuation of certain aspects of aesthetic judgment—a critique that is articulated very much from a contemporary perspective. My text, then, does not pretend to offer a history or theory of aesthetics but, rather, is posed in a polemical way to intervene in a particular position, exemplified by Hickey's work, which holds a great deal of international status within art discourse at this moment. By extension (and it is worth stressing that the tendency to perpetuate a certain authoritarianism within aesthetics and Hickey's own influence are both pronounced in contemporary art criticism), I hope to suggest a way of evaluating works of art that is more in sync with contemporary politics and culture—one that understands rather than veils or occludes the contingency of meaning and value and the role of the interpreter in determining both. It will be clear from my arguments that I do not believe the aesthetic approach to visual culture, which inevitably cleaves to the connoisseurial tradition and perpetuates its authoritarian effects, to be a productive one at this point in our cultural history.

Notably, in the introduction of *The Invisible Dragon* Hickey openly claims allegiance with Ruskin (unctuously citing the latter in the acknowledgments as his 'Victorian mentor'), and he stages the book, rather self-contradictorily, as a radical corrective to so-called 'political correctness' (or PC)—the supposed hegemony of narrow-minded 'art professionals' who currently administer 'a monolithic system of interlocking patronage.'<sup>3</sup> Hickey, then, strategically poses himself as correcting what he parodically characterizes as a bureaucratization of art through academic discourses of identity and cultural politics. Describing himself as 'admittedly outrageous,' he offers himself as art's savior from ideology. As many theorists of aesthetics have pointed out, the claim that one is the only critic 'free' of ideology is the oldest trick in the long book of aesthetics—it is trick that authorizes the disciplines of art criticism and art history in their more traditional modes.<sup>4</sup> Thus, with the revival of an abstract notion of 'beauty,' we return not only to Ruskin but, by implication (I will argue thoroughly below), to the imperialist and exclusionary logic of cultural value that gave Ruskin and his contemporaries their social authority as arbiters of taste.

Hickey's book is clearly staged as a polemic (rather close, to my mind, to the melodramatic pronouncements of Howard Stern) and cries out for an equally heated response, which I hope to provide here. It is important to note right away that I am on the defensive here, given that I am just the type of 'art professional' Hickey would excoriate for my supposed collusion with what he calls the PC 'liberal institution' with its seduction of the nonspecialist beholder by a rigid politics of antipleasure rhetoric—by which I understand him to mean the Marxian and specifically Brechtian emphases in dominant 1980s critical art discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Hickey's conservatism, however, is complicated in that it is intertwined with an overtly staged populism, which takes the primary form of an embrace of popular culture (perhaps it is not a coincidence, to this end, that this discourse has its power base in Los Angeles, the home of the entertainment industry, which conflates social liberalism with a myopic class, gender, and racial politics and an embrace of corporate consumerism). Hickey's admonition implies that the call to political responsibility is nothing but a burden for the 'common man.' Left alone, Hickey argues, this beholder would otherwise inevitably be impressed by the 'beauty' of objects—an aesthetic effect that is, in his words, 'directly' purveyed to the viewer but at the same time (and contradictorily), all too easily suppressed by misguided purveyors of 'PC.' Aside from the fact that Hickey himself is an academic, ensconced in the 'liberal institution' of the University of Nevada, and the fact that he has been supported by national awards (such as the most prestigious national award for art criticism, given out annually by the College Art Association<sup>6</sup>) the most important points to be made definitively against Hickey's argument are historical and political, rather than personal or institutional.

I want here, then, to dismantle the particular mode of authoritative aesthetic judgment mobilized by Hickey and his supporters such that, by the end of this essay, the reader will no longer be seduced by the rhetoric of beauty that has, unfortunately, once again taken on the legitimacy of a closed and self-evident discourse of 'truth.' First, through Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in his important book *Truth in Painting*, I retrace the foundations of this authoritative brand of aesthetic judgment;<sup>7</sup> the remainder of the essay then works through a number of images that art history has more or less consensually deemed 'beautiful' in order to interrogate the particular exclusions that are at work in any discourse that naturalizes 'beauty' as a singular criterion of art judgment and appreciation.

The tension in the 'more or less' serves to signal a series of conceptual gaps I spelunk in order to make their edges and chasms more visible, exposing the contradictions at work in this particular kind of aesthetic judgment so as to refuse its attempted lack of closure. I hope to convince the reader that, stripped of its suture effect, the new permutation of beauty discourse (where, in Hickey's words, beauty is made obvious and true as 'the single direct route from the image to the individual'<sup>8</sup>) can be laid bare for what it is: yet another version of a very old game that operates to privilege a particular group as having access to the truth. The naturalized discourse of aesthetic judgment ('every man knows where and how beauty gives him pleasure') is itself an 'institution' that specifically functions to exclude not only those readers/viewers labeled insensitive (those 'art professionals' who happen to disagree with Hickey and his colleagues—such as myself) but the very history of the politics of exclusion within this particular kind of aesthetic judgment.<sup>9</sup>

Exclusion—excluding the nonbeautiful from the realm of objects worth contemplating—is the primary function of aesthetics and the rhetoric of beauty as these have conventionally been wielded, Hickey's stated empathy with what he calls the 'secular' or 'disenfranchised' beholder aside. My project here is summed up by Roland Barthes's statement of goals in *Mythologies*, his epic study of myth: 'I want . . . to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.'<sup>10</sup>

## Stains on the Passe-Partout

In the history of Western art and the most dominant kinds of aesthetic judgment, the naked white female body has long been staged as the most consistent (if contentious and highly charged) trope of aesthetic beauty, as exemplified by Edmund Burke's description in his 1756 treatise *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*: 'Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface . . .; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried.'<sup>11</sup> As Burke's seductive, vertiginous description and bestsellers such as Kenneth Clark's book *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* suggest, it is the female nude that, in the words of Lynda Nead, is understood to articulate fully 'the alchemic powers of art' to transform through beauty.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, as Nead asserts, the female nude operates *through the aesthetic* as, precisely, a container to enframe and control the threat of unbridled female sexuality.<sup>13</sup> The aesthetic, in this light, can be viewed precisely as a strategic mode of discourse that operates to *cohere* the male subject, always anxious about the perceived power of female sexuality and social access.<sup>14</sup> As object safely contained within the rhetoric of representation, 'content' of the commodified painterly or sculpted object, the female nude is presumably made docile, an object of exchange between men (artist and patron or viewer). As I will discuss further later, the female nude is not only disempowered as the object of heterosexual male desire but also retains her status as 'art' rather than 'pornography' by maintaining an attachment to signifiers of purity (whiteness) that are racially determined.

Viewed through the lens of deconstructive philosophy, the aesthetic model derived from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, as Jacques Derrida has notably remarked, is a framing device that aims to link the inside (the subject, the interior of the picture) with the outside (the object, the viewer in the world). We might say that the aesthetic is precisely the conceptual structure that enables the traffic in images/in women called the art market, which itself has traditionally supported the vast and intricate system of privilege that might be reduced to the dualistic circuit that opposes the artist (bound by identification to the viewer and, by extension, to 'God') to the objects of exchange (women, paintings, slaves). As philosophers from Hegel onward have explored, such oppositional relationships structure not only aesthetics but the philosophical inquiry: lived experience in the Western world is characterized by a partition of subjects into endlessly negotiated dialectics of Master and Slave. Yet, as Derrida points out, the frame is itself both interior and exterior: these relationships are chiasmic, intertwining inside and out even as they work as momentary oppositions.

Through such momentary polarizations, the aesthetic sets itself up as proof of the viewer's mastery and coherence (as in Hickey's discourse, it becomes a 'self-authenticating dialogue'<sup>15</sup> that tautologically confirms the viewer's supposed correctness of opinion regarding the beautiful). The aesthetic works both to contain otherness by reducing the other to beautiful object and to erect the subject of judgment as Master; it does this paradoxically by claiming that the judgment of what is beautiful is both spontaneous and individual, sparked by the 'harmony of form in the object' (experienced within the subject), and *universal*. Kant, famously, insists that

the judging person feels completely *free* as regards the liking he accords the object [and is thus fully disinterested]. . . . Hence he will talk about the beautiful as if beauty were a characteristic of the object and the judgment were logical . . . *even though* in fact the judgment is only aesthetic and refers the object's presentation merely to the subject. He will talk in this way because the logical judgment does resemble a logical judgment inasmuch as *we may presuppose it to be valid for everyone*. . . . In other words, *a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality*.<sup>16</sup>

Kant's model of aesthetic judgment relies explicitly on the capacity of the beautiful object to inspire pure taste and elevated pleasure in the viewer (and it is the 'even though' that has been elided by dominant models of art critical analysis that borrow from Kant—*even though* the judgment is resolutely subjective), but, simultaneously, it requires that this viewer maintain his integrity by claiming to be *disinterested*. That is, *even though* the judgment of beauty refers 'merely to the subject,' it must be disinterested (free of sensory or emotional interest).<sup>17</sup> Aesthetic judgment is both a *bridge* between interior and exterior and, through disinterestedness (which sets the judge definitively *outside*), an inviolable boundary of difference. In proposing to control or master the world of visible objects, the aesthetic points to its own failure: Derrida notes that for Kant, '[while] the purely subjective affect [informing aesthetic judgment] is provoked by what is called the beautiful, that which is said to be beautiful [is] *outside*, in the object and independently of its existence.'<sup>18</sup>

The aesthetic is an ideology of control that is obviously highly successful in sustaining the law of patriarchy but also fails by its own internal contradictions; while it attempts to solve the age-old philosophical problem of the relationship between self and world, self and other, it can only function as such by setting apart the philosopher/judge, placing him or her outside the frame of the aesthetic. The frame is a *passee-partout* (which, in French, means both a 'pass key' and the mat that sets off the picture inside the frame—a 'frame within the frame') and, as Derrida points out, the 'internal edges of a *passee-partout* are often beveled.'<sup>19</sup> There is always leakage polluting the supposedly disinterested authority of the discourse of beauty (an authority exemplified by Hickey's repeated insistence that the beautiful work has a simple and 'direct' relationship to the viewer—a relationship which, naturally, only *he* is authorized to describe). That pollution is, as suggested earlier, the stench of ideology: the arbiter's own psychic and socially conditioned and inflected investments, which encourage him or her to prefer one object over another.

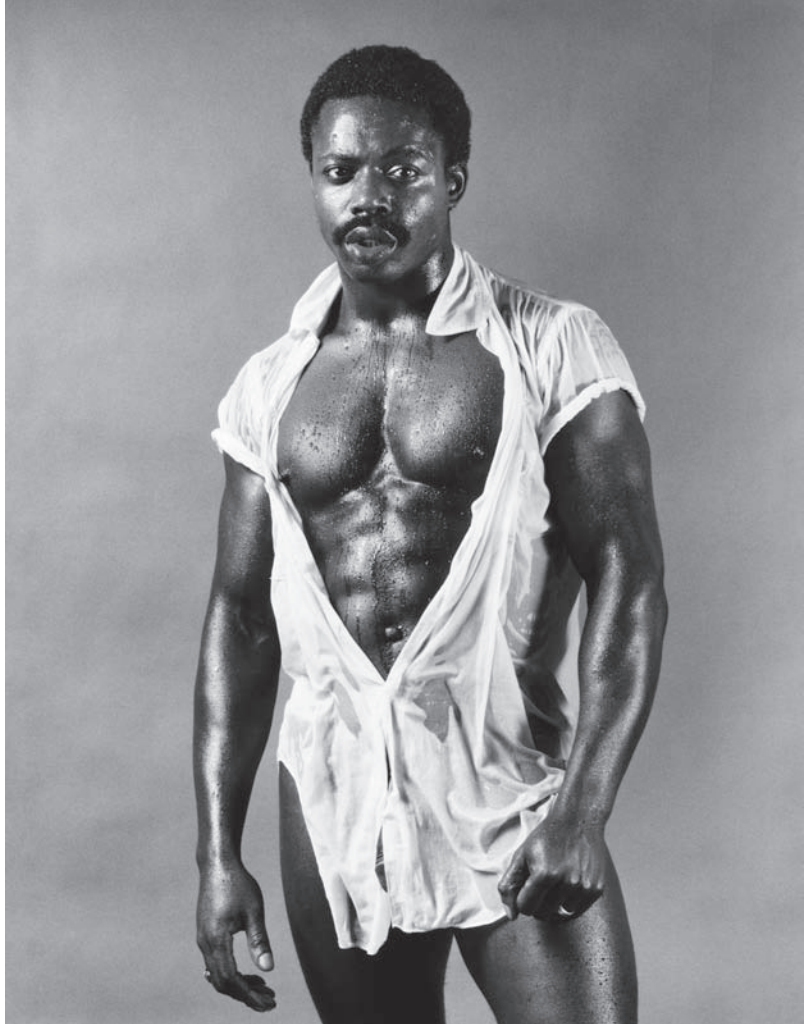
Hickey, like Kant and Ruskin before him, makes recourse to the seductive claims of common sense in his naturalized and never clearly specified notion of beauty, which he only once attempts to define and then tautologically. Hickey's definition—'beauty [is] the agency that cause[s] visual pleasure in the beholder'<sup>20</sup>—thus explicitly parallels (but is far less profound and productively ambiguous than) Kant's fabulous contortion in the *Critique of Judgment*: the 'feeling of pleasure or displeasure' that the beautiful inspires 'denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the Subject has.'<sup>21</sup> Thus, for Kant, as for Hickey, beauty is an agency supposedly emanating from the work of art which causes the viewing subject to judge it beautiful (beauty thus causes its own value), while reciprocally confirming the arbiter of beauty as 'correct' in his judgment (the viewer who claims an object to be beautiful is thus, inevitably, right).

Given the role of naked white women in the visual structuration of an ideology of 'beauty,' it is notable that Hickey chooses Robert Mapplethorpe—the author of images of naked (often black) men engaged in homoerotic postures and acts—as the Genius of beauty [51]. The question of the cultural value and interest of Mapplethorpe's work aside, it is worth noting by way of a complaint how convenient it seems to be for white male critics to continue to invoke Geniuses who are white men to secure the authenticity of their aesthetic judgments. The sexualized male bodies of Mapplethorpe's works notoriously mimic the codes of the fetishization of the female body that is at the base of Western aesthetics while, especially in the case of those that are black, aggressively dislocating the expected content. This fabulous contradiction could be productively mobilized to interrogate the bases of aesthetic judgment, as it has been in the work of Kobena Mercer, for example.<sup>22</sup> Hickey, however, deploys Mapplethorpe's work to reiterate the ideologically loaded claims of the aesthetic in its most authoritarian guises. There is something insidious at work in Hickey's claim that Mapplethorpe (whom he rather grotesquely insists on calling 'Robert') produces images that are dangerous because of their 'direct enfranchisement of the secular beholder' and their 'Baroque vernacular of beauty that predated and, clearly, outperformed the puritanical canon of visual appeal espoused by the therapeutic institution' (the latter, another Hickey code-term for 'PC' academia).<sup>23</sup>

It is the 'clearly' of Hickey's text that, in fact, alerts us to the fact that nothing is clear here. The edges of the *passee-partout* are beveled—and stained with ink or some other viscous fluid. Were the 'Baroque vernacular of beauty' Hickey invokes so obviously triumphant and transparent in its mechanics of transference, why would Hickey need to mount such an impassioned defense? It is no accident that Hickey claims Mapplethorpe's works have a 'direct appeal to the beholder' at the very moment he is so actively manufacturing a particular set of meanings for Mapplethorpe's work.<sup>24</sup> This is the gesture of 'self-authentication,' based entirely on circular reasoning, that Derrida excavates at the base of Kant's aesthetic. This is the self-authorization that has for so long conspired to support the exclusionary logic and institutions of aesthetic judgment, the most obvious of which is *not* academic art history per se but art criticism, with its basis in connoisseurship (it is the role of art critic that Hickey simultaneously holds and disavows in his self-staging in opposition to the supposed 'liberal' or 'therapeutic' institution).

At this point, I want to put Hickey in the background as I work to *denaturalize* the notion of beauty in relation, specifically, to the very politics of gendered and racialized identities that Hickey deems beneath his ('disinterested?') consideration (even while he gets mileage out of the frisson of their transgression by examining works such as Mapplethorpe's homoerotic images of black men). This analysis, which is meant to highlight exactly what is at stake in the revival of 'beauty' by Hickey and his followers will pivot around images of naked women that have served as focal points for discussions about the meaning of beauty or, otherwise stated, as magnets for what feminists have perhaps oversimplistically called the 'male gaze' of interpretive desire. It is, in my view, by excavating the psychic and social structures of desire at work in such images that we can best interrogate what (or whose) interests are served by the rhetoric of beauty.





### God or Goddess? Boucher's Pompadour/Pompadour's Boucher

In François Boucher's elaborate portraits of the extremely powerful Madame de Pompadour (Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson), mistress of Louis XV, the last great Bourbon king of the French monarchy, this extraordinary female intellectual is enframed by an aestheticizing atmosphere of fleshy display.<sup>25</sup> In the 1751 *Toilet of Venus* [52] this 'Venus' is depicted as a celestial (yet domesticated) goddess, surrounded by plump pink cupids, typically Rococo swathes of rich silk taffeta, jewels, and exotic gewgaws.<sup>26</sup> Here is a 'goddess' (the goddess of love, no less) laid low as paramour, a patroness of the arts sympathetically rendered as willfully open flesh offered for the delectation of Royal viewing pleasure: commissioned by Pompadour herself, the painting hung in the *salle-de-bain* at the Château de Bellevue, favorite trysting place for the King and his mistress.<sup>27</sup>

However, and paradoxically, within the discourse of beauty, this image stands as both paradigm and antithesis: it both sums up the way in which white women's bodies have historically been produced within the rhetoric of Western





painting as ‘beautiful’ objects of male desire and exemplifies that which Kantian aesthetics specifically labors to expel. Madame de Pompadour as Venus instantiates the contradictory logic at the base of the aesthetic. First of all, for Kant, disinterestedness requires precisely the removal of all sensual affect: the arbiter must eradicate corporeal enjoyment in his appreciation of true beauty.<sup>28</sup> This anxiety about corporeal desire is, of course, at odds with the insistent depiction of naked women (in the most obvious sense, sites of arousal for the conventional heterosexual male viewer) in the history of Western art. Pompadour/Venus—as paradigm of the female nude—works to contain just the uncontrollable erotic frisson that she invokes.<sup>29</sup> As Jacques Derrida has noted of this aspect of aesthetics, “The concept of art is . . . constructed with . . . a guarantee in view. It is there to raise man up, that is, always, to *erect* a man-god, to avoid contamination from “below” . . . [A] divine teleology secures the political economy of the Fine-Arts.”<sup>30</sup>

Pompadour's Bouchers (which are, reciprocally, Boucher's Pompadours) are doubly charged. Not only do they invoke what they are meant to contain and radically confuse female and male authority, such images also signified for revolutionary France and beyond the reprehensible corruption (otherwise viewed as feminization) of the *ancien régime*.<sup>31</sup> The fluffy, Rococo goddess is, above all, excessively sexual and embraced by an environment of hyperornamentality. She threatens to destroy Kant's argument that art, by definition, excludes decoration and artifice: art, Kant writes, 'must seem as free from all constraint of chosen rules as if it were a product of mere nature.'<sup>32</sup> While being raised to the level of 'goddess of love,' Pompadour is also arguably disempowered as beautiful object; at the same time, as feminist Eunice Lipton has pointed out, she is also deified and given devastating potency through the very sexual power that Kant's aesthetics labors to contain.<sup>33</sup> It was, in fact, precisely such excesses of the Rococo exemplified by Boucher's flamboyant deployment of color, atmosphere, and symbolism to heighten the erotic appeal (the *impure* aesthetic pleasure?) of his object which inspired Kant, writing just a few decades later, in his attempt to *expel* artifice (feminizing display) from the realm of the aesthetic.

Pompadour's Boucher and Boucher's Pompadour are thus both at the center of the discourse of beauty (by 1765 Boucher was named *premier peintre du roi*) and definitively shut out of its rigorous Kantian borders. Boucher and powerful women such as Pompadour were major targets of the Enlightenment *philosophes* in their articulation of new aesthetic and social standards. By the 1760s, the reaction against Boucher had been fully articulated by Kant's Enlightenment colleague, Denis Diderot, who wrote scathingly of Boucher's compositions as making 'an unbearable racket for the eyes.' Boucher, continued Diderot, 'is showing us the prettiest marionettes in the world.'<sup>34</sup> In one swipe, Diderot thus attempts to extinguish both the *feminized* aesthetic of Boucher (which is 'pretty' rather than 'beautiful') and the female power that lay behind it (with Pompadour having been Boucher's most supportive and prominent patron). Once again, we see a deep anxiety regarding that which can't be controlled at the base of the critic's naturalized claim of judgment.

Such naturalizing claims of value function to position the critic in identification with the artist who is, in turn, conflated with God. Thus, through informed and 'disinterested' aesthetic judgment, the critic intuits the meaning and value of the work by discerning the beauty that emanates forth from its contours (as presumably placed there by the divinely inspired artist).<sup>35</sup> This structure of circular identifications, which legitimates artist and interpreter in one gesture by aligning both with a transcendent origin, is what Derrida aptly terms, in the opening quotation of this section, the 'divine teleology' of the aesthetic, with its role in 'erecting' a 'man-god' impervious to the corruption of the feminine and primitive below. In our case, the contamination is signaled by a dangerous feminine sexual *cum* political power (linked, class-wise, to the increasingly questioned privileges of the aristocracy); while the rococo is deemed reactionary by Diderot, it can be viewed at the same time as a radical *freeing* of otherwise enframed and forbidden sexual power.

Given this divine teleology, it is worth returning to Ruskin, who, in the 1849 essay, states that 'God has stamped those characters of beauty which He has made it man's nature to love.'<sup>36</sup> It is 'clear,' as Hickey would claim for his judg-

ment of Mapplethorpe, that it is God—the ultimate patriarch—who secures such claims of beauty. Only God can act as origin and end of beauty, incontrovertible enough to stop the seepage that pollutes the ostensibly closed, otherwise ‘pure’ system of aesthetic judgment (staining the *passee-partout*). In fact, as noted, the history of aesthetics as it developed in the work of Kant and others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is a story about one of the last covertly theological attempts to bridge the seemingly unsurpassable chasm between ‘man’ and ‘nature,’ inside and outside, subject and object. Kant’s notion of aesthetic judgment proposed precisely to bridge this gap by defining a mode of experiencing beauty that would leap the abyss between the natural, the source of all that is beautiful, and the human-made.<sup>37</sup>

By proposing a ‘divine teleology,’ where the figure of the Genius secures a ‘divine agency in art’ the meaning of which can only be determined by the disinterested critic (who, by extension, claims his own ‘divine agency’ as judge), this model of the aesthetic reconfirms a system of privilege that can only be called patriarchal (with all of the colonialist, sexist, and heterosexist assumptions it sustains).<sup>38</sup> The artist/critic circuit—that divine teleology—is given authority by reference to an originary genius, God. It is *as goddess* that Pompadour threatens to disrupt this naturalized circuit of authority—both because of the uncontainability of the erotic pleasure she promises and because of the anxiety invoked by the social and economic power that enabled her to sponsor a painter such as Boucher.<sup>39</sup> Thus, per Diderot’s analysis, Pompadour/Boucher must be shut down. Diderot derides Boucher’s paintings (Pompadour’s body?) as a grotesque ‘invitation to pleasure.’ The heatedness of Diderot’s denunciation alerts us to the fact that this pleasure the pictures supposedly invite is dangerous because it is flamboyantly not ‘disinterested’ or wholesome.

It is of great interest, then, that the very naked white women’s bodies that the aesthetic deploys to defuse the threat of femininity are the vehicles through which this threat is publicly extended and proclaimed. At the same time, the aesthetic is successful enough in its framing exercise such that white women are, to be sure, not ruling the world—nor are academic feminists, Hickey’s anxieties aside. As Peggy Phelan has pointed out in her brilliant critique of the common faith in theories of identity on the power of visibility, ‘[i]f representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture.’<sup>40</sup> The very ambivalence that destructures the aesthetic at its core also points to the slipperiness of meaning and value in relation to all images, not the least those assumed to be ‘beautiful’ by one critic or another.

At this point, it is certainly worth thinking about other works that might be seen as performing an equally dangerous invitation to forbidden pleasures. In this way, I would like to suggest that there are other ‘almost-naked’ or even fully clothed women whose bodies disrupt the aesthetic from within—even more dramatically than that ambiguous figure of the white female nude.

### ‘Olympia’s Maid’

Two contemporaneous texts relating to Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* [53], the scandal of Paris’s 1865 salon, indicate the dangers posed by the *black* female body to the aesthetic:

*Quand, lasse de songer, Olympia s'éveille  
Le printemps entre au bras du doux messenger noir,  
C'est l'esclave, à la nuit amoureuse pareille,  
Qui vient fleurir le jour délicieux à voir.  
L'auguste jeune fille en qui la flamme veille*

*[When, weary of dreaming, Olympia wakes,  
Spring enters in the arms of a gentle black messenger,  
It is the slave, like the amorous night,  
Who comes to make the day bloom, delicious to see:  
the august young girl in whom the fire burns]<sup>41</sup>*

What's to be said for the Negress who brings a bunch of flowers wrapped in a paper, or for the black cat which leaves its dirty footprints on the bed? We would still forgive the ugliness, were it only truthful, carefully studied, heightened by some splendid effect of colour.<sup>42</sup>

Manet's *Olympia* holds a crucial—because highly conflicted—place in the trajectory defining the codification of the aesthetic in Western thought. The painting, conflated with its nude, was widely condemned by critics at the time. *Olympia*, wrote one critic, is 'a sort of female gorilla, a grotesque in India rubber outlined in black [who] . . . apes on a bed, in a state of complete nudity, the horizontal attitude of Titian's *Venus* [of Urbino, 1538].'<sup>43</sup> *Olympia*, as art historian T. J. Clark has argued, travestied conceptions of the beautiful (specifically through its explicit parody of Titian's Renaissance 'masterpiece') such that critics became almost hysterical, scarcely veiling their anxiety in a sarcastic rhetoric of exag-

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Édouard Manet, *Olympia*,  
1863.



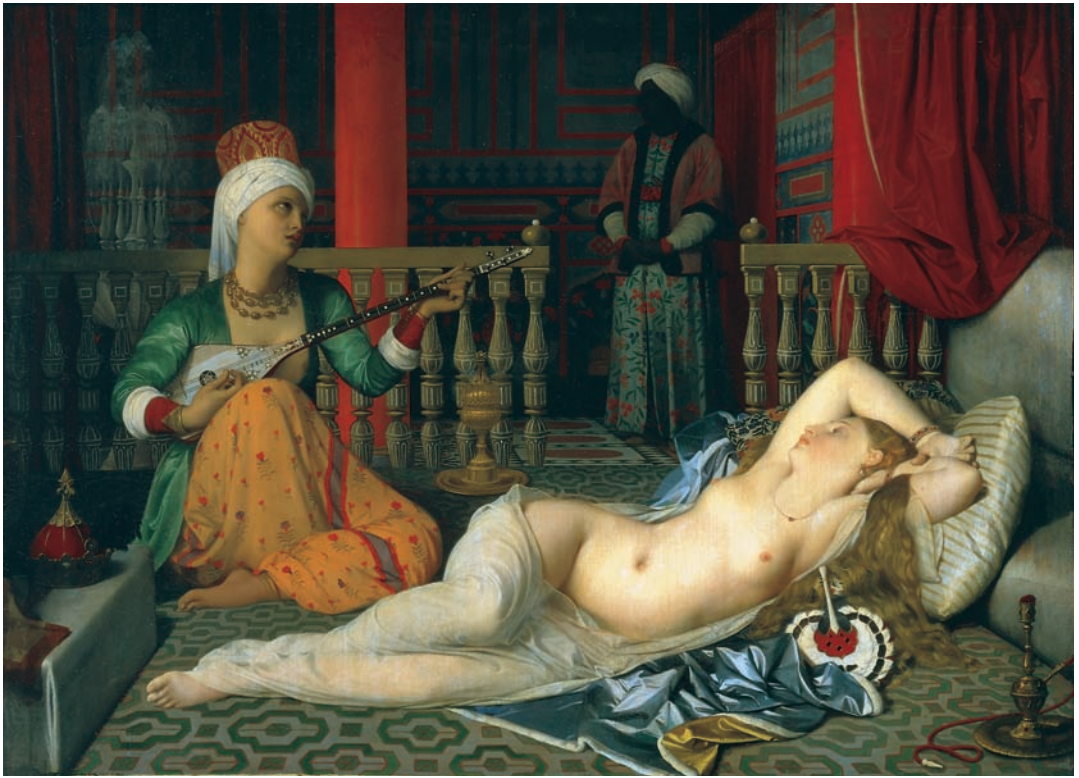


gerated disgust (not only is Olympia a ‘rubber gorilla,’ she is dirty, corpse-like, decrepit, stupid, and ‘of a perfect ugliness’).<sup>44</sup>

Olympia’s radical unhinging of accepted conventions of ‘beauty’—as summed up by contrasting it to Alexandre Cabanal’s *Venus*, which had been effusively praised as the masterpiece of the 1863 salon—resulted in feverish attempts to *close her down*. Olympia must be kept out—or *en-framed*—at all costs, lest the resistance signaled by her rubbery flesh and defiant gaze destroy the pretension of (erotic) disinterestedness held forth by the aesthetic.

And yet, there is something even more disturbing here. Leaving Boucher’s boudoir-encased fluffy pink nudes behind, by the early to mid-nineteenth century, French painters highlighted the delectable whiteness of their naked or almost naked women by posing them against dark bodies.<sup>45</sup> As Lorraine O’Grady has so importantly asked in this regard, what about ‘Olympia’s Maid’? Once brought back into the frame, as it were, the maid points to the fact that it is not, strictly speaking, Olympia who is the greatest threat to the conventional gaze of aesthetic judgment, but the maid herself; surely the tendency to label Olympia a ‘gorilla’ is a displacement of racial anxieties generated by the maid. As O’Grady notes, the maid (painted after a professional model named Laura) is the ‘chaos that must be excised [from the picture], and it is her excision that stabilizes the West’s construct of the female body, for the “femininity” of the white female body is ensured by assigning the not-white to a chaos safely removed from sight. Thus, only the white body remains as the object of a voyeuristic, fetishizing male gaze.’<sup>46</sup> While Olympia is clearly a challenge to the unbridled privilege of sexual ownership claimed by the upper-class European white male viewer, the chaos signified by the maid *exceeds* that proposed by Olympia to such a degree that the maid cannot even be mentioned in contemporaneous critical reviews without an immediate reference to her object status as Olympia’s possession (reinforced by Manet’s choice of the Astruc poem, which makes reference to a black slave, to accompany the picture in the catalogue).<sup>47</sup> The maid, whose ‘hypersexuality possesses the white woman,’ threatens to ‘stain’ Olympia black, as Jennifer Brody has noted of the painting.<sup>48</sup>

Olympia’s maid thus throws into relief not only the anxious misogyny at the base of aesthetic judgment but its classist and racist dimensions. J. A. D. Ingres’s 1839–1840 painting *Odalisque with a Slave* [54] allows a further elaboration of these dimensions, which were linked to Europe’s colonial exploits abroad. Thus, in the Ingres painting a range of racial desirability serves to sustain the conflicted logic of the aesthetic and thereby labors to secure the viewer in his sexual, racial, class, and national superiority. The apparently ‘white’ woman in the foreground is clearly thrown forth as the primary object of sexual desire, her blank genital region coyly offered up through a diaphanous veil of chiffon, her arms thrown back in seeming ecstasy. At the same time, she must not, cannot ‘really’ be white in the European sense since Ingres clearly shows us a Middle Eastern or North African harem (the two vastly different cultures being virtually interchangeable in French painting from this period).<sup>49</sup> Yet she is assigned symbolic whiteness *by contrast* to her harem mates—a somewhat darker skinned female musician, taut reddish nipple peeking out from green silk robe, and a eunuch servant whose black and emasculated body recedes into the depths of the painting’s rich, exaggeratedly ‘Oriental’ interior. (And one might ask, which figure, musician or eunuch, is the ‘Slave’ of the title?) The Ori-



54  
 J. A. D. Ingres, *Odalisque with a Slave*, 1839–1840.

ent, produced in relation to all three bodies in the painting, is rendered exotic and strange, ‘feminized as a passive cipher to be governed by an active (and superior) Western civilization.’<sup>50</sup>

Notably, too, as the skin gets darker, it is more fully covered—to the point where the servant’s body (except for hands and face) is entirely draped in fabric: molded into a phallic sheath as if to palliate the (castration) anxiety that the idea of the eunuch—as well as the image of the female nude—produces in the European masculine imagination. The white European male viewer is offered a cornucopia of exotic/erotic delights, with the threat of racial and sexual otherness defused either by its transformation into whiteness or its veiling and class subordination (the covered eunuch, the objectified musician gazing upwards as if in an opium-induced stupor).<sup>51</sup> Like Olympia’s maid, the olive-skinned musician and reserved black servant function to highlight the available *difference* and, by comparison, supposed ‘purity,’ of the seemingly white odalisque: fleshy, open, penetrable, erotic.

The harem, as contrived through the nineteenth-century French male imaginary, functions as the perfect site for the circulation of uninhibited desires (after all, European men viewed harems as equivalents to bordellos). As Malek Alloula has written, ‘[t]he phantasmatic value of the harem is a function of this presumed absence of limitation to a sexual pleasure lived in the mode of frenzy.’ He adds that it is in the nature of pleasure ‘to scrutinize its object detail by detail, to take possession of it in both a total and a fragmented fashion. It is an intoxication, a loss of oneself in the other through sight.’<sup>52</sup> While the white European male produces an ‘intoxication’ in such images, proposing a



'loss' of the white male subject in the 'other through sight,' he also, as discussed, attempts to defuse the threat posed by such an intoxication through the colored ranking of bodies and through their hierarchical regimentation in space.

This regimentation is, within art discourse, codified as aesthetic composition, its political dimension effectively veiled. Thus, in the major survey book on nineteenth-century art, Robert Rosenblum sums up the evasive exclusions of dominant modes of aesthetic judgment in his rhapsodizing description of the painting, in which he argues that, '[a]s rigorous as his master David in his ability to interlock a multitude of rectilinear volumes and surfaces, Ingres evokes here a feminine ambiance of voluptuous relaxation and engulfing sensuousness.'<sup>53</sup> Even as Ingres exposes and unveils his erotic object(s) he labors to contain her/them through rigid codes of aesthetic display—codes that specifically reiterate differences of class, nation, and race as they function both to incite desire and to allay psychosexual, cultural anxieties about these very differences. This, as Rosenblum's description confirms, is the goal of the mode of aesthetic judgment that has come to define how and what is talked about in art discourse.

### ***Yo Mama* – Renee Cox's Phallus**

Through this rather extended analysis of paintings by Boucher, Manet, and Ingres I hope to have persuaded my readers that anxieties regarding gender are not by any means the only terrors motivating the aesthetic's logic of enframing (either in terms of the production or reception of works of art). In concluding, I want to take a look at a stunning life-sized photographic self-portrait by the young artist Renee Cox. Entitled *Yo Mama*, this 1993 image [55], which I read as exemplifying the efforts on the part of many young women artists working today to dislocate and discredit claims for the neutrality of 'beauty' as a label of aesthetic judgment, can be seen as a definitive talking-back, an aggressive challenge to the still potent institutional force of beauty discourse.

Hickey might well criticize such work—and certainly my reading of it—as motivated by the desire to be 'politically correct'; by such a gesture, he would legitimate his own preferences as inherent rather than ideologically motivated. I would like to stress here again that such rhetoric merely veils privilege (and this is where the crux of my argument against continuing this authoritative aspect of aesthetic judgment lies). Hickey privileges Mapplethorpe's works for their 'enfranchise[ment] of the non-canonical beholder,' with no consideration of who this beholder might be and under what circumstances she or he would become 'enfranchised' through an encounter with an image of, for example, a picture of a young girl with her naked legs spread or two men fist-fucking. Too, Hickey's argument shows a complete and surely strategic lack of any element of self-consciousness that might take into account why *he in particular* finds 'Robert's' works so obviously and directly to convey such *jouissance*.

Like Kant's transcendental subject, Hickey must, in the words of Susan Buck-Morss, 'purge ... himself of the senses which endanger autonomy not only because they unavoidably entangle him in the world, but, specifically, because they make him passive ... instead of active ..., susceptible, like "Oriental voluptuaries," to sympathy and tears.'<sup>54</sup> Self-consciousness would eliminate Hickey's naturalized claim to critical authority—placing him, as it were, in the harem or conspiring with Mapplethorpe in the latter's eroticization of black



male bodies; an admittance of his own erotic interpretive investments—his desire to *penetrate* the mysteries of ‘Robert’s’ works—would expose what is at stake in his attempt to establish his view as inexorably correct.<sup>55</sup>

Returning to Cox, let me propose an alternative way to interpret visual art works that we find compelling, politically astute, entertaining, or, for that matter, ‘beautiful’ (whatever that may mean). Let me project my own partiality for Cox—her body (I want it for my own, to *be* it as well as, perhaps, but this is deeply repressed, to *possess* it) and her mind (I want to mimic what I perceive as her conceptual brilliance and ironic sense of humor). I want to align myself definitively with Cox’s strength of mind and body, as I perceive these being expressed in this taut body-image of a strong naked woman who is at once sexualized object, threatening (masculinized) muscular black female subject, and maternal subject. In my sometimes pain at being white, with the negative responsibilities this entails in Western patriarchy, and experiencing the inevitable privilege that my ‘visible’ bodily appearance assigns me in this culture, I want to *be this someone else*.

This is an impassioned response to Hickey's dismissal of PC, and here I will strategically continue my lapse into self-consciousness. I've always attempted to incorporate a sense of my own responsibility within my judging subjectivity rather than projecting it outward into claims for authenticity; if this is 'PC,' then so be it (though this catch-all term certainly, to say the least, profoundly oversimplifies the complexity and heterogeneity of the vast range of politicized and informed positions on art and culture which Hickey and others attempt to join together under its rubric). As Jennifer Faist recently argued, beauty is Hickey's 'camouflage to lobby for his own ethical and political agendas.'<sup>56</sup> Refusing to camouflage myself, I have to emphasize here that my readings are fully contingent and willfully tendentious; this does not, I hope preclude their being experienced as informed and compelling, at least for some.

I am here, I judge and give meaning—on the basis of what my particular investments are, on the basis of a specific, highly politicized, argument I am trying to make. I am cognizant that I thereby participate in the circuit of meaning ascribed to the author-subject Renee Cox. If I am persuasive, I may entice some of my readers to identify with the positions I outline here (and to agree with my admiration for the 'beauty,' power, and political efficacy of Cox's fantastic image). If I am not, you may dislike the picture and even continue to believe in the immutable authenticity of Dave Hickey's judgments. Either way, it behooves all of us to recognize that beauty—there's no doubt about it—is in the eye of the beholder.<sup>57</sup>

## Queer Wallpaper

The nearest Warhol print to which I have regular, free access is from his 1978 *Sex Parts* series of silk-screens. The image is a print of a pornographic photograph, a close-up of anal sex between men. Normally, this is a very difficult image to gain access to—recent large scale retrospectives of Warhol's paintings and prints have excluded any example of this series. Very few Warhol catalogues include this work—as a result, very few people even know that Warhol made work like this. I came across it by accident.

This particular print hangs on the back wall of M.J.'s, a local gay bar in my neighborhood in Los Angeles. Because most of my friends are queer, and many of them are gay men, I sometimes go to M.J.'s for an evening cocktail [56]. The print hangs on the wall with other 'gay art'—art by gay men, depicting gay sexual life (far less graphically)—and with oversized posters for gladiator movies. There is no wall text explaining what you are looking at—it's there as decoration, as the background for cruising, drinking, dancing, and more. As queer wallpaper.

The function of the word 'queer' in writing about art is hard to pin down. But I am sure that the fact that a Warhol hangs in my local gay bar (not a *hip* gay bar, but an old neighborhood gay bar where it probably goes unrecognized by most of the bar's patrons) is a queer thing.

When we use the word 'queer' to describe art or criticism, we are certainly saying something about the importance of sexuality to art—but we are not always 'outing' the work of an artist or writer as 'gay.' That Warhol's image depicts sex between men may make it gay, but this doesn't necessarily make it queer. We often use the word 'queer' to signal the things that can come with being gay and lesbian, with being a member of a lesbian and gay community, but which are not exactly reducible to sexual identity. Thinking about queer visual culture, in other words, is more than thinking about art by gay men and lesbians. To pursue this line of inquiry is to ask questions about where and how that art happens, about who that art addresses, how that art is visible in some contexts and invisible in others, about what kinds of things art makes possible. It is also to look differently at art in general—at the sexual politics of all art, at what art can tell us about the world, and at how the lines around the category 'Art' are drawn. For me, counter-intuitively, what's queer about that Warhol image is not exactly what it depicts, but where it hangs—and what its location makes visible.

M.J.'s *Sex Parts* print is arguably one of the more accessible 'real Warhols' in Southern California, requiring neither an entrance fee nor an invitation into a private mansion to see it. During business hours, anyone can walk into M.J.'s and check out the Warhol on the back wall, as long as he or she is willing to walk into a gay bar.



A straight person who crosses M.J.'s threshold but is not used to gay spaces might find himself wondering 'Am I welcome here?' or thinking 'I don't belong here.' This is perhaps not entirely unlike the feeling that a lot of people have about museums. The grand institutions of art have a way of making many feel like outsiders. The unease of feeling unwelcome in such spaces is not entirely unlike how many queer scholars feel about the discipline of art history. You can take a class on the history of art since 1945 and never hear a word about sexuality. You can attend a major museum exhibition on Andy Warhol and never learn that he was gay—never mind that homoerotic and explicitly sexual images animate the entire range of his artistic production.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the particular de-gaying effect of 'official' disciplinary rhetoric is perhaps most obvious in the history of critical writing about Warhol, who is also, paradoxically, in Richard Dyer's words, 'the most famous gay man who ever lived.'<sup>2</sup> Mandy Merck writes, 'as out as Warhol may have been, gay as [Warhol's films] *My Hustler*, *Lonesome Cowboys*, *Blow Job* may seem, his assumption to the postmodern pantheon has been a surprisingly straight ascent, if only in its stern detachment from any form of commentary that could be construed as remotely sexy.'<sup>3</sup> The full discus-

sion of sexuality and art is a very recent development in art history—as central to art history as queer people are (as, for example, artists, critics, collectors, and curators), the subject of sexuality still remains outside the official boundaries of the field. Those writers (such as Jonathan Weinberg, Harmony Hammond, Gavin Butt, and Richard Meyer) who do take up sexuality in their work are, in essence, carving out a new field of scholarship.<sup>4</sup> The long-standing hostility of art history to the subject of identity is the reason why so much of the most influential queer writing about art and visual culture comes from outside the discipline. Queer scholars in more politicized fields such as film (e.g. Richard Dyer), performance studies (Sue-Ellen Case, José Muñoz), visual/cultural studies (Douglas Crimp, Judith Halberstam), and critical theory (Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) have provoked dramatic shifts in how we understand some of the most significant artists of this period.<sup>5</sup>

For those of us attached to queer subjects—such as Andy Warhol’s fascination with gay porn; the sexual radicalism of films by Jack Smith, Carolee Schneemann, and Cheryl Dunye; the coded queer subtexts embedded in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, and Jasper Johns; or the utopian drive of lesbian feminist artists like Harmony Hammond—the systematic negation of queer sexualities from art history’s official record can leave us feeling, well, as though we’ve walked into the wrong bar.

### Queering Criticism

Writing about sexuality and art after 1945 differs from similar scholarship about other periods because unlike art preceding this era, many of its most famous figures (like Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Isaac Julien, Harmony Hammond, Catherine Opie) were and are openly and recognizably gay and lesbian. Toward the end of the 1960s, in the US and Western Europe gay men and lesbians formed new social and political movements around sexual identity, and began en masse to fight homophobia—in the US this movement was famously sparked by the Stonewall uprising, a protest led largely by Latina drag queens in response to a 1969 police raid on a gay bar in New York City.<sup>6</sup> In late twentieth-century art we see artists and audiences publicly identifying themselves as gay and lesbian, and we see curators organizing exhibitions that explore the idea of gay and lesbian identity and what it means to be a gay artist, as well as the history of representations of homoerotic bonds and identities.<sup>7</sup> The word ‘queer’ emerges as a key term in conversations about sexuality against this backdrop—in which, on the one hand, we see the proliferation of representations of queer communities in all their varieties and on a range of fronts (in film, performance, painting, photography, etc.) and, on the other, we nevertheless find the systematic exclusion of art and writing by gay and lesbian artists from art historical scholarship.

In the 1980s, the AIDS crisis added a new level of urgency to the battle against homophobia—and it is at this moment that we begin to see the word ‘queer’ circulating in academic writing, and in and around contemporary art. ‘Queer’ was recuperated in the late 1980s from its more everyday use (often as a homophobic insult) by gay and lesbian activists working especially with ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)—as in the rallying chant, ‘We’re Here, We’re Queer, Get Used to It!’<sup>8</sup> A number of the intellectuals



now associated with queer scholarship in art criticism and visual culture (such as Douglas Crimp and Simon Watney) have been deeply involved with AIDS activism, AIDS organizations, and ACT UP itself.<sup>9</sup> The particular impact of AIDS on artists, on the art community, and on contemporary intellectual life cannot be understated, and the energy and political commitment that animates much writing about sexuality, art, and politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s should be understood in that context. The role of homophobia in state and public indifference to the AIDS epidemic made the project of anti-homophobic inquiry feel not just important, but a matter of life and death. Some of the most influential writings on sexuality and visual culture (such as Watney's 1987 *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media*) grew directly from the need to intervene against homophobic systems of representation. Artists, activists, and scholars found themselves asking questions such as: 'How do we mourn the loss of people whose lives have already been ignored, erased, or stigmatized as degenerate?' and 'How do we assert the importance of gay underground sexual culture in a society that associates same-sex and non-monogamous sexual practices with disease and death?' On the intellectual movement that formed in response to the AIDS crisis, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write,

AIDS activism forced the issue of translating queerness into the national scene. AIDS made those of us who confronted it realize the deadly stakes of discourse; it made us realize the public and private unvoiceability of so much that mattered, about anger, mourning, and desire.... AIDS also showed that rhetorics of expertise limit the circulation of knowledge, ultimately authorizing the technocratic administration of peoples' lives. Finally, in a way that directly affects critics of polite letters, AIDS taught us the need to be disconcertingly explicit about things such as money and sexual practices, for as long as euphemism and indirection produce harm and privilege.<sup>10</sup>

In their emphasis on the challenge the AIDS crisis posed to intellectuals, making their writing carry the urgency of the moment, Berlant and Warner gesture toward queer criticism's double edge: for not only does queer criticism bring sexuality and desire to the center of our attention; it sometimes also experiments with (and therefore 'queers') the practice of criticism itself—often by injecting a personal or anecdotal voice into scholarly writing.<sup>11</sup>

In 'Getting the Warhol We Deserve,' Douglas Crimp gestures toward the relationship between the personal and the political in queer criticism when he writes,

That is one reason why an art such as [underground film-maker Jack] Smith's—and Warhol's—matters, why I want to make of it the art I need and the art I deserve—not because it reflects or refers to a historical gay identity and thus serves to confirm my own now, but because it disdains and defies the coherence and stability of all sexual identity. That to me is the meaning of *queer*, and it is a meaning we need now, in all its historical richness, to counter both the normalization of sexuality and the historical reification of avant-garde genealogy.<sup>12</sup>

Crimp re-asserts one of the principle themes of queer criticism—its investment not in the articulation and production of concrete categories of sexuality and gender, but in the very real ways that queer art (be it a novel, a photograph, a film, a performance) can cut across and dismantle the attempt to produce sexual

subjects as inevitable members of a 'type,' and, at the same time, call into question the disciplinary narratives that have formed around queer art that has been absorbed into the canonical record (such as work by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, or Andy Warhol), or that stubbornly remains 'underground' (such the films of Jack Smith, the performances of lesbian punk bands such as Tribe 8 or The Butchies, or the performances of the Los Angeles-based artist Ron Athey).

To approach the subject of sexuality and art from questions like these is to re-imagine the subject/object relation that structures much art historical scholarship. It is to push art historical writing beyond the rhetoric of connoisseurship and expertise. It is to place special emphasis on the character of the relationship between ourselves and our objects, photographs, paintings, and films—to ask what it is that we get out of our love for art. In paying attention to these artists we discover that their 'queerness' resides not only in the domain of the sexual, but in how they make art, in the kinds of relationships between people and art they foster. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1993 essay 'Queer and Now' thus speaks to how we become attached to certain works of art because they seem to speak to us, to speak about us—and because they seem, in particular, to speak to the experience of living at odd angles to dominant culture:

I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high culture or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love.<sup>13</sup>

We feel recognized in those sites where meanings don't 'line up tidily with each other,' in part because they mirror our struggles with those moments when Sedgwick writes, 'all institutions are speaking with one voice,' when 'religion, state, capital, ideology, domesticity, the discourses of power and legitimacy' unite as a monolith around one word, such as 'family' or 'nation.'<sup>14</sup> For those of us (which is probably most of us) who find ourselves living at odd angles with these monolithic structures (because we are, for example, gay, black, working-class, an immigrant, etc.), art is not a luxury, but a necessity—queer readings of books, novels, films, paintings, and performances give us our maps, our user's manuals for finding pleasure in a world more often than not organized around that pleasure's annihilation. Robert Reid-Pharr thus writes that queer political work 'must necessarily be the politics of the moment, the politics of action, the politics of bombast, the politics of innovation, and most especially the politics of joy.'<sup>15</sup> Queer artists share this suspicion of the rhetoric of connoisseurship that defines art history, and have furthermore shaped their practices not around developing a presence in the gallery system, but around the cultivation of an alternative community. The London-based body artist Franko B, for example, describes his political commitment in the following words:

I try to work against the imposition of moral codes that dictate what is right or wrong. I started using my body as a 'fuck you' to Section 28, to the age of consent, to the Spanner trial [three British legal sites that specifically criminalize gay and lesbian sex]. I said 'fuck you' to the ignorance and bigotry around issues of desire, sexuality and race that thrive in institutions from the so-called liberal environment of the art academies and galleries to

the tabloids and the right-wing rags. . . . My work is . . . rooted in the problems of protection, love, and freedom.<sup>16</sup>

At its best, queer art and queer art history is animated by exactly this blend of passion and commitment.

### Imaginative Genealogies: Visualizing Queer Art Histories

Although queer criticism and theory coalesces as such in the late 1980s and early 1990s around the intense activist, intellectual, and creative energy of AIDS activism, it also has an immediate relationship to the identity-based movements of the 1970s and 1980s—to, for example, radical feminism, to the Stonewall uprising and gay liberation, to the civil rights movement—as well as to a range of critical schools of thought. This is to say that one might imagine multiple genealogies for queer scholarship and art. Given the importance of the intersection of different aspects of identity (like race and gender) to queer criticism one might, for example, ground its intellectual history in the writings of lesbian feminists of color (such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa) and the groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), or in the black feminist radicalism of lesbian poet Audre Lorde.<sup>17</sup> Much queer theory—such as Judith Butler’s seminal work on the nature of gender and sexual identity in *Gender Trouble* (1990)—is anchored in feminist theory, in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir (who famously declared ‘One is not born a woman’ in *The Second Sex*), the philosophy of Monique Wittig (who declared in *The Straight Mind* that ‘Lesbians are not women’), and in the work of psychoanalytic theorists like Joan Riviere (whose 1929 essay ‘Womanliness as Masquerade’ is crucial to psychoanalytic readings of the constructedness of gender difference).<sup>18</sup> One of the foundational texts in queer theory, *Between Men* (1985), Eve Sedgwick’s analysis of the dynamics of homophobia and the social regulation of relations between men, begins with an assertion of the importance of materialist and radical feminism to the book’s project.

Many of the artists and intellectual leaders of gay, lesbian, and queer feminist communities have furthermore been Marxists—their political radicalism is not only about re-imagining family and forms of intimacy, but also about generating a critique of capitalism’s investment in hetero-patriarchy. For some of the artists most profoundly identified with queer art making the ‘queerness’ of their ethos is directly linked to their antipathy toward consumer culture and the careerism of the art world. Jack Smith not only filmed the camp classic *Flaming Creatures* (1963, arguably queer visual culture’s filmic ur-text), but penned inspired rants against ‘landlordism.’<sup>19</sup> We can also look to the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) aesthetic of video artist George Kuchar (who has made hundreds of videotapes about everything from tornadoes to cats), queer ‘zine culture (e.g. Tammy Rae Carland’s *I ‘heart’ Amy Carter* (c. 1992–4), Vaginal Davis’s *Fertile Latoya Jackson* (1982–91), and the collectively produced *LTTR* (2002–present)—‘Lesbians to the Rescue’—as modes of art making that resist the market-driven ethics of official museum and gallery culture.

David Wojnarowicz explored the relationship between corporate greed, homophobia, and the AIDS crisis in his writings and in his art. *Untitled (Hujar Dead)* (1988–9), for example, memorializes his friend (an artist who had died

of AIDS) and considers 'the deadly economics of the AIDS crisis.'<sup>20</sup> *Untitled* consists of a collaged series of photographs of Hujar's corpse (images of his face, hands, and feet) underneath a layer of text. Nearly the entire surface is covered with a 46-line long paragraph, a single sentence which moves back and forth between despair and outrage—at the narrator's own decline, at this high cost of healthcare, and, more pointedly, at the smug and murderous attitudes of public officials and corporate executives. The artist writes, 'there's a thin line a very thin line and as each T-cell disappears from my body it's replaced by ten thousand pounds of rage ... it's been murder on a daily basis for eight count them eight long years and we're expected to pay taxes to support this public and social murder and we're expected to quietly and politely make house in this windstorm of murder. ...' Hujar is buried beneath this breathless and moving single sentence and framing both the rant and the images of Hujar are dollar bills. Like Hujar, a number of the names we associate most often with queer art making (from Jack Smith to Andy Warhol to the Italian artist, film-maker, and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini) often made capitalism and consumer culture as the subject of their work (as in Warhol's silk-screens of Campbell's soup cans and of celebrity icons like Marilyn Monroe).

We can construct other contexts and histories for contemporary queer art, or better yet, we can look at the work of contemporary artists to see how they imagine alternative historical contexts for themselves. In part because so much of the history of gay and lesbian life is a history of exclusion and erasure, much queer art takes history (and even 'Art History') as its subject. The Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura, for example, performs a series of cross-racial, cross-cultural, and cross-historical identifications when he photographs himself in drag as Marilyn Monroe, as the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, or as the white prostitute in Manet's 1863 painting *Olympia*. The Black British artist Yinka Shonibare imagines himself in a series of photographs as a Victorian dandy—surrounded by dissipated bohemians in a bedroom orgy, or by dignified intellectuals in a masculine salon. As these artists identify with and re-work the past, they practice what Elizabeth Freeman has called 'temporal drag.' The term 'temporal drag' exploits the associations that the word 'drag' has with cross-gender performance and also 'with all of the associations that the word drag has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present.' Temporal drag, Freeman continues, is the 'stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceed[s our] own historical moment.'<sup>21</sup> Freeman develops this term in her analysis of *Shulie* (1997), Elizabeth Subrin's shot-by-shot recreation of a 1967 film of the same title about Shulamith Firestone. In 1967, Firestone was then a student at the Art Institute of Chicago, but later, in 1970, she would write *The Dialectic of Sex*, one of radical feminism's most important manifestos. In recreating this film (which was suppressed by Firestone), Subrin asks 'what Second Wave feminism might mean to those who did not live through it except possibly as children.'<sup>22</sup> We see a similar deployment of temporal drag in David Wojnarowicz's photographic series 'Arthur Rimbaud in New York' (1978–9), in which the artist photographs a young man in a range of urban bohemian underground settings (on the subway, cruising for sex, shooting heroin, masturbating), all with a mask of the French poet covering his face.

Closely related to queer projects that imagine temporal slips and hauntings, that fill the present with the past (and vice versa), is work that explores the

often overwhelming sense of loss that marks especially artists who were making work throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and were therefore grappling with the impact of AIDS on the artistic community. Wojnarowicz photographed himself almost completely buried in sand, produced images of Buffalo tumbling off a bluff, and, as noted, superimposed a rant against corporate greed and indifference over a photo collage of the corpse of his friend the photographer Peter Hujar, who had died of AIDS. Felix Gonzalez-Torres covered billboards with an enormous and profoundly melancholic image of an empty bed (1991). Video artist Ming Yuen S. Ma's *Sniff* (1997) shows the artist naked, crawling in a bed searching for the scent of an absent lover as the video image itself appears to disintegrate. One of the most influential works in this vein is Isaac Julien's film *Looking for Langston* (1998), which at once articulates the importance of the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes as a black gay artist, mourns the erasure of homosexuality from representations of the Harlem Renaissance, and connects these subjects to the fragility of queer black queer bohemian communities today.

### Wall Text

Several years ago (in 2002) a friend of mine got me into the press preview for the self-declared definitive retrospective of the work of Andy Warhol at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. I was already familiar with critiques of the show from my colleagues in London, who had seen it at the Tate, and were floored, as I would be, by the particularly cynical framing of the exhibition, which excluded huge sections of Warhol's oeuvre—namely, anything visibly sexual—from its 'survey' of his career. I walked through the exhibit, tried to keep an open mind, and then settled into the crowd gathered to hear the men responsible for the exhibition—the mayor, the curator, and the director of the museum—speak.

The mayor's remarks at the press conference stayed well inside the museum's official line on Warhol and Los Angeles—'Andy always did love Hollywood.'

It took a while for the shock of the spectacle to settle in: the mayor of Los Angeles delivered his rambling speech, most of which was about money—money donated, money the city hoped to squeeze out of art patrons visiting downtown Los Angeles for a glimpse of superstardom—all this was spoken at the foot of a giant Warhol portrait of Chairman Mao. The devastating political irony of the Mao portrait, which renders the face of Communist China into a 'brand' (*à la* Campbell's Soup or Coca-Cola), was, one suspected, lost on the museum and city officials behind this media event. For some, however, the image of Mao can never be fully emptied out of its historical force. If the museum had imagined its constituency as comprising, in part, the range of Asian communities that make up Los Angeles, it might not have been so casual in visually pairing the mayor and museum director with Chairman Mao, the iconic image of the Cultural Revolution, as they announced their desire to bring more money to the city.

The thoughtlessness of the pairing was a reflection of the exhibit's perspective on Warhol's work as an existential exercise in nothingness—which is, as it happens, one of the ways through which Warhol is 'de-gayed' by museums. The

'de-gaying' effect was reinforced by the fact that the exhibit had no wall text: the museum wanted to let the works 'speak for themselves.'

Once the speeches were over, the museum director offered to take questions. Since I am a Warhol scholar who has written about the active refusal of museums to acknowledge the importance of Warhol's sexuality to his work, I felt it was up to me to be the loose canon and ask the 'sex question.' Reluctantly, I stepped up to the mike and asked how it was possible that one could curate a survey of the career of one of the most famously gay men ever (an artist who, for instance, premiered his films in gay porn houses) and elide the subject of sexuality from all discussion of the importance and meaning of the work.

My voice seemed to disappear into the space of the gallery. I felt like I was talking in a room full of pillows. The mike wasn't on (in fact, I'm not even sure it was even plugged in) and the room emptied out as I posed my awkward, and oddly academic, question. I forced myself to get to the end of my sentence, even though I felt with each word the increasing pointlessness of my intervention.

I heard myself: shrill, nervous, slightly hysterical. I saw myself, in that context, as small, and—most painfully—low-class. (To ask a question like that!) In my battered leather coat, jeans, and ponytail, I felt like an ANGRY WOMAN, and thought about Valerie Solanas, a radical lesbian who shot Warhol in 1968 and nearly killed the artist. I pictured her in her long leather coat, carrying a wrinkled paper bag hiding a gun and a sanitary napkin. A manifesto in one hand, a gun in the other, she was destined to an obscure form of infamy. A flash-image that expressed a fantasy about my own importance to this scene.

What response could he give? the museum director explained, slightly annoyed. Since I'd seen 'it' (meaning the gay stuff)—'it' was in the work itself, and didn't need any explanation. Which was as much as saying that if one doesn't see 'it,' 'it' isn't there either. And which, for me, felt about as good as hearing that I wasn't there at all. And, on some level, I felt my critical love affair with Warhol come to an end. Why bother? 'Why bother explaining what "it" is, and what's missing from the show to people who could care less?' I thought. And I let it go.

I am not sharing this anecdote because I think it represents a good example of a critical intervention. Quite the opposite. As much as I wanted to intervene in the rinsing out of Warhol, I knew in my heart I wasn't in any position to pull off that intervention. My attempt to speak out in that context was ridiculous. It was not only ridiculous of me to think I might be heard, it was ridiculous even to think that the microphones were plugged in. A huge institution like MOCA, dependent on the good will of its most conservative constituents, is expert at avoiding the mess of subjects like Warhol's queerness, and the long history of homophobic responses to that topic on the part of critics, historians, and museums. And, it is expert at managing our feelings—on making us think, 'Why bother?'

We cannot underestimate the impact of this problem not only on critics, but on artists themselves. The economic pressures, the political forces that determine what goes in museums and galleries and gets printed in art journals, magazines, and newspapers are, for some, not just overwhelming, but annihilating—for some, figuring out how to make work in this environment isn't a career problem, it's a matter of survival.



And then one night, looking for a good place to have a cocktail with an old friend of mine who is a gay man, I wandered into M.J.'s, and saw the Warhol on the back wall—exactly the kind of work that you never see in museums. And in M.J.'s, Warhol's *Sex Parts* doesn't need wall text explaining to bar patrons its art historical significance. No one is there looking for a lesson in art history.

And I remembered: *that*—the integration of art into life—is just the sort of thing that queer art is all about.

## Jennifer Doyle: Queer Wallpaper

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# Globalization and its Discontents

## Introduction

Trying to leave a museum behind when one walks out of the door may be like trying to exit a labyrinth similar to that once described by Derrida as including in itself its own exits.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of museums and of art history has been essential to the fabrication and maintenance of the modern world. European modernity—in Heidegger's phrase the 'age of the world picture' (i.e. the world as exhibition)—is also a labyrinth of the kind just mentioned, where the exits to an exposition, fair, theme park, theatre, or museum seem to lead immediately to more of the same. Timothy Mitchell, in the first selection below, 'Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order', from 1989, makes a complementary point in his discussion of nineteenth-century Parisian expositions and the astonished reactions to them by Egyptian and other non-European visitors, highlighting the specificities of the modern European penchant for transforming the world into a representation: an exhibition.

This obsession with the 'organization of the view' (*intizam al-manzar*, in Arabic), as the visitors characterized European behaviour both at home and as tourists everywhere in the world, involved understanding the world as a system of objects whose very organization was believed to evoke some larger meaning or reality (Empire, Progress, Spirit of a People, and so on). Such a world demanded to be understood in terms of palpable distinctions between objects 'in themselves' and their 'meanings'—representations of what Heidegger called *dis-position*<sup>3</sup>—and was compatible with an ethical view of the individual as itself represented *in and as* his or her works and deeds. As if an individual could be separated into 'material' and 'immaterial' portions (bodies and souls), the latter distinct from or even persisting beyond its embodiment.

Which recalls Hegel and his history of art as the account of the unfolding of Spirit whose trace is legible or embodied in art objects: the museological or exhibitionary order which is the subject of several selections in this chapter. Mitchell argues that 'orientalism' was (and is) not just a nineteenth-century instance of how one culture (Europe) portrays another, nor is it merely an aspect of colonial domination. It is more than the (presumably alterable) *content* of a policy, but is rather an essential part of the *cognitive methods of order and truth* (what I've referred to elsewhere in these introductions as epistemological technologies) constituting European modernity itself. This would be part and parcel of a more fundamental cognitive organization of the modern

European and Eurocentric world *as* an 'exhibitionary order'. Such a world, of course, is driven by a desire to possess 'realities behind' their 're-presentations'—a desire that may forever be unsatisfied; a point echoed in the Coda to the present volume, below.

Mitchell's arguments resonate to some extent with those of Derrida in a famous critique of Saussurian linguistic semiology, summarized in an interview with Julia Kristeva in 1968.<sup>4</sup> Derrida argued that Saussure's maintenance of a rigorous distinction between signifier and signified allowed for the construal of signifieds as concepts which were somehow autonomous, with an independent existence apart from the signifiers or forms used to 'express' them. This resonates also with some of the most common binary distinctions familiar to art history, discussed elsewhere: form vs. content; spirit or idea vs. its expression or representation; etc.—themselves with clear metaphysical and theological subtexts.

Globalization—the generic contemporary term referring to interconnected ideologies, policies, and practices supporting trans- and supranational flows of capital—itself constitutes a massively effective 'organization of views', in this case corresponding to the harnessing of diverse resources, interests, political, cultural, and social practices in the service of hegemonic economic order. Global capital fabricates a virtual world order from the perspective of the relative economic value of practices and products of all kinds; an arena of investment opportunities (or foreclosures) where artistic practices of all kinds may be effectively staged as variable commodities with calculable exchange value. Among the palpable effects of this has been an increasingly explicit alignment of artistic production with current or potential market values, and the concomitant marginalization of practices not readily amenable to commodification—works, for example, not of 'biennale quality'.<sup>5</sup>

Much recent disciplinary response to globalization has been either negative or suspicious: as one recent anthology typically claimed, 'Globalism [*sic*] is arguably the most pressing issue facing art criticism and art history. As the number of art history departments continues to grow, there is a danger art history will become a uniform practice around the world and may soon settle to a global standard.'<sup>6</sup> Many extravagant claims about globalization have obscured what is commonly overlooked: its genesis and evolution in early modern and Enlightenment attempts to articulate modes of commensurability amongst diverse fields of knowledge and knowledge production. The evolution of art history as a European institution, for example, was never separate from an emerging vision of art as a global, pan-human phenomenon, even if the arts of Europe were characteristically situated at and as the apex of aesthetic evolution and cognitive sophistication—itself not entirely distinct from early nineteenth-century Hegelian evolutionism of Spirit discussed above.

In fact, the idea of a global or world art history was implicit (albeit with a variety of conflicting motivations and inflections) from the foundations of the discipline in the West. In concert with the evolution of modern notions of European national and artistic identity in relation to one or more perceived or fabricated extra-European Others, academic art history as conventionally practised in many Western societies was in its origins a self-proclaimed transnational phenomenon, grounded in an explicit faith in the pan-humanness of

the *idea* of (what it acknowledged to be) art.<sup>7</sup> Even if the idea of a truly 'global' art history was in practice projected onto a distant multiculturalist horizon of a 'complete' art history of the future. Underscoring that all-inclusive discipline-yet-to-come, present practice could be animated with the belief that for every people, time, and place there could, would, or should be cited a particular and unique 'art', subject to comparison and contrast with all other extant, lost, or even potential artistic 'traditions' or 'histories'. In a comparable manner, museology could itself be animated by the belief that any collection of artworks or artefacts was understood to be legible as a mere (or significant) fragment of an ideal totality that no one institution could fully contain. Each collection was regarded as an epitome of a future (global) fullness.<sup>8</sup>

Globalization is a recent effect and artefact of a half-millennium-long movement. The period of European expansion across the planet beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing unabated since then on increasingly diverse fronts brought with it a concomitant need for methods of translation amongst all conceivable areas of knowledge and knowledge production in what today might be termed the human sciences. A plethora of modern institutions, including museums, universities, markets, and a wide variety of academic sciences, have arisen to address the fundamental problem of *incommensurability*: the possibility and feasibility of finding common denominators between disparate modes of knowledge both within and between societies and cultural traditions. (How could there be a universal discipline of 'art history' if societies X, Y, and Z don't have a word corresponding to 'art'?)

From the perspective of current debates over globalization, what emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century as the academic discipline of art history may itself be understood as one hypothetical approximation of a universalizing cultural historiography. In that respect, it shared its teleological agendas with Western disciplinarity as such. Amongst prominent early examples of and catalysts for what we call globalization—and one that was an explicit attempt to link together art, industry, commerce, finance, and aesthetic morality—was the 1851 Great Exhibition at London's Crystal Palace. This was the first universal, trans-cultural exhibition of 'the arts and manufactures of all nations', arguably also the midwife to what were becoming the modern European institutions and professions of art history and museology.<sup>9</sup> Essential by-products of this exhibitionary order were its discursive complements: the 'world histories of art' (or 'histories of world art') staged in various academic and cultural institutions across Europe, America, and Australia, in connection with massively marketed introductions to the 'art of the world'.

The Crystal Palace exhibition (the brainchild of Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert) was grounded in a British imperial vision of a world of nation-states (actual and emergent), joined together (and simultaneously distinguished) by their aesthetic and industrial production and their marketing and dissemination by public and corporate means; an embodied vision that was the effective catalyst for the nineteenth-century industries of travel, tourism, taste, fashion, and (national, regional, and local) heritage and identity politics, of which museology and art history were powerfully and globally effective institutions and professions. In juxtaposing together in plain sight a panoptic sample of all the world's works and wares, the exhibition was the first great projection of a world of global commodification: a world in which



form and spirit were circulated together; and a powerful ideal template of all subsequent versions of museology.

The essay by Carol Duncan of 1995, 'The Art Museum as Ritual', considers the performative and ceremonial aspects of museum architecture, spatial organization, and display, as well as the roles performed by viewers and users in these civic rituals. She provides a compelling account of the ways in which museum practices are centrally invested in fabricating and sustaining dominant social ideologies. At the same time, the exhibitionary order of the modern museum reveals an underlying spiritual dimension, and Duncan argues that the eighteenth-century invention of aesthetics constituted a transference of spiritual values from the sacred to the secular realm of social life. The museum is an institutional *corollary* of this philosophical transference, in which art objects were invested with transformative spiritual, ethical, and emotional power; aspects of this topic are also considered in the following selection.

One of the most interesting twentieth-century texts on changes in the practice of visual artistry with potentially radical implications for understanding the relations between art and social, cultural, and political life is Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility'. Known today in three 1930s versions, two of them not known during Benjamin's lifetime (1892–1940), it garnered attention beyond the orbit of germanophone art history only during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In all versions of the essay, the author discussed art history as constituting a working-out of tensions between two polarities within the artwork itself—the work's cult value and its exhibitionary value. With the secularization of the arts (on which, however, see the Coda below), and due to what Benjamin took to be a (relative) cessation of its service to ritual, the object's exhibitionary and consequently its exchange value come to the fore—a situation accelerated enormously with technological advances in reproduction and dissemination. It is that alleged qualitatively new status of the work that concerns Benjamin above all.

Although Benjamin's hypotheses were grounded in views of art and artifice that were ultimately Hegelian and spiritualist in orientation, he insisted that in the contemporary world (that of the 1930s), the loss of a 'magic aura' of artworks was compensated for by an increase in the element of art's playfulness and multiple affordances. The latter is of interest primarily because reproduction enables an 'original' to circulate in situations the original could not attain, thus 'meeting the spectator half-way', and in environments radically different from those of any original encounter. Such sites of encounter offer immensely multiplied opportunities for social and political intervention and transformation—a situation capitalized upon by the fascism of Benjamin's own time, and available to fascism's potential critiques.

The 'age of technological reproducibility' referred to by Benjamin is clearly an age of globalization and of the extra-local and trans-cultural circulation of capital as well as of aesthetic or cultural products and processes. Benjamin's sense of the uniqueness and authenticity of the work of art was tied to its contextual locus and site of production and original construal, and yet the object's aura-filled mode of existence survives in the 'secular worship' of beauty that

developed in Europe in the Renaissance, problematizing any clear distinction between 'cult value' and 'exhibitionary value'.

In the face of contemporary globalization, and in light of its very long and complex history prior to the twenty-first century (in fact emerging with European expansion and colonization beginning in the sixteenth century), what are the prospects for a discipline, profession, and institution currently staged under the rubric of 'art history' (or 'visual culture' studies) which, despite enduring allegiances to a universalizing vision of art, may still be tied to very particular (and socially and culturally specific) Western notions of identity, authorship, originality, objecthood, and artistry in a rapidly changing social and political and economic (global) environment? In such an environment it would appear that such local verities regarding art, object- or subject-hood, or even time and space themselves may or may not be translatable. These and related themes are addressed in the various selections making up the present chapter.

Many contemporary artists have been dealing in an increasingly wide and diverse variety of media with the contradictions of globalization, and with the failure of cross-cultural translation, and, more importantly, with one culture's failure to engage in any depth with cultures and ideas that are different from it. In the face of extravagant claims for the contemporary globalized world in which we can 'bridge' huge geographical distances in a few hours, or where we can 'communicate' in virtual space, online, instantaneously, the work of many contemporary artists demonstrates that we trip up at the first encounter with the material realities of linguistic and cultural difference. It is significant, therefore, that so many contemporary artistic practices deal with the contradictions between the abstractions of a globalized commercial world and the very material world of communities, languages, and cultures that are imagined to be bridged by globalization. This mismatch examined and critiqued in actual artistic practice and art criticism remains largely absent in the literature on the economic and financial aspects of globalization.

But is art history (and art theory and criticism) somehow not 'translatable' because of insurmountable differences between societies and cultures on many fundamental conceptual issues? Concepts that are often taken for granted in one society present very complex problems when we try to transfer them to the arts of another society, or even of one's own society at different times in its own history, the notorious example being that of academic art history applying modernist notions of 'art' to pre-modern practices in Europe. The same is true of many concepts common in modern and contemporary Western art history, theory, methodology, and criticism: the common vocabulary of art history is unstable, culture-specific, and constantly evolving. Yet attempts at creating an 'international' or 'world' history of art, or what some today may still be calling 'world art' or 'global art history', are themselves products of the forces of globalization with respect to the commodification and trans-national marketing of art and culture.

Aspects of these problems are explicitly confronted in the essays below by Satya Mohanty ('Can our Values be Objective' of 2002) and Marquard Smith ('Visual Culture Studies: Questions of History, Theory, and Practice' of 2006). In the former, the author investigates the interconnections between concepts of political, ethical, and aesthetic value, relating these to long-standing

debates over connections between local and more general cultural conditions. In the latter, Marquard Smith reviews historical justifications for establishing a disciplinary or interdisciplinary practice of visual culture studies. The latter resonates with perspectives considered at various points in the introductory essays in the present volume, where the discipline (art history, visual studies) is staged as a 'when' rather than a 'what'. Which recalls Mitchell's discussion of the *intizam al-manzar* or organization of the view, above.

The idea of the *object of attention* of art historical or visual culture studies as a certain *kind* of thing or as a *process* and as a way of attending to experience (including the experiencing of things) is the subject of the final essay in this chapter, María Fernández's essay "'Life-like": Historicizing Process and Responsiveness in Digital Art'. The author considers the implications of conceiving artworks as *evolving processes* (in various traditional and contemporary media) rather than as static objects, and, in so doing, presents a useful introduction to the origins and development of digital culture, with its bridging of conventionally distinct domains of the arts, the natural sciences, the humanities, and social sciences.

Concern with the challenges of globalization *to* art and art history—some of which are cited in this chapter—should be balanced with an awareness of how precisely art and art history *themselves pose challenges to* the (allegedly homogenizing) forces of (economic) globalization, both in the past and in the present. It may prove in the long run as important to articulate the ways in which art and art history work to problematize and trouble the narrowly economic cognitive or exhibitionary order of globalization. But to even begin to address such a question with a modicum of historical, ethical, and critical awareness would require that we begin by clearly articulating what it is we would require of such a practice, whether we call that 'art history' or not, or whether what we take to constitute 'art' itself is to remain a 'what' invariably subject to commodification (a representation of value) rather than an inherently elusive or relational 'when' (a process of creating and transforming value).

# Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order

It is no longer unusual to suggest that the construction of the colonial order is related to the elaboration of modern forms of representation and knowledge. The relationship has been most closely examined in the critique of Orientalism. The Western artistic and scholarly portrayal of the non-West, in Edward Said's analysis, is not merely an ideological distortion convenient to an emergent global political order but a densely imbricated arrangement of imagery and expertise that organizes and produces the Orient as a political reality.<sup>1</sup> Three features define this Orientalist reality: it is understood as the product of unchanging racial or cultural essences; these essential characteristics are in each case the polar opposite of the West (passive rather than active, static rather than mobile, emotional rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered); and the Oriental opposite or Other is, therefore, marked by a series of fundamental absences (of movement, reason, order, meaning, and so on). In terms of these three features—essentialism, otherness, and absence—the colonial world can be mastered, and colonial mastery will, in turn, reinscribe and reinforce these defining features.

Orientalism, however, has always been part of something larger. The nineteenth-century image of the Orient was constructed not just in Oriental studies, romantic novels, and colonial administrations, but in all the new procedures with which Europeans began to organize the representation of the world, from museums and world exhibitions to architecture, schooling, tourism, the fashion industry, and the commodification of everyday life. In 1889, to give an indication of the scale of these processes, 32 million people visited the Exposition Universelle, built that year in Paris to commemorate the centenary of the Revolution and to demonstrate French commercial and imperial power.<sup>2</sup> The consolidation of the global hegemony of the West, economically and politically, can be connected not just to the imagery of Orientalism but to all the new machinery for rendering up and laying out the meaning of the world, so characteristic of the imperial age.

The new apparatus of representation, particularly the world exhibitions, gave a central place to the representation of the non-Western world, and several studies have pointed out the importance of this construction of otherness to the manufacture of national identity and imperial purpose.<sup>3</sup> But is there, perhaps, some more integral relationship between representation, as a modern technique of meaning and order, and the construction of otherness so important to the colonial project? One perspective from which to explore this question is provided by the accounts of non-Western visitors to nineteenth-century Europe. An Egyptian delegation to the Eighth International

Congress of Orientalists, for example, held in Stockholm in the summer of 1889, traveled to Sweden via Paris and paused there to visit the Exposition Universelle, leaving us a detailed description of their encounter with the representation of their own otherness. Beginning with this and other accounts written by visitors from the Middle East, I examine the distinctiveness of the modern representational order exemplified by the world exhibition. What Arab writers found in the West, I will argue, were not just exhibitions and representations of the world, but the world itself being ordered up as an endless exhibition. This world-as-exhibition was a place where the artificial, the model, and the plan were employed to generate an unprecedented effect of order and certainty. It is not the artificiality of the exhibitionary order that matters, however, so much as the contrasting effect of an external reality that the artificial and the model create—a reality characterized, like Orientalism's Orient, by essentialism, otherness, and absence. In the second half of the article, I examine this connection between the world-as-exhibition and Orientalism, through a rereading of European travel accounts of the nineteenth-century Middle East. The features of the kind of Orient these writings construct—above all its characteristic absences—are not merely motifs convenient to colonial mastery, I argue, but necessary elements of the order of representation itself.

### **La rue du Caire**

The four members of the Egyptian delegation to the Stockholm Orientalist conference spent several days in Paris, climbing twice the height (as they were told) of the Great Pyramid in Alexandre Eiffel's new tower, and exploring the city and exhibition laid out beneath. Only one thing disturbed them. The Egyptian exhibit had been built by the French to represent a street in medieval Cairo, made of houses with overhanging upper stories and a mosque like that of Qaitbay. 'It was intended,' one of the Egyptians wrote, 'to resemble the old aspect of Cairo.' So carefully was this done, he noted, that 'even the paint on the buildings was made dirty.'<sup>4</sup> The exhibit had also been made carefully chaotic. In contrast to the geometric layout of the rest of the exhibition, the imitation street was arranged in the haphazard manner of the bazaar. The way was crowded with shops and stalls, where Frenchmen, dressed as Orientals, sold perfumes, pastries, and tarbushes. To complete the effect of the Orient, the French organizers had imported from Cairo fifty Egyptian donkeys, together with their drivers and the requisite number of grooms, farriers, and saddlers. The donkeys gave rides (for the price of one franc) up and down the street, resulting in a clamor and confusion so lifelike, the director of the exhibition was obliged to issue an order restricting the donkeys to a certain number at each hour of the day. The Egyptian visitors were disgusted by all this and stayed away. Their final embarrassment had been to enter the door of the mosque and discover that, like the rest of the street, it had been erected as what the Europeans called a facade. 'Its external form was all that there was of the mosque. As for the interior, it had been set up as a coffee house, where Egyptian girls performed dances with young males, and dervishes whirled.'<sup>5</sup>

After eighteen days in Paris, the Egyptian delegation traveled on to Stockholm to attend the Congress of Orientalists. Together with other non-

European delegates, the Egyptians were received with hospitality—and a great curiosity. As though they were still in Paris, they found themselves something of an exhibit. ‘*Bona fide* Orientals,’ wrote a European participant in the Congress, ‘were stared at as in a Barnum’s all-world show: the good Scandinavian people seemed to think that it was a collection of *Orientals*, not of *Orientalists*.’<sup>6</sup> Some of the Orientalists themselves seemed to delight in the role of showmen. At an earlier congress, in Berlin, we are told that ‘the grotesque idea was started of producing natives of Oriental countries as illustrations of a paper: thus the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford produced a real live Indian Pandit, and made him go through the ritual of Brahmanical prayer and worship before a hilarious assembly.... Professor Max Müller of Oxford produced two rival Japanese priests, who exhibited their gifts; it had the appearance of two showmen exhibiting their monkeys.’<sup>7</sup> At the Stockholm Congress, the Egyptians were invited to participate as scholars, but when they used their own language to do so they again found themselves treated as exhibits. ‘I have heard nothing so unworthy of a sensible man,’ complained an Oxford scholar, ‘as... the whistling howls emitted by an Arabic student of El-Azhar of Cairo. Such exhibitions at Congresses are mischievous and degrading.’<sup>8</sup>

The exhibition and the congress were not the only examples of this European mischief. As Europe consolidated its colonial power, non-European visitors found themselves continually being placed on exhibit or made the careful object of European curiosity. The degradation they were made to suffer seemed as necessary to these spectacles as the scaffolded facades or the curious crowds of onlookers. The facades, the onlookers, and the degradation seemed all to belong to the organizing of an exhibit, to a particularly European concern with rendering the world up to be viewed. Of what, exactly, did this exhibitionary process consist?

### An Object-World

To begin with, Middle Eastern visitors found Europeans a curious people, with an uncontainable eagerness to stand and stare. ‘One of the characteristics of the French is to stare and get excited at everything new,’ wrote an Egyptian scholar who spent five years in Paris in the 1820s, in the first description of nineteenth-century Europe to be published in Arabic.<sup>9</sup> The ‘curiosity’ of the European is encountered in almost every subsequent Middle Eastern account. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when one or two Egyptian writers adopted the realistic style of the novel and made the journey to Europe their first topic, their stories would often evoke the peculiar experience of the West by describing an individual surrounded and stared at, like an object on exhibit. ‘Whenever he paused outside a shop or showroom,’ the protagonist in one such story found on his first day in Paris, ‘a large number of people would surround him, both men and women, staring at his dress and appearance.’<sup>10</sup>

In the second place, this curious attitude that is described in Arabic accounts was connected with what one might call a corresponding *objectness*. The curiosity of the observing subject was something demanded by a diversity of mechanisms for rendering things up as its object—beginning with



the Middle Eastern visitor himself. The members of an Egyptian student mission sent to Paris in the 1820s were confined to the college where they lived and allowed out only to visit museums and the theater—where they found themselves parodied in vaudeville as objects of entertainment for the French public.<sup>11</sup> ‘They construct the stage as the play demands,’ explained one of the students. ‘For example, if they want to imitate a sultan and the things that happen to him, they set up the stage in the form of a palace and portray him in person. If for instance they want to play the Shah of Persia, they dress someone in the clothes of the Persian monarch and then put him there and sit him on a throne.’<sup>12</sup> Even Middle Eastern monarchs who came in person to Europe were liable to be incorporated into its theatrical machinery. When the Khedive of Egypt visited Paris to attend the Exposition Universelle of 1867, he found that the Egyptian exhibit had been built to simulate medieval Cairo in the form of a royal palace. The Khedive stayed in the imitation palace during his visit and became a part of the exhibition, receiving visitors with medieval hospitality.<sup>13</sup>

Visitors to Europe found not only themselves rendered up as objects to be viewed. The Arabic account of the student mission to Paris devoted several pages to the Parisian phenomenon of ‘*le spectacle*,’ a word for which its author knew of no Arabic equivalent. Besides the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, among the different kinds of spectacle he described were ‘places in which they represent for the person the view of a town or a country or the like,’ such as ‘the Panorama, the Cosmorama, the Diorama, the Europorama and the Uranorama.’ In a panorama of Cairo, he explained in illustration, ‘it is as though you were looking from on top of the minaret of Sultan Hasan, for example, with al-Rumaila and the rest of the city beneath you.’<sup>14</sup>

The effect of such spectacles was to set the world up as a picture. They ordered it up as an object on display to be investigated and experienced by the dominating European gaze. An Orientalist of the same period, the great French scholar Sylvestre de Sacy, wanted the scholarly picturing of the Orient to make available to European inspection a similar kind of object-world. He had planned to establish a museum, which was to be

a vast depot of objects of all kinds, of drawings, of original books, maps, accounts of voyages, all offered to those who wish to give themselves to the study of [the Orient]; in such a way that each of these students would be able to feel himself transported as if by enchantment into the midst of, say, a Mongolian tribe or of the Chinese race, whichever he might have made the object of his studies.<sup>15</sup>

As part of a more ambitious plan in England for ‘the education of the people,’ a proposal was made to set up ‘an ethnological institution, with very extensive grounds’ where ‘within the same enclosure’ were to be kept ‘specimens in pairs of the various races.’ The natives on exhibit, it was said,

should construct their own dwellings according to the architectural ideas of their several countries; their ... mode of life should be their own. The forms of industry prevalent in their nation or tribe they should be required to practise; and their ideas, opinions, habits, and superstitions should be permitted to perpetuate themselves. ... To go from one division of this establishment to another would be like travelling into a new country.<sup>16</sup>

The world exhibitions of the second half of the century offered the visitor exactly this educational encounter, with natives and their artifacts arranged to provide the direct experience of a colonized object-world. In planning the layout of the 1889 Paris Exhibition, it was decided that the visitor 'before entering the temple of modern life' should pass through an exhibit of all human history, 'as a gateway to the exposition and a noble preface.' Entitled 'Histoire du Travail,' or, more fully, 'Exposition retrospective du travail et des sciences anthropologiques,' the display would demonstrate the history of human labor by means of 'objects and things themselves.' It would have 'nothing vague about it,' it was said, 'because it will consist of an *object lesson*.'<sup>17</sup>

Arabic accounts of the modern West became accounts of these curious object-worlds. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, more than half the descriptions of journeys to Europe published in Cairo were written to describe visits to a world exhibition or an international congress of Orientalists.<sup>18</sup> Such accounts devote hundreds of pages to describing the peculiar order and technique of these events—the curious crowds of spectators, the organization of panoramas and perspectives, the arrangement of natives in mock colonial villages, the display of new inventions and commodities, the architecture of iron and glass, the systems of classification, the calculations of statistics, the lectures, the plans, and the guide books—in short, the entire method of organization that we think of as representation.

### The World-as-Exhibition

In the third place, then, the effect of objectness was a matter not just of visual arrangement around a curious spectator, but of representation. What reduced the world to a system of objects was the way their careful organization enabled them to evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress. This machinery of representation was not confined to the exhibition and the congress. Almost everywhere that Middle Eastern visitors went they seemed to encounter the arrangement of things to stand for something larger. They visited the new museums, and saw the cultures of the world portrayed in the form of objects arranged under glass, in the order of their evolution. They were taken to the theater, a place where Europeans represented to themselves their history, as several Egyptian writers explained. They spent afternoons in the public gardens, carefully organized 'to bring together the trees and plants of every part of the world,' as another Arab writer put it. And, inevitably, they took trips to the zoo, a product of nineteenth-century colonial penetration of the Orient, as Theodor Adorno wrote, that 'paid symbolic tribute in the form of animals.'<sup>19</sup>

The Europe one reads about in Arabic accounts was a place of spectacle and visual arrangement, of the organization of everything and everything organized to represent, to recall, like the exhibition, a larger meaning. Characteristic of the way Europeans seemed to live was their preoccupation with what an Egyptian author described as '*intizam almanzar*,' the organization of the view.<sup>20</sup> Beyond the exhibition and the congress, beyond the museum and the zoo, everywhere that non-European visitors went—the streets of the modern city with their meaningful facades, the countryside encountered typically in the form of a model farm exhibiting new machinery and cultivation

methods, even the Alps once the funicular was built—they found the technique and sensation to be the same.<sup>21</sup> Everything seemed to be set up before one as though it were the model or the picture of something. Everything was arranged before an observing subject into a system of signification, declaring itself to be a mere object, a mere ‘signifier of’ something further.

The exhibition, therefore, could be read in such accounts as epitomizing the strange character of the West, a place where one was continually pressed into service as a spectator by a world ordered so as to represent. In exhibitions, the traveler from the Middle East could describe the curious way of addressing the world increasingly encountered in modern Europe, a particular relationship between the individual and a world of ‘objects’ that Europeans seemed to take as the experience of the real. This reality effect was a world increasingly rendered up to the individual according to the way in which, and to the extent to which, it could be made to stand before him or her as an exhibit. Non-Europeans encountered in Europe what one might call, echoing a phrase from Heidegger, the age of the world exhibition, or rather, the age of the world-as-exhibition.<sup>22</sup> The world-as-exhibition means not an exhibition of the world but the world organized and grasped as though it were an exhibition.

### The Certainty of Representation

‘England is at present the greatest Oriental Empire which the world has ever known,’ proclaimed the president of the 1892 Orientalist Congress at its opening session. His words reflected the political certainty of the imperial age. ‘She knows not only how to conquer, but how to rule.’<sup>23</sup> The endless spectacles of the world-as-exhibition were not just reflections of this certainty but the means of its production, by their technique of rendering imperial truth and cultural difference in ‘objective’ form.

Three aspects of this kind of certainty can be illustrated from the accounts of the world exhibition. First there was the apparent realism of the representation. The model or display always seemed to stand in perfect correspondence to the external world, a correspondence that was frequently noted in Middle Eastern accounts. As the Egyptian visitor had remarked, ‘Even the paint on the buildings was made dirty.’ One of the most impressive exhibits at the 1889 exhibition in Paris was a panorama of the city. As described by an Arab visitor, this consisted of a viewing platform on which one stood, encircled by images of the city. The images were mounted and illuminated in such a way that the observer felt himself standing at the center of the city itself, which seemed to materialize around him as a single, solid object ‘not differing from reality in any way.’<sup>24</sup>

In the second place, the model, however realistic, always remained distinguishable from the reality it claimed to represent. Even though the paint was made dirty and the donkeys were brought from Cairo, the medieval Egyptian street at the Paris exhibition remained only a Parisian copy of the Oriental original. The certainty of representation depended on this deliberate difference in time and displacement in space that separated the representation from the real thing. It also depended on the position of the visitor—the tourist in the imitation street or the figure on the viewing platform. The representation

of reality was always an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst, an observing European gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition's careful order. The more the exhibit drew in and encircled the visitor, the more the gaze was set apart from it, as the mind (in our Cartesian imagery) is said to be set apart from the material world it observes. The separation is suggested in a description of the Egyptian exhibit at the Paris Exhibition of 1867.

A museum inside a pharaonic temple represented Antiquity, a palace richly decorated in the Arab style represented the Middle Ages, a caravanserai of merchants and performers portrayed in real life the customs of today. Weapons from the Sudan, the skins of wild monsters, perfumes, poisons and medicinal plants transport us directly to the tropics. Pottery from Assiut and Aswan, filigree and cloth of silk and gold invite us to touch with our fingers a strange civilization. All the races subject to the Vice-Roy were personified by individuals selected with care. We rubbed shoulders with the fellah, we made way before the Bedouin of the Libyan desert on their beautiful white dromedaries. This sumptuous display spoke to the mind as to the eyes; it expressed a political idea.<sup>25</sup>

The remarkable realism of such displays made the Orient into an object the visitor could almost touch. Yet to the observing eye, surrounded by the display but excluded from it by the status of visitor, it remained a mere representation, the picture of some further reality. Thus, two parallel pairs of distinctions were maintained, between the visitor and the exhibit and between the exhibit and what it expressed. The representation seemed set apart from the political reality it claimed to portray as the observing mind seems set apart from what it observes.

Third, the distinction between the system of exhibits or representations and the exterior meaning they portrayed was imitated, within the exhibition, by distinguishing between the exhibits themselves and the plan of the exhibition. The visitor would encounter, set apart from the objects on display, an abundance of catalogs, plans, sign posts, programs, guidebooks, instructions, educational talks, and compilations of statistics. The Egyptian exhibit at the 1867 exhibition, for example, was accompanied by a guidebook containing an outline of the country's history—divided, like the exhibit to which it referred, into the ancient, medieval, and modern—together with a 'notice statistique sur le territoire, la population, les forces productives, le commerce, l'effective militaire et naval, l'organisation financière, l'instruction publique, etc. de l'Egypte' compiled by the Commission Impériale in Paris.<sup>26</sup> To provide such outlines, guides, tables, and plans, which were essential to the educational aspect of the exhibition, involved processes of representation that are no different from those at work in the construction of the exhibits themselves. But the practical distinction that was maintained between the exhibit and the plan, between the objects and their catalog, reinforced the effect of two distinct orders of being—the order of things and the order of their meaning, of representation and reality.

Despite the careful ways in which it was constructed, however, there was something paradoxical about this distinction between the simulated and the real, and about the certainty that depends on it. In Paris, it was not always easy to tell where the exhibition ended and the world itself began. The boundaries of the exhibition were clearly marked, of course, with high perimeter walls and monumental gates. But, as Middle Eastern visitors had continually discovered, there was much about the organization of the 'real world' out-

side, with its museums and department stores, its street facades and Alpine scenes, that resembled the world exhibition. Despite the determined efforts to isolate the exhibition as merely an artificial representation of a reality outside, the real world beyond the gates turned out to be more and more like an extension of the exhibition. Yet this extended exhibition continued to present itself as a series of mere representations, representing a reality beyond. We should think of it, therefore, not so much as an exhibition but as a kind of labyrinth, the labyrinth that, as Derrida says, includes in itself its own exits.<sup>27</sup> But then, maybe the exhibitions whose exits led only to further exhibitions were becoming at once so realistic and so extensive that no one ever realized that the real world they promised was not there.

### The Labyrinth without Exits

To see the uncertainty of what seemed, at first, the clear distinction between the simulated and the real, one can begin again inside the world exhibition, back at the Egyptian bazaar. Part of the shock of the Egyptians came from just how real the street claimed to be: not simply that the paint was made dirty, that the donkeys were from Cairo, and that the Egyptian pastries on sale were said to taste like the real thing, but that one paid for them with what we call 'real money.' The commercialism of the donkey rides, the bazaar stalls, and the dancing girls seemed no different from the commercialism of the world outside. With so disorienting an experience as entering the facade of a mosque to find oneself inside an Oriental cafe that served real customers what seemed to be real coffee, where, exactly, lay the line between the artificial and the real, the representation and the reality?

Exhibitions were coming to resemble the commercial machinery of the rest of the city. This machinery, in turn, was rapidly changing in places such as London and Paris, to imitate the architecture and technique of the exhibition. Small, individually owned shops, often based on local crafts, were giving way to the larger apparatus of shopping arcades and department stores. According to the *Illustrated Guide to Paris* (a book supplying, like an exhibition program, the plan and meaning of the place), each of these new establishments formed 'a city, indeed a world in miniature.'<sup>28</sup> The Egyptian accounts of Europe contain several descriptions of these commercial worlds-in-miniature, where the real world, as at the exhibition, was something organized by the representation of its commodities. The department stores were described as 'large and well organized,' with their merchandise 'arranged in perfect order, set in rows on shelves with everything symmetrical and precisely positioned.' Non-European visitors would remark especially on the panes of glass, inside the stores and along the gas-lit arcades. 'The merchandise is all arranged behind sheets of clear glass, in the most remarkable order. ... Its dazzling appearance draws thousands of onlookers.'<sup>29</sup> The glass panels inserted themselves between the visitors and the goods on display, setting up the former as mere onlookers and endowing the goods with the distance that is the source, one might say, of their objectness. Just as exhibitions had become commercialized, the machinery of commerce was becoming a further means of engineering the real, indistinguishable from that of the exhibition.

Something of the experience of the strangely ordered world of modern commerce and consumers is indicated in the first fictional account of Europe to be published in Arabic. Appearing in 1882, it tells the story of two Egyptians who travel to France and England in the company of an English Orientalist. On their first day in Paris, the two Egyptians wander accidentally into the vast, gas-lit premises of a wholesale supplier. Inside the building they find long corridors, each leading into another. They walk from one corridor to the next, and after a while begin to search for the way out. Turning a corner they see what looks like an exit, with people approaching from the other side. But it turns out to be a mirror, which covers the entire width and height of the wall, and the people approaching are merely their own reflections. They turn down another passage and then another, but each one ends only in a mirror. As they make their way through the corridors of the building, they pass groups of people at work. 'The people were busy setting out merchandise, sorting it and putting it into boxes and cases. They stared at the two of them in silence as they passed, standing quite still, not leaving their places or interrupting their work.' After wandering silently for some time through the building, the two Egyptians realize they have lost their way completely and begin going from room to room looking for an exit. 'But no one interfered with them,' we are told, 'or came up to them to ask if they were lost.' Eventually they are rescued by the manager of the store, who proceeds to explain to them how it is organized, pointing out that, in the objects being sorted and packed, the produce of every country in the world is represented.<sup>30</sup> The West, it appears, is a place organized as a system of commodities, values, meanings, and representations, forming signs that reflect one another in a labyrinth without exits.

### **The Effect of the Real**

The conventional critique of this world of representation and commodification stresses its artificiality. We imagine ourselves caught up in a hall of mirrors from which we cannot find a way out. We cannot find the door that leads back to the real world outside; we have lost touch with reality. This kind of critique remains complicitous with the world-as-exhibition, which is built to persuade us that such a simple door exists. The exhibition does not cut us off from reality. It persuades us that the world is divided neatly into two realms, the exhibition and the real world, thereby creating the effect of a reality from which we now feel cut off. It is not the artificiality of the world-as-exhibition that should concern us, but the contrasting effect of a lost reality to which such supposed artificiality gives rise. This reality, which we take to be something obvious and natural, is in fact something novel and unusual. It appears as a place completely external to the exhibition: that is, a pristine realm existing prior to all representation, which means prior to all intervention by the self, to all construction, mixing, or intermediation, to all the forms of imitation, displacement, and difference that give rise to meaning.

This external reality, it can be noted, bears a peculiar relationship to the Orientalist portrayal of the Orient. Like the Orient, it appears that it simply 'is.' It is a place of mere being, where essences are untouched by history, by intervention, by difference. Such an essentialized world lacks, by definition, what the exhibition supplies—the dimension of meaning. It lacks the plan or



program that supplies reality with its historical and cultural order. The techniques of the world exhibition build into an exterior world this supposed lack, this original meaninglessness and disorder, just as colonialism introduces it to the Orient. The Orient, it could be said, is the pure form of the novel kind of external reality to which the world-as-exhibition gives rise.

Before further examining this connection between the features of Orientalism and the kind of external reality produced by the world-as-exhibition, it is worth recalling that world exhibitions and the new large-scale commercial life of European cities were aspects of a political and economic transformation that was not limited to Europe itself. The new department stores were the first establishments to keep large quantities of merchandise in stock, in the form of standardized textiles and clothing. The stockpiling, together with the introduction of advertising (the word was coined at the time of the great exhibitions, Walter Benjamin reminds us) and the new European industry of 'fashion' (on which several Middle Eastern writers commented) were all connected with the boom in textile production.<sup>31</sup> The textile boom was an aspect of other changes, such as new ways of harvesting and treating cotton, new machinery for the manufacture of textiles, the resulting increase in profits, and the reinvestment of profit abroad in further cotton production. At the other end from the exhibition and the department store, these wider changes extended to include places such as the southern United States, India, and the Nile valley.

Since the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Nile valley had been undergoing a transformation associated principally with the European textile industry.<sup>32</sup> From a country that formed one of the hubs in the commerce of the Ottoman world and beyond and that produced and exported its own food and its own textiles, Egypt was turning into a country whose economy was dominated by the production of a single commodity, raw cotton, for the global textile industry of Europe.<sup>33</sup> The changes associated with this growth and concentration in exports included an enormous growth in imports, principally of textile products and food, the extension throughout the country of a network of roads, telegraphs, police stations, railways, ports, and permanent irrigation canals, a new relationship to the land (which became a privately owned commodity concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful, and increasingly wealthy social class), the influx of Europeans (seeking to make fortunes, transform agricultural production or make the country a model of colonial order), the building and rebuilding of towns and cities as centers of the new European-dominated commercial life, and the migration to these urban centers of tens of thousands of the increasingly impoverished rural poor. In the nineteenth century, no other place in the world was transformed on a greater scale to serve the production of a single commodity.

Elsewhere I have examined in detail how the modern means of colonizing a country that this transformation required—new military methods, the reordering of agricultural production, systems of organized schooling, the rebuilding of cities, new forms of communication, the transformation of writing, and so on—all represented the techniques of ordering up an object-world to create the novel effect of a world divided in two: on the one hand a material dimension of things themselves, and on the other a seemingly separate dimension of their order or meaning.<sup>34</sup> Thus it can be shown, I think, that the strange, binary order of the world-as-exhibition was already being

extended through a variety of techniques to places like the Middle East. If, as I have been suggesting, this binary division was, in fact, uncertain and it was hard to tell on close inspection where the exhibition ended and reality began, then this uncertainty extended well beyond the supposed limits of the West. Yet at the same time as these paradoxical but enormously powerful methods of the exhibition were spreading across the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, the world exhibitions began to portray, outside the world-as-exhibition and lacking by definition the meaning and order that exhibitions supply, an essentialized and exotic Orient.

There are three features of this binary world that I have tried to outline in the preceding pages. First, there is its remarkable claim to certainty or truth: the apparent certainty with which everything seems ordered and represented, calculated and rendered unambiguous—ultimately, what seems its political decidedness. Second, there is the paradoxical nature of this decidedness: the certainty exists as the seemingly determined correspondence between mere representations and reality; yet the real world, like the world outside the exhibition, despite everything the exhibition promises, turns out to consist only of further representations of this ‘reality.’ Third, there is its colonial nature: the age of the exhibition was necessarily the colonial age, the age of world economy and global power in which we live, since what was to be made available as exhibit was reality, the world itself.

To draw out the colonial nature of these methods of order and truth and thus their relationship to Orientalism, I am now going to move on to the Middle East. The Orient, as I have suggested, was the great ‘external reality’ of modern Europe—the most common object of its exhibitions, the great signified. By the 1860s, Thomas Cook, who had launched the modern tourist industry by organizing excursion trains (with the Midland Railway Company) to visit the first of the great exhibitions, at the Crystal Palace in 1851, was offering excursions to visit not exhibits of the East, but the ‘East itself.’ If Europe was becoming the world-as-exhibition, what happened to Europeans who went abroad—to visit places whose images invariably they had already encountered in books, spectacles, and exhibitions? How did they experience the so-called real world such images had depicted, when the reality was a place whose life was not lived, or at least not yet, as if the world were an exhibition?

### **The East Itself**

‘So here we are in Egypt,’ wrote Gustave Flaubert, in a letter from Cairo in January, 1850.

What can I say about it all? What can I write you? As yet I am scarcely over the initial bedazzlement . . . each detail reaches out to grip you; it pinches you; and the more you concentrate on it the less you grasp the whole. Then gradually all this becomes harmonious and the pieces fall into place of themselves, in accordance with the laws of perspective. But the first days, by God, it is such a bewildering chaos of colours. . .<sup>35</sup>

Flaubert experiences Cairo as a visual turmoil. What can he write about the place? That it is a chaos of color and detail that refuses to compose itself as a picture. The disorienting experience of a Cairo street, in other words, with its arguments in unknown languages, strangers who brush past in strange clothes,

unusual colors, and unfamiliar sounds and smells, is expressed as an absence of pictorial order. There is no distance, this means, between oneself and the view, and the eyes are reduced to organs of touch: 'Each detail reaches out to grip you.' Without a separation of the self from a picture, moreover, what becomes impossible is to grasp 'the whole.' The experience of the world as a picture set up before a subject is linked to the unusual conception of the world as an enframed totality, something that forms a structure or system. Subsequently, coming to terms with this disorientation and recovering one's self-possession is expressed again in pictorial terms. The world arranges itself into a picture and achieves a visual order, 'in accordance with the laws of perspective.'

Flaubert's experience suggests a paradoxical answer to my question concerning what happened to Europeans who 'left' the exhibition. Although they thought of themselves as moving from the pictures or exhibits to the real thing, they went on trying—like Flaubert—to grasp the real thing as a picture. How could they do otherwise, since they took reality itself to be picturelike? The real is that which is grasped in terms of a distinction between a picture and what it represents, so nothing else would have been, quite literally, thinkable.

Among European writers who traveled to the Middle East in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, one very frequently finds the experience of its strangeness expressed in terms of the problem of forming a picture. It was as though to make sense of it meant to stand back and make a drawing or take a photograph of it; which for many of them actually it did. 'Every year that passes,' an Egyptian wrote, 'you see thousands of Europeans traveling all over the world, and everything they come across they make a picture of.'<sup>36</sup> Flaubert traveled in Egypt on a photographic mission with Maxime du Camp, the results of which were expected to be 'quite special in character' it was remarked at the Institut de France, 'thanks to the aid of this modern traveling companion, efficient, rapid, and always scrupulously exact.'<sup>37</sup> The chemically etched correspondence between photographic image and reality would provide a new, almost mechanical kind of certainty.

Like the photographer, the writer wanted to reproduce a picture of things 'exactly as they are,' of 'the East itself in its vital actual reality.'<sup>38</sup> Flaubert was preceded in Egypt by Edward Lane, whose innovative *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, published in 1835, was a product of the same search for a pictorial certainty of representation. The book's 'singular power of description and minute accuracy' made it, in the words of his nephew, Orientalist Stanley Poole, 'the most perfect picture of a people's life that has ever been written.'<sup>39</sup> 'Very few men,' added his grandnephew, the Orientalist Stanley Lane-Poole, 'have possessed in equal degree the power of minutely describing a scene or a monument, so that the pencil might almost restore it without a fault after the lapse of years. . . . The objects stand before you as you read, and this not by the use of imaginative language, but by the plain simple description.'<sup>40</sup>

Lane, in fact, did not begin as a writer but as a professional artist and engraver, and had first traveled to Egypt in 1825 with a new apparatus called the camera lucida, a drawing device with a prism that projected an exact image of the object on to paper. He had planned to publish the drawings he made and the accompanying descriptions in an eight-volume work entitled 'An Exhaustive Description of Egypt,' but had been unable to find a pub-

lisher whose printing techniques could reproduce the minute and mechanical accuracy of the illustrations. Subsequently he published the part dealing with contemporary Egypt, rewritten as the famous ethnographic description of the modern Egyptians.<sup>41</sup>

The problem for the photographer or writer visiting the Middle East, however, was not just to make an accurate picture of the East but to set up the East as a picture. One can copy or represent only what appears already to exist representationally—as a picture. The problem, in other words, was to create a distance between oneself and the world and thus constitute it as something picturelike—as an object on exhibit. This required what was now called a ‘point of view,’ a position set apart and outside. While in Cairo, Edward Lane lived near one of the city’s gates, outside which there was a large hill with a tower and military telegraph on top. This elevated position commanded ‘a most magnificent view of the city and suburbs and the citadel,’ Lane wrote. ‘Soon after my arrival I made a very elaborate drawing of the scene, with the camera lucida. From no other spot can so good a view of the metropolis ... be obtained.’<sup>42</sup>

These spots were difficult to find in a world where, unlike the West, such ‘objectivity’ was not yet built in. Besides the military observation tower used by Lane, visitors to the Middle East would appropriate whatever buildings and monuments were available in order to obtain the necessary viewpoint. The Great Pyramid at Giza had now become a viewing platform. Teams of Bedouin were organized to heave and push the writer or tourist—guidebook in hand—to the top, where two more Bedouin would carry the European on their shoulders to all four corners, to observe the view. At the end of the century, an Egyptian novel satirized the westernizing pretensions among members of the Egyptian upper middle class, by having one such character spend a day climbing the pyramids at Giza to see the view.<sup>43</sup> The minaret presented itself similarly to even the most respectable European as a viewing tower, from which to sneak a panoptic gaze over a Muslim town. ‘The mobbing I got at *Shoomlo*,’ complained Jeremy Bentham on his visit to the Middle East, ‘only for taking a peep at the town from a thing they call a *minaret* ... has canceled any claims they might have had upon me for the dinner they gave me at the *divan*, had it been better than it was.’<sup>44</sup>

Bentham can remind us of one more similarity between writer and camera, and of what it meant, therefore, to grasp the world as though it were a picture or exhibition. The point of view was not just a place set apart, outside the world or above it. Ideally, it was a position from where, like the authorities in Bentham’s panopticon, one could see and yet not be seen. The photographer, invisible beneath his black cloth as he eyed the world through his camera’s gaze, in this respect typified the kind of presence desired by the European in the Middle East, whether as tourist, writer, or, indeed, colonial power.<sup>45</sup> The ordinary European tourist, dressed (according to the advice in *Murray’s Handbook for Travellers in Lower and Upper Egypt*, already in its seventh edition by 1888) in either ‘a common felt helmet or wide-awake, with a turban of white muslin wound around it’ or alternatively a pith helmet, together with a blue or green veil and ‘coloured-glass spectacles with gauze sides,’ possessed the same invisible gaze.<sup>46</sup> The ability to see without being seen confirmed

one's separation from the world, and constituted at the same time a position of power.

The writer, too, wished to see without being seen. The representation of the Orient, in its attempt to be detached and objective, would seek to eliminate from the picture the presence of the European observer. Indeed, to represent something as Oriental, as Edward Said has argued, one sought to excise the European presence altogether.<sup>47</sup> 'Many thanks for the local details you sent me,' wrote Théophile Gautier to Gérard de Nerval in Cairo, who was supplying him with firsthand material for his Oriental scenarios at the Paris Opéra. 'But how the devil was I to have included among the walk-ons of the Opéra these Englishmen dressed in raincoats, with their quilted cotton hats and their green veils to protect themselves against ophthalmia?' Representation was not to represent the voyeur, the seeing eye that made representation possible.<sup>48</sup> To establish the objectness of the Orient, as a picture-reality containing no sign of the increasingly pervasive European presence, required that the presence itself, ideally, become invisible.

### Participant Observation

Yet this was where the paradox began. At the same time as the European wished to elide himself in order to constitute the world as something not-himself, something other and objectlike, he also wanted to experience it as though it were the real thing. Like visitors to an exhibition or scholars in Sacy's Orientalist museum, travelers wanted to feel themselves 'transported...into the very midst' of their Oriental object-world, and to 'touch with their fingers a strange civilization.' In his journal, Edward Lane wrote of wanting 'to throw myself entirely among strangers,...to adopt their language, their customs, and their dress.'<sup>49</sup> This kind of immersion was to make possible the profusion of ethnographic detail in writers such as Lane, and produce in their work the effect of a direct and immediate experience of the Orient. In Lane, and even more so in writers such as Flaubert and Nerval, the desire for this immediacy of the real became a desire for direct and physical contact with the exotic, the bizarre, and the erotic.

There was a contradiction, therefore, between the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and experience it directly; a contradiction that world exhibitions, with their profusion of exotic detail and yet their clear distinction between visitor and exhibit, were built to accommodate and overcome. In fact, 'experience,' in this sense, depends upon the structure of the exhibition. The problem in a place such as Cairo, which had not been built to provide the experience of an exhibition, was to fulfill such a double desire. On his first day in Cairo, Gérard de Nerval met a French 'painter' equipped with a daguerreotype, who 'suggested that I come with him to choose a point of view.' Agreeing to accompany him, Nerval decided 'to have myself taken to the most labyrinthine point of the city, abandon the painter to his tasks, and then wander off haphazardly, without interpreter or companion.' But within the labyrinth of the city, where Nerval hoped to immerse himself in the exotic and finally experience 'without interpreter' the real Orient, they were unable to find any point from which to take the picture. They followed one crowded,

twisting street after another, looking without success for a suitable viewpoint, until eventually the profusion of noises and people subsided and the streets became 'more silent, more dusty, more deserted, the mosques fallen in decay and here and there a building in collapse.' In the end they found themselves outside the city, 'somewhere in the suburbs, on the other side of the canal from the main sections of the town.' Here at last, amid the silence and the ruins, the photographer was able to set up his device and portray the Oriental city.<sup>50</sup> [...]

In claiming that the 'East itself' is not a place, I am not saying simply that Western representations created a distorted image of the real Orient; nor am I saying that the 'real Orient' does not exist, and that there are no realities but only images and representations. Either statement would take for granted the strange way the West had come to live, as though the world were divided in this way into two: into a realm of 'mere' representations opposed to an essentialized realm of 'the real'; into exhibitions opposed to an external reality; into an order of models, descriptions, texts, and meanings opposed to an order of originals, of things in themselves.<sup>51</sup> What we already suspected in the streets of Paris, concerning this division, is confirmed by the journey to the Orient: what seems excluded from the exhibition as the real or the outside turns out to be only that which can be represented, that which occurs in exhibitionlike form—in other words, a further extension of that labyrinth that we call an exhibition. What matters about this labyrinth is not that we never reach the real, never find the promised exit, but that such a notion of the real, such a system of truth, continues to convince us.

The case of Orientalism shows us, moreover, how this supposed distinction between a realm of representation and an external reality corresponds to another apparent division of the world, into the West and the non-West. In the binary terms of the world-as-exhibition, reality is the effect of an external realm of pure existence, untouched by the self and by the processes that construct meaning and order. The Orient is a similar effect. It appears as an essentialized realm originally outside and untouched by the West, lacking the meaning and order that only colonialism can bring. Orientalism, it follows, is not just a nineteenth-century instance of some general historical problem of how one culture portrays another, nor just an aspect of colonial domination, but part of a method of order and truth essential to the peculiar nature of the modern world.



# The Art Museum As Ritual

[...] Art museums have always been compared to older ceremonial monuments such as palaces or temples. Indeed, from the eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, they were deliberately designed to resemble them. One might object that this borrowing from the architectural past can have only metaphoric meaning and should not be taken for more, since ours is a secular society and museums are secular inventions. If museum facades have imitated temples or palaces, is it not simply that modern taste has tried to emulate the formal balance and dignity of those structures, or that it has wished to associate the power of bygone faiths with the present cult of art? Whatever the motives of their builders (so the objection goes), in the context of our society, the Greek temples and Renaissance palaces that house public art collections can signify only secular values, not religious beliefs. Their portals can lead to only rational pastimes, not sacred rites. We are, after all, a post-Enlightenment culture, one in which the secular and the religious are opposing categories.

It is certainly the case that our culture classifies religious buildings such as churches, temples, and mosques as different in kind from secular sites such as museums, court houses, or state capitals. Each kind of site is associated with an opposite kind of truth and assigned to one or the other side of the religious/secular dichotomy. That dichotomy, which structures so much of the modern public world and now seems so natural, has its own history. It provided the ideological foundation for the Enlightenment's project of breaking the power and influence of the church. By the late eighteenth century, that undertaking had successfully undermined the authority of religious doctrine—at least in western political and philosophical theory if not always in practice. Eventually, the separation of church and state would become law. Everyone knows the outcome: secular truth became authoritative truth; religion, although guaranteed as a matter of personal freedom and choice, kept its authority only for voluntary believers. It is secular truth—truth that is rational and verifiable—that has the status of 'objective' knowledge. It is this truest of truths that helps bind a community into a civic body by providing it a universal base of knowledge and validating its highest values and most cherished memories. Art museums belong decisively to this realm of secular knowledge, not only because of the scientific and humanistic disciplines practiced in them—conservation, art history, archaeology—but also because of their status as preservers of the community's official cultural memory.

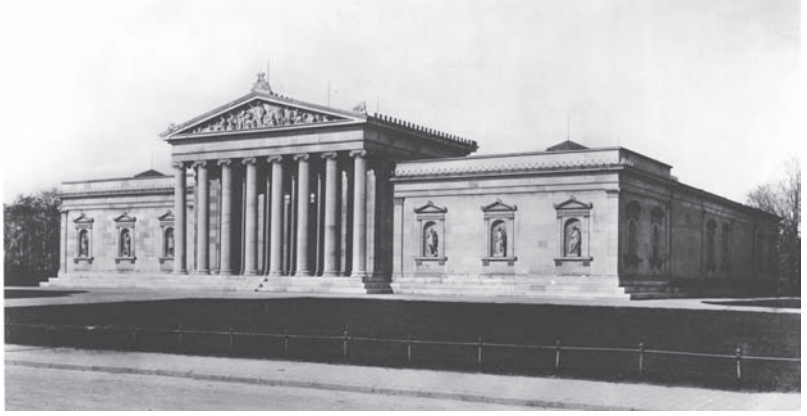
Again, in the secular/religious terms of our culture, 'ritual' and 'museums' are antithetical. Ritual is associated with religious practices—with the realm of belief, magic, real or symbolic sacrifices, miraculous transformations, or

overpowering changes of consciousness. Such goings-on bear little resemblance to the contemplation and learning that art museums are supposed to foster. But in fact, in traditional societies, rituals may be quite unspectacular and informal-looking moments of contemplation or recognition. At the same time, as anthropologists argue, our supposedly secular, even anti-ritual, culture is full of ritual situations and events—very few of which (as Mary Douglas has noted) take place in religious contexts.<sup>1</sup> That is, like other cultures, we, too, build sites that publicly represent beliefs about the order of the world, its past and present, and the individual's place within it.<sup>2</sup> Museums of all kinds are excellent examples of such microcosms; art museums in particular—the most prestigious and costly of these sites<sup>3</sup>—are especially rich in this kind of symbolism and, almost always, even equip visitors with maps to guide them through the universe they construct. Once we question our Enlightenment assumptions about the sharp separation between religious and secular experience—that the one is rooted in belief while the other is based in lucid and objective rationality—we may begin to glimpse the hidden—perhaps the better word is disguised—ritual content of secular ceremonies.

We can also appreciate the ideological force of a cultural experience that claims for its truths the status of objective knowledge. To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual—those who are most able to respond to its various cues—are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully confirms. It is precisely for this reason that museums and museum practices can become objects of fierce struggle and impassioned debate. What we see and do not see in art museums—and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it—is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity.

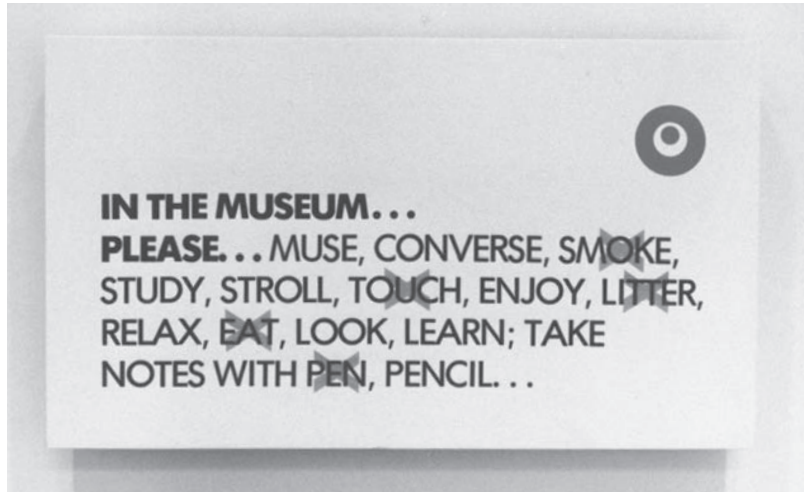
I have already referred to the long-standing practice of museums borrowing architectural forms from monumental ceremonial structures of the past. Certainly when Munich, Berlin, London, Washington, and other western capitals built museums whose facades looked like Greek or Roman temples, no one mistook them for their ancient prototypes [57, 58]. On the contrary, temple facades—for 200 years the most popular source for public art museums<sup>4</sup>—were completely assimilated to a secular discourse about architectural beauty, decorum, and rational form. Moreover, as coded reminders of a pre-Christian civic realm, classical porticos, rotundas, and other features of Greco-Roman architecture could signal a firm adherence to Enlightenment values. These same monumental forms, however, also brought with them the spaces of public rituals—corridors scaled for processions, halls implying large, communal gatherings, and interior sanctuaries designed for awesome and potent effigies.

Museums resemble older ritual sites not so much because of their specific architectural references but because they, too, are settings for rituals. (I make no argument here for historical continuity, only for the existence of comparable ritual functions.) Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention—in



this case, for contemplation and learning. One is also expected to behave with a certain decorum. In the Hirshhorn Museum, a sign spells out rather fully the dos and don'ts of ritual activity and comportment [59]. Museums are normally set apart from other structures by their monumental architecture and clearly defined precincts. They are approached by impressive flights of stairs, guarded by pairs of monumental marble lions, entered through grand doorways. They are frequently set back from the street and occupy parkland, ground consecrated to public use. (Modern museums are equally imposing architecturally and similarly set apart by sculptural markers. In the United States, Rodin's *Balzac* is one of the more popular signifiers of museum precincts, its priapic character making it especially appropriate for modern collections.)<sup>5</sup>

By the nineteenth century, such features were seen as necessary prologues to the space of the art museum itself:



Do you not think that in a splendid gallery ... all the adjacent and circumjacent parts of that building should ... have a regard for the arts, ... with fountains, statues, and other objects of interest calculated to prepare [visitors'] minds before entering the building, and lead them the better to appreciate the works of art which they would afterwards see?

The nineteenth-century British politician asking this question<sup>6</sup> clearly understood the ceremonial nature of museum space and the need to differentiate it (and the time one spends in it) from day-to-day time and space outside. Again, such framing is common in ritual practices everywhere. Mary Douglas writes:

A ritual provides a frame. The marked off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated 'Once upon a time' creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales.<sup>7</sup>

'Liminality,' a term associated with ritual, can also be applied to the kind of attention we bring to art museums. Used by the Belgian folklorist Arnold van Gennep,<sup>8</sup> the term was taken up and developed in the anthropological writings of Victor Turner to indicate a mode of consciousness outside of or 'betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending.'<sup>9</sup> As Turner himself realized, his category of liminal experience had strong affinities to modern western notions of the aesthetic experience—that mode of receptivity thought to be most appropriate before works of art. Turner recognized aspects of liminality in such modern activities as attending the theatre, seeing a film, or visiting an art exhibition. Like folk rituals that temporarily suspend the constraining rules of normal social behavior (in that sense, they 'turn the world upside-down'), so these cultural situations, Turner argued, could open a space in which individuals can step back from the practical concerns and social relations of everyday life and look at themselves and their world—or at some aspect of it—with different thoughts and feelings. Turner's idea of liminality, developed as it is out of anthropological categories and based on data gathered mostly in non-western cultures, probably cannot be neatly superimposed onto western concepts of art experience. Nevertheless, his work remains use-

ful in that it offers a sophisticated general concept of ritual that enables us to think about art museums and what is supposed to happen in them from a fresh perspective.<sup>10</sup>

It should also be said, however, that Turner's insight about art museums is not singular. Without benefit of the term, observers have long recognized the liminality of their space. The Louvre curator Germain Bazin, for example, wrote that an art museum is 'a temple where Time seems suspended'; the visitor enters it in the hope of finding one of 'those momentary cultural epiphanies' that give him 'the illusion of knowing intuitively his essence and his strengths.'<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the Swedish writer Goran Schildt has noted that museums are settings in which we seek a state of 'detached, timeless and exalted' contemplation that 'grants us a kind of release from life's struggle and ... captivity in our own ego.' Referring to nineteenth-century attitudes to art, Schildt observes 'a religious element, a substitute for religion.'<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, others, too, have described art museums as sites which enable individuals to achieve liminal experience—to move beyond the psychic constraints of mundane existence, step out of time, and attain new, larger perspectives.

Thus far, I have argued the ritual character of the museum experience in terms of the kind of attention one brings to it and the special quality of its time and space. Ritual also involves an element of performance. A ritual site of any kind is a place programmed for the enactment of something. It is a place designed for some kind of performance. It has this structure whether or not visitors can read its cues. In traditional rituals, participants often perform or witness a drama—enacting a real or symbolic sacrifice. But a ritual performance need not be a formal spectacle. It may be something an individual enacts alone by following a prescribed route, by repeating a prayer, by recalling a narrative, or by engaging in some other *structured* experience that relates to the history or meaning of the site (or to some object or objects on the site). Some individuals may use a ritual site more knowledgeably than others—they may be more educationally prepared to respond to its symbolic cues. The term 'ritual' can also mean habitual or routinized behavior that lacks meaningful subjective context. This sense of ritual as an 'empty' routine or performance is not the sense in which I use the term.

In art museums, it is the visitors who enact the ritual.<sup>13</sup> The museum's sequenced spaces and arrangements of objects, its lighting and architectural details provide both the stage set and the script—although not all museums do this with equal effectiveness. The situation resembles in some respects certain medieval cathedrals where pilgrims followed a structured narrative route through the interior, stopping at prescribed points for prayer or contemplation. An ambulatory adorned with representations of the life of Christ could thus prompt pilgrims to imaginatively re-live the sacred story. Similarly, museums offer well-developed ritual scenarios, most often in the form of art-historical narratives that unfold through a sequence of spaces. Even when visitors enter museums to see only selected works, the museum's larger narrative structure stands as a frame and gives meaning to individual works.

Like the concept of liminality, this notion of the art museum as a performance field has also been discovered independently by museum professionals. Philip Rhys Adams, for example, once director of the Cincinnati Art



Museum, compared art museums to theatre sets (although in his formulation, objects rather than people are the main performers):

The museum is really an impresario, or more strictly a *régisseur*, neither actor nor audience, but the controlling intermediary who sets the scene, induces a receptive mood in the spectator, then bids the actors take the stage and be their best artistic selves. And the art objects do have their exits and their entrances; motion—the movement of the visitor as he enters a museum and as he goes or is led from object to object—is a present element in any installation.<sup>14</sup>

The museum setting is not only itself a structure; it also constructs its *dramatis personae*. These are, ideally, individuals who are perfectly predisposed socially, psychologically, and culturally to enact the museum ritual. Of course, no real visitor ever perfectly corresponds to these ideals. In reality, people continually ‘misread’ or scramble or resist the museum’s cues to some extent; or they actively invent, consciously or unconsciously, their own programs according to all the historical and psychological accidents of who they are. But then, the same is true of any situation in which a cultural product is performed or interpreted.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, a ritual experience is thought to have a purpose, an end. It is seen as transformative: it confers or renews identity or purifies or restores order in the self or to the world through sacrifice, ordeal, or enlightenment. The beneficial outcome that museum rituals are supposed to produce can sound very like claims made for traditional, religious rituals. According to their advocates, museum visitors come away with a sense of enlightenment, or a feeling of having been spiritually nourished or restored. In the words of one well-known expert,

The only reason for bringing together works of art in a public place is that ... they produce in us a kind of exalted happiness. For a moment there is a clearing in the jungle: we pass on refreshed, with our capacity for life increased and with some memory of the sky.<sup>16</sup>

One cannot ask for a more ritual-like description of the museum experience. Nor can one ask it from a more renowned authority. The author of this statement is the British art historian Sir Kenneth Clark, a distinguished scholar and famous as the host of a popular BBC television series of the 1970s, ‘Civilization.’ Clark’s concept of the art museum as a place for spiritual transformation and restoration is hardly unique. Although by no means uncontested, it is widely shared by art historians, curators, and critics everywhere. Nor, as we shall see below, is it uniquely modern.

We come, at last, to the question of art museum objects. Today, it is a commonplace to regard museums as the most appropriate places in which to view and keep works of art. The existence of such objects—things that are most properly used when contemplated as art—is taken as a given that is both prior to and the cause of art museums. These commonplaces, however, rest on relatively new ideas and practices. The European practice of placing objects in settings designed for contemplation emerged as part of a new and, historically speaking, relatively modern way of thinking. In the course of the eighteenth century, critics and philosophers, increasingly interested in visual experience, began to attribute to works of art the power to transform their viewers



spiritually, morally, and emotionally. This newly discovered aspect of visual experience was extensively explored in a developing body of art criticism and philosophy. These investigations were not always directly concerned with the experience of art as such, but the importance they gave to questions of taste, the perception of beauty, and the cognitive roles of the senses and imagination helped open new philosophical ground on which art criticism would flourish. Significantly, the same era in which aesthetic theory burgeoned also saw a growing interest in galleries and public art museums. Indeed, the rise of the art museum is a corollary to the philosophical invention of the aesthetic and moral powers of art objects: if art objects are most properly used when contemplated as art, then the museum is the most proper setting for them, since it makes them useless for any other purpose.

In philosophy, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* is one of the most monumental expressions of this new preoccupation with aesthetics. In it, Kant definitively isolated and defined the human capacity for aesthetic judgement and distinguished it from other faculties of the mind (practical reason and scientific understanding).<sup>17</sup> But before Kant, other European writers, for example, Hume, Burke, and Rousseau, also struggled to define taste as a special kind of psychological encounter with distinctive moral and philosophical import.<sup>18</sup> The eighteenth century's designation of art and aesthetic experience as major topics for critical and philosophical inquiry is itself part of a broad and general tendency to furnish the secular with new value. In this sense, the invention of aesthetics can be understood as a transference of spiritual values from the sacred realm into secular time and space. Put in other terms, aestheticians gave philosophical formulations to the condition of liminality, recognizing it as a state of withdrawal from the day-to-day world, a passage into a time or space in which the normal business of life is suspended. In philosophy, liminality became specified as the aesthetic experience, a moment of moral and rational disengagement that leads to or produces some kind of revelation or transformation. Meanwhile, the appearance of art galleries and museums gave the aesthetic cult its own ritual precinct.

Goethe was one of the earliest witnesses of this development. Like others who visited the newly created art museums of the eighteenth century, he was highly responsive to museum space and to the sacral feelings it aroused. In 1768, after his first visit to the Dresden Gallery, which housed a magnificent royal art collection,<sup>19</sup> he wrote about his impressions, emphasizing the powerful ritual effect of the total environment:

The impatiently awaited hour of opening arrived and my admiration exceeded all my expectations. That *salon* turning in on itself, magnificent and so well-kept, the freshly gilded frames, the well-waxed parquet, the profound silence that reigned, created a solemn and unique impression, akin to the emotion experienced upon entering a House of God, and it deepened as one looked at the ornaments on exhibition which, as much as the temple that housed them, were objects of adoration in that place consecrated to the holy ends of art.<sup>20</sup>

The historian of museums Niels von Holst has collected similar testimony from the writings of other eighteenth-century museum-goers. Wilhelm Wackenroder, for example, visiting an art gallery in 1797, declared that gazing

at art removed one from the 'vulgar flux of life' and produced an effect that was comparable to, but better than, religious ecstasy.<sup>21</sup> And here, in 1816, still within the age when art museums were novelties, is the English critic William Hazlitt, aglow over the Louvre:

Art lifted up her head and was seated on her throne, and said, All eyes shall see me, and all knees shall bow to me.... There she had gathered together all her pomp, there was her shrine, and there her votaries came and worshipped as in a temple.<sup>22</sup>

A few years later, in 1824, Hazlitt visited the newly opened National Gallery in London, then installed in a house in Pall Mall. His description of his experience there and its ritual nature—his insistence on the difference between the quality of time and space in the gallery and the bustling world outside, and on the power of that place to feed the soul, to fulfill its highest purpose, to reveal, to uplift, to transform and to cure—all of this is stated with exceptional vividness. A visit to this 'sanctuary,' this 'holy of holies,' he wrote, 'is like going on a pilgrimage—it is an act of devotion performed at the shrine of Art!'

It is a cure (for the time at least) for low-thoughted cares and uneasy passions. We are abstracted to another sphere: we breathe empyrean air; we enter into the minds of Raphael, of Titian, of Poussin, of the Caracci, and look at nature with their eyes; we live in time past, and seem identified with the permanent forms of things. The business of the world at large, and even its pleasures, appear like a vanity and an impertinence. What signify the hubbub, the shifting scenery, the fantoccini figures, the folly, the idle fashions without, when compared with the solitude, the silence, the speaking looks, the unfading forms within? Here is the mind's true home. The contemplation of truth and beauty is the proper object for which we were created, which calls forth the most intense desires of the soul, and of which it never tires.<sup>23</sup>

This is not to suggest that the eighteenth century was unanimous about art museums. Right from the start, some observers were already concerned that the museum ambience could change the meanings of the objects it held, redefining them as works of art and narrowing their import simply by removing them from their original settings and obscuring their former uses. Although some, like Hazlitt and the artist Philip Otto Runge, welcomed this as a triumph of human genius, others were—or became—less sure. Goethe, for example, thirty years after his enthusiastic description of the art gallery at Dresden, was disturbed by Napoleon's systematic gathering of art treasures from other countries and their display in the Louvre as trophies of conquest. Goethe saw that the creation of this huge museum collection depended on the destruction of something else, and that it forcibly altered the conditions under which, until then, art had been made and understood. Along with others, he realized that the very capacity of the museum to frame objects as art and claim them for a new kind of ritual attention could entail the negation or obscuring of other, older meanings.<sup>24</sup>

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, those who were most interested in art museums, whether they were for or against them, were but a minority of the educated—mostly poets and artists. In the course of the nineteenth century, the serious museum audience grew enormously; it also adopted an almost unconditional faith in the value of art museums. By the late nineteenth century, the idea of art galleries as sites of wondrous and

transforming experience became commonplace among those with any pretensions to 'culture' in both Europe and America.

Through most of the nineteenth century, an international museum culture remained firmly committed to the idea that the first responsibility of a public art museum is to enlighten and improve its visitors morally, socially, and politically. In the twentieth century, the principal rival to this ideal, the aesthetic museum, would come to dominate. In the United States, this new ideal was advocated most forcefully in the opening years of the century. Its main proponents, all wealthy, educated gentlemen, were connected to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and would make the doctrine of the aesthetic museum the official creed of their institution.<sup>25</sup> The fullest and most influential statement of this doctrine is Benjamin Ives Gilman's *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method*, published by the museum in 1918 but drawing on ideas developed in previous years. According to Gilman, works of art, once they are put in museums, exist for one purpose only: to be looked at as things of beauty. The first obligation of an art museum is to present works of art as just that, as objects of aesthetic contemplation and not as illustrative of historical or archaeological information. As he expounded it (sounding much like Hazlitt almost a century earlier), aesthetic contemplation is a profoundly transforming experience, an imaginative act of identification between viewer and artist. To achieve it, the viewer 'must make himself over in the image of the artist, penetrate his intention, think with his thoughts, feel with his feelings.'<sup>26</sup> The end result of this is an intense and joyous emotion, an overwhelming and 'absolutely serious' pleasure that contains a profound spiritual revelation. Gilman compares it to the 'sacred conversations' depicted in Italian Renaissance altarpieces—images in which saints who lived in different centuries miraculously gather in a single imaginary space and together contemplate the Madonna. With this metaphor, Gilman casts the modern aesthete as a devotee who achieves a kind of secular grace through communion with artistic geniuses of the past—spirits that offer a life-redeeming sustenance. 'Art is the Gracious Message pure and simple,' he wrote, 'integral to the perfect life,' its contemplation 'one of the ends of existence.'<sup>27</sup>

The museum ideal that so fascinated Gilman would have a compelling appeal to the twentieth century. Most of today's art museums are designed to induce in viewers precisely the kind of intense absorption that he saw as the museum's mission, and art museums of all kinds, both modern and historical, continue to affirm the goal of communion with immortal spirits of the past. Indeed, the longing for contact with an idealized past, or with things imbued by immortal spirits, is probably pervasive as a sustaining impetus not only of art museums but many other kinds of rituals as well. The anthropologist Edmund Leach noticed that every culture mounts some symbolic effort to contradict the irreversibility of time and its end result of death. He argued that themes of rebirth, rejuvenation, and the spiritual recycling or perpetuation of the past deny the fact of death by substituting for it symbolic structures in which past time returns.<sup>28</sup> As ritual sites in which visitors seek to re-live spiritually significant moments of the past, art museums make splendid examples of the kind of symbolic strategy Leach described.<sup>29</sup>

Nowhere does the triumph of the aesthetic museum reveal itself more dramatically than in the history of art gallery design. Although fashions in wall colors, ceiling heights, lighting, and other details have over the years varied

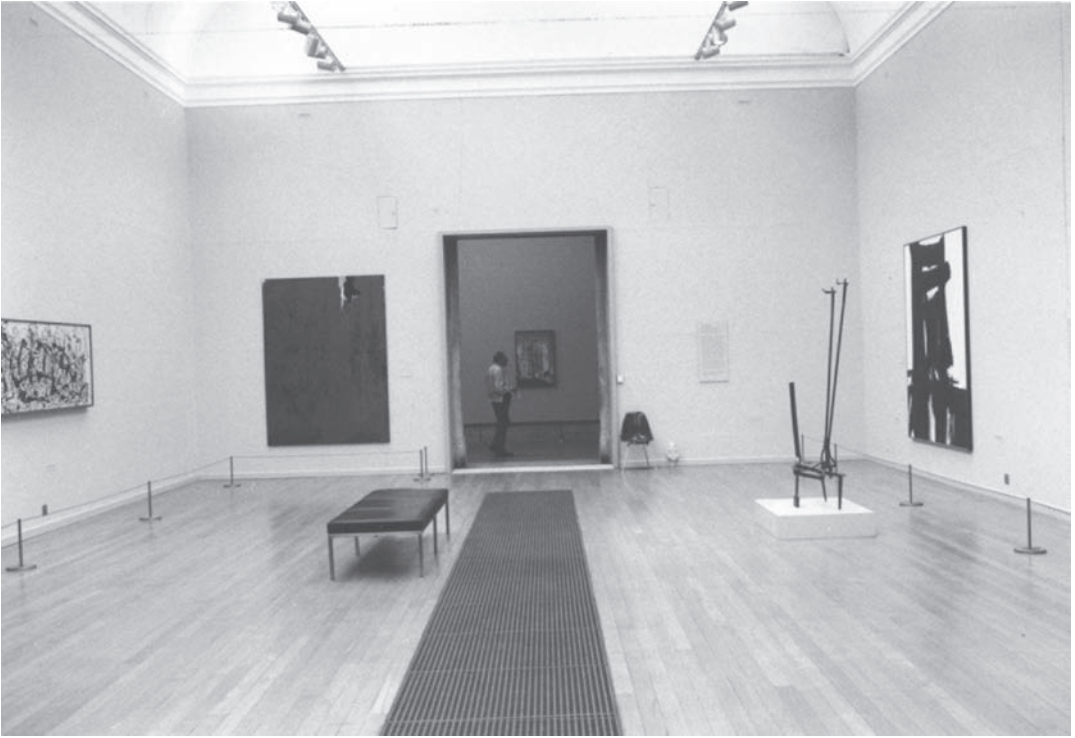


with changing museological trends, installation design has consistently and increasingly sought to isolate objects for the concentrated gaze of the aesthetic adept and to suppress as irrelevant other meanings the objects might have. The wish for ever closer encounters with art have gradually made galleries more intimate, increased the amount of empty wall space between works, brought works nearer to eye level, and caused each work to be lit individually.<sup>30</sup> Most art museums today keep their galleries uncluttered and, as much as possible, dispense educational information in anterooms or special kiosks at a tasteful remove from the art itself. Clearly, the more 'aesthetic' the installations—the fewer the objects and the emptier the surrounding walls—the more sacralized the museum space. The sparse installations of the National Gallery in Washington, DC, take the aesthetic ideal to an extreme [60], as do installations of modern art in many institutions [61]. As the sociologist César Graña once suggested, modern installation practices have brought the museum-as-temple metaphor close to the fact. Even in art museums that attempt education, the practice of isolating important originals in 'aesthetic chapels' or niches—but never hanging them to make an historical point—undercuts any educational effort.<sup>31</sup>

The isolation of objects for visual contemplation, something that Gilman and his colleagues in Boston ardently preached, has remained one of the outstanding features of the aesthetic museum and continues to inspire eloquent advocates. Here, for example, is the art historian Svetlana Alpers in 1988:

Romanesque capitals or Renaissance altarpieces are appropriately looked at in museums (*pace* Malraux) even if not made for them. When objects like these are severed from the ritual site, the invitation to look attentively remains and in certain respects may even be enhanced.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, in Alpers' statement, only the original site has ritual meaning. In my terms, the attentive gazing she describes belongs to another, if different, ritual field, one which requires from the performer intense, undistracted visual contemplation.



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Modern Art in the Tate  
Gallery, London.

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In *The Museum Age*, Germain Bazin described with penetrating insight how modern installations help structure the museum as a ritual site. In his analysis, the isolation and illumination of objects induces visitors to fix their attention onto things that exist seemingly in some other realm. The installations thus take visitors on a kind of mental journey, a stepping out of the present into a universe of timeless values:

Statues must be isolated in space, paintings hung far apart, a glittering jewel placed against a field of black velvet and spot-lighted; in principle, only one object at a time should appear in the field of vision. Iconographic meaning, overall harmony, aspects that attracted the nineteenth-century amateur, no longer interest the contemporary museum goer, who is obsessed with form and workmanship; the eye must be able to scan slowly the entire surface of a painting. The act of looking becomes a sort of trance uniting spectator and masterpiece.<sup>33</sup>

One could take the argument even farther: in the liminal space of the museum, everything—and sometimes anything—may become art, including fire-extinguishers, thermostats, and humidity gauges, which, when isolated on a wall and looked at through the aesthetizing lens of museum space, can appear, if only for a mistaken moment, every bit as interesting as some of the intended-as-art works on display, which, in any case, do not always look very different. [...]

# The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility

## Third Version

Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts, there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years, neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.

—Paul Valéry, *Pièces sur l'art* ('La Conquête de l'ubiquité')

### Introduction

When Marx undertook his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, this mode was in its infancy.<sup>1</sup> Marx adopted an approach which gave his investigations prognostic value. Going back to the basic conditions of capitalist production, he presented them in a way which showed what could be expected of capitalism in the future. What could be expected, it emerged, was not only an increasingly harsh exploitation of the proletariat but, ultimately, the creation of conditions which would make it possible for capitalism to abolish itself.

Since the transformation of the superstructure proceeds far more slowly than that of the base, it has taken more than half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture. How this process has affected culture can only now be assessed, and these assessments must meet certain prognostic requirements. They do not, however, call for theses on the art of the proletariat after its seizure of power, and still less for any on the art of the classless society. They call for theses defining the tendencies of the development of art under the present conditions of production. The dialectic of these conditions of production is evident in the superstructure, no less than in the economy. Theses defining the developmental tendencies of art can



therefore contribute to the political struggle in ways that it would be a mistake to underestimate. They neutralize a number of traditional concepts—such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery—which, used in an uncontrolled way (and controlling them is difficult today), allow factual material to be manipulated in the interests of fascism. *In what follows, the concepts which are introduced into the theory of art differ from those now current in that they are completely useless for the purposes of fascism. On the other hand, they are useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art [Kunstpolitik].*

## I

In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. Objects made by humans could always be copied by humans. Replicas were made by pupils in practicing for their craft, by masters in disseminating their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of profit. But the technological reproduction of artworks is something new. Having appeared intermittently in history, at widely spaced intervals, it is now being adopted with ever-increasing intensity. The Greeks had only two ways of technologically reproducing works of art: casting and stamping. Bronzes, terracottas, and coins were the only artworks they could produce in large numbers. All others were unique and could not be technologically reproduced. Graphic art was first made technologically reproducible by the woodcut, long before written language became reproducible by movable type. The enormous changes brought about in literature by movable type, the technological reproducibility of writing, are well known. But they are only a special case, though an important one, of the phenomenon considered here from the perspective of world history. In the course of the Middle Ages the woodcut was supplemented by engraving and etching, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century by lithography.

Lithography marked a fundamentally new stage in the technology of reproduction. This much more direct process—distinguished by the fact that the drawing is traced on a stone, rather than incised on a block of wood or etched on a copper plate—first made it possible for graphic art to market its products not only in large numbers, as previously, but in daily changing variations. Lithography enabled graphic art to provide an illustrated accompaniment to everyday life. It began to keep pace with movable-type printing. But only a few decades after the invention of lithography, graphic art was surpassed by photography. For the first time, photography freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction—tasks that now devolved solely upon the eye looking into a lens. And since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was enormously accelerated, so that it could now keep pace with speech. A cinematographer shooting a scene in the studio captures the images at the speed of an actor's speech. Just as the illustrated newspaper virtually lay hidden within lithography, so the sound film was latent in photography. The technological reproduction of sound was tackled at the end of the last century. These convergent endeavors made it possible to conceive of the situation that Paul Valéry describes in this sentence: 'Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs with minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images,

which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign.<sup>2</sup> *Around 1900, technological reproduction not only had reached a standard that permitted it to reproduce all known works of art, profoundly modifying their effect, but it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes.* In gauging this standard, we would do well to study the impact which its two different manifestations—the reproduction of artworks and the art of film—are having on art in its traditional form.

## II

In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership.<sup>3</sup> Traces of the former can be detected only by chemical or physical analyses (which cannot be performed on a reproduction), while changes of ownership are part of a tradition which can be traced only from the standpoint of the original in its present location.

The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its authenticity. Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish its authenticity, just as the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages came from an archive of the fifteenth century helps to establish its authenticity. *The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and, of course, not only technological—reproducibility.*<sup>4</sup> But whereas the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproduction. The reason is twofold. First, technological reproduction is more independent of the original than is manual reproduction. For example, in photography it can bring out aspects of the original that are accessible only to the lens (which is adjustable and can easily change viewpoint) but not to the human eye; or it can use certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, to record images which escape natural optics altogether. This is the first reason. Second, technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a gramophone record. The cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover; the choral work performed in an auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room.

The situations into which the product of technological reproduction can be brought may leave the artwork's other properties untouched, but they certainly devalue the here and now of the artwork. And although this can apply not only to art but (say) to a landscape moving past the spectator in a film, in the work of art this process touches on a highly sensitive core, more vulnerable than that of any natural object. That core is its authenticity. The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration

plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.<sup>5</sup>

One might encompass the eliminated element within the concept of the aura, and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. The process is symptomatic; its significance extends far beyond the realm of art. *It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced.* These two processes lead to a massive upheaval in the domain of objects handed down from the past—a shattering of tradition which is the reverse side of the present crisis and renewal of humanity. Both processes are intimately related to the mass movements of our day. Their most powerful agent is film. The social significance of film, even—and especially—in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage. This phenomenon is most apparent in the great historical films. It is assimilating ever more advanced positions in its spread. When Abel Gance fervently proclaimed in 1927, 'Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films. ... All legends, all mythologies, and all myths, all the founders of religions, indeed, all religions, ... await their celluloid resurrection, and the heroes are pressing at the gates,' he was inviting the reader, no doubt unawares, to witness a comprehensive liquidation.<sup>6</sup>

### III

*Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception.* The way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it occurs—is conditioned not only by nature but by history. The era of the migration of peoples, an era which saw the rise of the late-Roman art industry and the Vienna Genesis, developed not only an art different from that of antiquity but also a different perception. The scholars of the Viennese school Riegl and Wickhoff, resisting the weight of the classical tradition beneath which this art had been buried, were the first to think of using such art to draw conclusions about the organization of perception at the time the art was produced.<sup>7</sup> However far-reaching their insight, it was limited by the fact that these scholars were content to highlight the formal signature which characterized perception in late-Roman times. They did not attempt to show the social upheavals manifested in these changes of perception—and perhaps could not have hoped to do so at that time. Today, the conditions for an analogous insight are more favorable. And if changes in the medium of present-day perception can be understood as a decay of the aura, it is possible to demonstrate the social determinants of that decay.

The concept of the aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects can be usefully illustrated with reference to an aura of natural objects. We define the aura of the latter as the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be.<sup>8</sup> To follow with the eye—while resting on a sum-

mer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch. In the light of this description, we can readily grasp the social basis of the aura's present decay. It rests on two circumstances, both linked to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely: *the desire of the present-day masses to 'get closer' to things spatially and humanly, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness [Überwindung des Einmaligen jeder Gegebenheit] by assimilating it as a reproduction.*<sup>9</sup> Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image [*Bild*], or better, in a facsimile [*Abbild*], a reproduction. And the reproduction [*Reproduktion*], as offered by illustrated magazines and newsreels, differs unmistakably from the image. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former. The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose 'sense for sameness in the world'<sup>10</sup> has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing significance of statistics. The alignment of reality with the masses and of the masses with reality is a process of immeasurable importance for both thinking and perception.

#### IV

The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition. Of course, this tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for instance, existed in a traditional context for the Greeks (who made it an object of worship) that was different from the context in which it existed for medieval clerics (who viewed it as a sinister idol). But what was equally evident to both was its uniqueness—that is, its aura. Originally, the embeddedness of an artwork in the context of tradition found expression in a cult. As we know, the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals—first magical, then religious. And it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function.<sup>11</sup> In other words: *the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the source of its original use value.* This ritualistic basis, however mediated it may be, is still recognizable as secularized ritual in even the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.<sup>12</sup> The secular worship of beauty, which developed during the Renaissance and prevailed for three centuries, clearly displayed that ritualistic basis in its subsequent decline and in the first severe crisis which befell it. For when, with the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction (namely, photography, which emerged at the same time as socialism), art felt the approach of that crisis which a century later has become unmistakable, it reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*—that is, with a theology of art. This in turn gave rise to a negative theology, in the form of an idea of 'pure' art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational content. (In poetry, Mallarmé was the first to adopt this standpoint.)<sup>13</sup>

No investigation of the work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility can overlook these connections. They lead to a crucial insight: for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual. To an ever-increasing degree, the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility.<sup>14</sup> From a photographic plate, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. *But as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics.*

## V

The reception of works of art varies in character, but in general two polar types stand out: one accentuates the artwork's cult value; the other, its exhibition value.<sup>15</sup> Artistic production begins with figures in the service of a cult. One may assume that it was more important for these figures to be present than to be seen. The elk depicted by Stone Age man on the walls of his cave is an instrument of magic. He exhibits it to his fellow men, to be sure, but in the main it is meant for the spirits. Cult value as such tends today, it would seem, to keep the artwork out of sight: certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain images of the Madonna remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are not visible to the viewer at ground level. *With the emancipation of specific artistic practices from the service of ritual, the opportunities for exhibiting their products increase.* It is easier to exhibit a portrait bust that can be sent here and there than to exhibit the statue of a divinity that has a fixed place in the interior of a temple. A panel painting can be exhibited more easily than the mosaic or fresco which preceded it. And although a Mass may have been no less suited to public presentation than a symphony, the symphony came into being at a time when the possibility of such presentation promised to be greater.

The scope for exhibiting the work of art has increased so enormously with the various methods of technologically reproducing it that, as happened in prehistoric times, a quantitative shift between the two poles of the artwork has led to a qualitative transformation in its nature. Just as the work of art in prehistoric times, through the absolute emphasis placed on its cult value, became first and foremost an instrument of magic which only later came to be recognized as a work of art, so today, through the absolute emphasis placed on its exhibition value, the work of art becomes a construct [*Gebilde*] with quite new functions. Among these, the one we are conscious of—the artistic function—may subsequently be seen as incidental.<sup>16</sup> This much is certain: today, photography and film are the most serviceable vehicles of this new understanding.

## VI

*In photography, exhibition value begins to drive back cult value on all fronts.* But cult value does not give way without resistance. It falls back to a last entrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait is central to

early photography. In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time. This is what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty. But as the human being withdraws from the photographic image, exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to cult value. To have given this development its local habitation constitutes the unique significance of Atget, who, around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets.<sup>17</sup> It has justly been said that he photographed them like scenes of crimes. A crime scene, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographic records begin to be evidence in the historical trial [*Prozess*]. This constitutes their hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer appropriate to them. They unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them. At the same time, illustrated magazines begin to put up signposts for him—whether these are right or wrong is irrelevant. For the first time, captions become obligatory. And it is clear that they have a character altogether different from the titles of paintings. The directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines soon become even more precise and commanding in films, where the way each single image is understood appears prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images.

## Epilogue

The increasing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two sides of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights.<sup>18</sup> The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them *expression* in keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.* The violation of the masses, whom fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into serving the production of ritual values.

*All efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in one point. That one point is war.* War, and only war, makes it possible to set a goal for mass movements on the grandest scale while preserving traditional property relations. That is how the situation presents itself in political terms. In technological terms it can be formulated as follows: only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technological resources while maintaining property relations. It goes without saying that the fascist glorification of war does not make use of *these* arguments. Nevertheless, a glance at such glorification is instructive. In Marinetti's manifesto for the colonial war in Ethiopia, we read:

For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the idea that war is anti-aesthetic.... We therefore state: ... War is beautiful because—thanks to its gas masks, its terrifying megaphones, its flame throwers, and light tanks—it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machine. War is beautiful because it inaugurates the dreamed-of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine-guns. War is beautiful because it combines gunfire,



barrages, cease-fires, scents, and the fragrance of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architectures, like those of armored tanks, geometric squadrons of aircraft, spirals of smoke from burning villages, and much more. . . . Poets and artists of Futurism, . . . remember these principles of an aesthetic of war, that they may illuminate. . . . your struggles for a new poetry and a new sculpture!<sup>19</sup>

This manifesto has the merit of clarity. The question it poses deserves to be taken up by the dialectician. To him, the aesthetic of modern warfare appears as follows: if the natural use of productive forces is impeded by the property system, then the increase in technological means, in speed, in sources of energy will press toward an unnatural use. This is found in war, and the destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently devel-

oped to master the elemental forces of society. The most horrifying features of imperialist war are determined by the discrepancy between the enormous means of production and their inadequate use in the process of production (in other words, by unemployment and the lack of markets). *Imperialist war is an uprising on the part of technology, which demands repayment in 'human material' for the natural material society has denied it.* Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and in gas warfare it has found a new means of abolishing the aura.

'Fiat ars—pereat mundus,'<sup>20</sup> says fascism, expecting from war, as Marinetti admits, the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology. This is evidently the consummation of *l'art pour l'art*. Humankind, which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure. *Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art.*

Written spring 1936–March or April 1939; unpublished in this form in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 471–508. Translated by Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott.

# Can Our Values Be Objective?

## On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics

Are evaluations always political? Are our efforts to make objective value judgments always thwarted by our own political interests or our cultural and social perspectives? I am interested in this question because I am interested in progressive politics and would like to believe that my values and commitments are not rigidly determined by my social background or my narrow personal interests. In this essay I would like to defend the view that objectivity is attainable in the realm of values, in such areas as ethics and even aesthetics. For the purposes of the present discussion, I shall pose the question about value in epistemological terms: Can we human beings be objective in our views and judgments about such properties as goodness, justice, or beauty?

In order to outline my position and present my argument, however, I need to first explain what I mean by objectivity, for it is clear that we live in a postempiricist intellectual world where the term has undergone substantial redefinition. Whether we work in literary studies or in philosophy, in anthropology or any of the social sciences, we have to acknowledge the deep critique of empiricist and positivist epistemologies which has emerged from related developments in the philosophies of science and language, in ethics and cultural studies. Specifically, what has been shown to be inadequate is a particular conception of observation and objective knowledge. Thus, philosophers like Quine and Putnam, Nietzsche or Heidegger, all argue that everything that science relies on—its methodology, its understanding of what ‘facts’ are, its practices of confirmation and even observation—is always necessarily theory-dependent rather than innocent, filtered through our values, presuppositions, and ideologies, rather than unmediated and self-evident.

Where contemporary philosophers and most literary theorists disagree, however, is in their account of the implications of this antipositivist insight about the unavoidability of theory. A natural question to ask the antipositivist is this: Does the necessary ubiquity of theories and presuppositions, of biases and ideologies, lead to the conclusion that ‘objectivity’ as such is never possible, not in values and not even in science? That conclusion, that objectivity is never possible, is endorsed by postmodernist thinkers who are influential especially in the fields of literary and cultural studies. A very different conclusion, endorsed by post-positivist thinkers in a variety of fields from philosophy of science to some new forms of literary theory, is that what is outmoded

is specifically the positivist conception of objectivity, a conception based on a denial of the role of theory. This positivist view defines objective knowledge as something we achieve when we have freed ourselves from all bias and all interest; in this conception objectivity is seen as absolute *neutrality*, a complete divestiture of the thinker's subjectivity and her socially situated values, ideologies, and theoretical presuppositions. Defenders of a postpositivist conception of objectivity claim that this image of complete divestiture is profoundly flawed because such divestiture is never possible for humans. Objectivity is not neutrality. What we need to develop, such thinkers insist, is a more nuanced conception of objectivity which goes beyond the specifically positivist view of it; it is argued that this new conception can be built on an analysis of the differences between different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias or interest, an analysis that distinguishes those biases that are limiting or counterproductive from those that are in fact necessary for knowledge, that are epistemically productive and useful.

Arguing against postmodernist literary and cultural critics, I said in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* that such an analysis of different kinds of bias and prejudice needs to focus on the role error plays in human inquiry. Our elaboration of a new, nuanced conception of objectivity in literary and cultural inquiry, I suggested, depends on the richness of our understanding of error—its sources and causes, as well as the variety of forms it takes in various contexts. Our conceptions of objectivity and error are dialectically related. Both conceptions are the product of good inquiry, inquiry that is necessarily both theoretical and empirical. The analysis of error—of the distorting role played by pernicious social ideologies for instance, or the limitations of certain methodological approaches—is unavoidably empirical, even while it involves theoretical considerations. Similarly, the analysis of what works, what is epistemically productive and useful, is also simultaneously empirical and theoretical.<sup>1</sup> The view I am defending is opposed to the postmodernist position that objectivity as such is impossible, for I believe that objectivity is often a realizable goal. Indeed, as I suggest later, objectivity is an epistemic ideal in the realm of values precisely because *values often refer to facts and properties that exist independently of our beliefs*. Such moral and aesthetic properties as goodness, justice, and beauty are, on this view, complex properties of objects and persons in the world, and we can be right or wrong in our attempts to detect and understand such properties. For realists (about value), the identification and analysis of error is essential for the attainment of objective knowledge.

One of my claims in this essay is that when postmodernists assume a skeptical attitude toward objectivity in an a priori way, their analysis of error often ends up being very limited in some ways and very inflated in others. An a priori skepticism makes it less urgent for us to look carefully at the variety of forms of, say, ideological error, and at the reasons for the differences among these different forms. The incomplete or inadequate empirical analysis is both supported by and seen as the support for an inflated thesis about the unavoidability of error. Error and distortion thus become a primeval epistemic condition, an original sinfulness, as it were. Instead of an explanation of error, we end up with a theology that sets unnecessarily rigid limits on the scope of social inquiry.

## Foucault vs. Chomsky: Are Values Political?

The postmodernist view of error is often presented initially as an empirical caution, but the skepticism that it is supposed to lead to is deep and unwavering, ultimately amounting to an acontextual and unqualified position. What begins as an empirically grounded caution is often elevated to a rigid theoretical doctrine.<sup>2</sup> And nowhere is this move from methodological caution to inflexible theory as clearly evident as in the postmodernist suspicion of normativity, of values. This suspicion leads some thinkers—particularly progressive thinkers—into strange quandaries, or at least into obvious inconsistencies. Michel Foucault, for instance, in his 1971 debate with Noam Chomsky, initially raises the empirically based question about whether political activists and thinkers should rely on a substantive conception of human nature, deriving justification for their values and goals from such a conception. His initial point is a familiar one, and it is fundamentally sound: ‘If you say that a certain human nature exists, that this human nature has not been given in actual society the rights and the possibilities which allow it to realise itself ... [don’t you] risk defining this human nature—which is at the same time ideal and real ...—in terms borrowed from our society, from our civilization, from our culture?’ (‘Human Nature,’ 173–74). The ‘risk’ Foucault is talking about can be best understood in the context of the antipositivist theoretical insight I identified earlier. All knowledge is unavoidably socially situated, and it is impossible to seek the kind of objectivity that is understood as neutrality, as ideological or theoretical innocence. When we try to define human nature, we inevitably do so ‘in terms borrowed from our society, from our civilization, from our culture.’ The legitimate question, then, is: since our account of human nature is inevitably shaped by our society and culture, the context in which the account originates, how can we minimize the risk of repeating our culture’s ideological errors, projecting our metaphysical blindnesses onto the ideal human nature we wish to imagine and theorize? Foucault’s initial point is also a more specifically historical one: we risk error in talking about human nature, he says, because we know of so many instances in the past when we have erred, and erred seriously and egregiously. Socialists of a certain period, he points out, unwittingly used a bourgeois model of human nature even when they claimed to be going beyond such a model and its ideological implications: ‘The socialism of ... the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth century, admitted in effect that in capitalist societies man hadn’t realized the full potential of his development and self-realization. ... And [this socialism] dreamed of an ultimately liberated human nature. ... What model did it use to conceive, project, and eventually realize human nature? It was in fact the bourgeois model. The universalization of the model of the bourgeois has been the utopia which has animated the constitution of Soviet society.’ All of this indicates, he concludes, ‘that it is difficult to say exactly what human nature is’ and that ‘there is a risk that we will be led into error’ (174).

Now, it is necessary to be careful here if we want to understand where exactly the disagreement lies. For few people on the other side of this debate (Chomsky, to take an obvious instance) will dream of denying that it is ‘difficult to say exactly what human nature is’ if by that we mean that it is difficult to come up with a comprehensive account of human nature. But that is not

Foucault's main point. His point about the 'risk' (that 'we will be led into error') cuts deeper. His antipositivist theoretical insight and his empirical caution about the historical errors in our use of the idea of human nature together lead Foucault to entertain an extreme claim: human nature as such may not exist, for what we have is entirely culture- or class-specific. He cites Mao approvingly, suggesting that there may only be a 'bourgeois human nature and [a] proletarian human nature and [Mao thinks] that they are not the same thing' (174). This is a radically relativist (and historicist) position, but notice that it does not follow in a straightforward way from the earlier thesis about the erroneous and unwittingly ideological uses of the concept of human nature. From empirically grounded cautions about error, we have been led to at least two possible theses: (1) there is no such thing as human nature; and/or (2) our knowledge of human nature, even if there were such a thing, would never be reliable or objective, since everything we can say about human nature will be ideological. Now the two theses I have identified are distinct, and they call for different kinds of argument and evidence for support, but Foucault's general attitude suggests that he is drawn to (at least) the skeptical thesis (2), which denies the possibility of objective knowledge altogether. Bourgeois or proletarian, we are stuck with our own class-based views about human nature, and there is no going beyond such limited ideological views. The socialist thinkers cited earlier, Foucault would say, proved how dead wrong one can be in trying to go beyond one's culture-specific and class-specific notions and images of human nature. Their error, in other words, is symptomatic of the human condition; there is no hope of transcending such an ideology.

I believe that Foucault's attitude toward human nature cannot be adequately understood unless we see that it is accompanied by a tenacious suspicion of all normative claims as such. In fact, this suspicion strengthens the view that no objective account of human nature is possible. The problem with human nature might be that it is, as he says, simultaneously 'ideal and real,' and hence our thinking about it is especially vulnerable to speculative fancies. The suspicion of normative claims becomes clearer later in the discussion. Arguing for the need for the victory of the proletariat in its class struggle against the bourgeoisie, Foucault nonetheless balks at the idea that this need ought to be justified by appealing to a normative conception such as social justice. He is quite emphatic about this: 'The proletariat does not wage war against the ruling class because it considers such a war to be just. The proletariat makes war ... because for the first time in history it wants to take power. And *because* it will overthrow the power of the ruling class it considers such a war to be just. ... One makes war to win, not because it is just' (182, emphasis added). For Foucault, this is not a psychological description (of the way the proletariat thinks); rather, it is an account of what 'justifies' proletarian class struggle, which Foucault supports. The justification, he says, is not justice, since it does not exist except as tied inextricably to power (180; see the following discussion). It is power, the newly acquired power of the proletariat after its victory, that will justify its struggle. There is thus bourgeois justice and proletarian justice, with no objective conception of justice that can transcend either.

It is on this point about whether value judgments can be objectively justified that Chomsky, for the sake of clarification, presses Foucault. If Foucault

could be convinced, Chomsky suggests for the sake of argument, that the victory of the proletariat will lead to terror and the permanent abuse of power and never to a better society, he would probably not support the proletariat; his support of the working people in a class war must depend on a conviction—or a vision—of something better than what exists. Foucault admits, finally, that class struggle is more than a simple logic of fighting to win: ‘What the proletariat will achieve by expelling the class which is at present in power and by taking over power itself, is precisely the suppression of the power of class in general’ (184). ‘The suppression of the power of class in general’—here, clearly, is a basic conception of a more just order, where the premises are that class power (particularly in its current form) is wrong and it is only the proletariat that can use its power to get rid of class power. Here, surely, is a conception of justice, no matter how elementary a sketch it might be. But, interestingly, Foucault denies that his justification is in terms of ‘justice’ or any other normative notion. The theoretical argument he advances is radically skeptical and relativist: ‘Contrary to what you think, you can’t prevent me from believing that these notions of human nature, of justice, of the realization of the essence of human beings, are all notions and concepts which have been formed within our civilization, within our type of knowledge and our form of philosophy, and that as a result form part of our class system; and one can’t, however regrettable it may be, put forward these notions to justify a fight which should—and shall in principle—overthrow the very fundamentals of our society. This is an extrapolation for which I can’t find the ... historical justification’ (187).

Here is what Foucault means by the ‘extrapolation’ for which he can find no ‘historical justification’: A culture’s deepest evaluative concepts, like human welfare and social justice, are formed within the ideological, philosophical, and political boundaries of that culture, and people like Chomsky wish to use these concepts to justify an objective ideal, one that by definition goes beyond the bounds of this culture. How, Foucault asks, can one justify a political ideal with terms and concepts borrowed from a world that is far from ideal? How can you adequately imagine a healthy body while using the diseased and faulty organs of perception and imagination that we in fact have? I think this is a good question, and an important one, but notice that formulated in this way it is linked to the antipositivist point about the theory-dependence of observation and knowledge which I discussed earlier. Foucault’s question is the same one philosophers of science, for instance, have been raising for several decades now: given that scientific methods are so radically theory-dependent, how can we use them to gain objective knowledge, knowledge that can transcend the limitations of the given theory? Different answers to this question are provided by different philosophers and historians of science, but the one point that is relevant to our discussion of the status of value is that a lot depends on precisely how we define objectivity. As may already be evident, Foucault does in fact have a conception of objective values here; it is simply that his conception of objectivity is so extreme and ahistorical that it is impossible to attain. While seeming to argue in a general way for an antipositivist view of objective knowledge, Foucault in fact *assumes* an essentially positivist conception of objectivity as absolute (ideological, theoretical, and historical) neutrality! And since this extreme and abstract notion of objectiv-



ity is impossible to attain, he ends up espousing a rigidly skeptical view about values. Let me explain how this happens.

Foucault's thesis is not that our ideas about justice and human nature are inevitably somewhat tainted by our current social ideologies and our other views about, say, morality, society, and even the nature of the universe. None of Foucault's opponents in this debate, to the extent they accept the anti-positivist view we've discussed, would deny this basic claim about the social situatedness of knowledge. Foucault's real claim—the one that differentiates his position from that of someone like Chomsky—is that we cannot even distinguish between the *current* conception of justice and a *better* one. He argues against Chomsky's use of the idea of a better justice: 'So it is in the name of a purer justice that you criticize the functioning of justice? There is an important question for us here. It is true that in all social struggles, there is a question of "justice". . . . But if justice is at stake in a struggle, then it is as an instrument of power; it is not in the hope that finally one day, in this or another society, people will be rewarded according to their merits, or punished according to their faults' (180). The thesis is this: since the notion of justice is at stake in (that is, is deployed in and hence redefined by) social struggles—a perfectly plausible empirical claim about just about every society we know—justice is *no more than* an instrument of power.

Since power corrupts our concepts and our methods of inquiry, Foucault asks, how can we use such concepts and methods to imagine a world that transcends our political framework? His own implicit answer, that we cannot legitimately justify our normative ideals, is supported by the following further specification: We cannot in principle talk about better conceptions of justice, since for such a conception to be truly better, it must not make *any* reference to any of the 'fundaments of our society' (187), the society that has shaped such a conception. The underlying view is that the only conception of justice that can really—objectively—be better than what we've got is one that is entirely new, entirely free of our current social biases and ideologies, all our current knowledge—the fundaments of our society. Short of this kind of untainted and pristine conception of justice—divested of everything that can legitimately be called cultural or social—every conception becomes ideological, in the narrowly pejorative sense of the word. Objective knowledge of justice is imaginable, according to this line of argument, but only as a form of absolute theoretical and ideological neutrality. We do not know what 'justice' can refer to, and it is best (on this theoretical view) to define objectivity as a purely epistemic stance—one defined by a complete shedding of all our social and political 'biases', all our theoretical commitments. But of course this is the very conception of objectivity, the severely asocial and ahistorical positivist view, which we were supposed to reject!<sup>3</sup>

This is a limiting and unproductive conception of objectivity, but why is Foucault (unwittingly) drawn to it? I suggest that it is because he subscribes to an implausible form of epistemological holism, an unnecessarily extreme version of the legitimate antipositivist thesis about the theory-dependence of all observation and knowledge. Foucault's implausible epistemological holism is not in principle limited to values, since it can have relevance for all of human knowledge, but his arguments here focus on evaluative concepts since (as we saw above) they are simultaneously 'ideal and real.' His initial

claim is that 'justice,' as an evaluative notion, is tied to various other features of our social world, those features that make our world what it in fact is. In arguing against the objectivity of evaluative notions like justice, Foucault is not drawing on the familiar observation that since, when we look cross-culturally, we see a variety of conceptions of justice, our own conception must be limited and culture-specific. For this familiar observation naturally elicits the objection that the presence of variety does not preclude the possibility that one of the existing conceptions is in fact better, more accurate than the others. Recognition of variety is useful, it might be argued, to show how some cultural contexts might in fact have enabled greater accuracy and objectivity in thinking about the nature of the just society, while others have served to distort our thinking about these matters. The mere existence of cultural variety in approaches to justice does nothing, it can be objected, to establish the general skeptical or relativist thesis, the thesis that notions of justice are entirely culture- or class-specific. But Foucault's argument is not vulnerable to this objection, for at bottom he is proposing an epistemology of value. Values are always partly speculative, the claim goes, and we can never justify them since they are especially prone to social distortion. Indeed, this distortion is of a kind that undermines *any* possibility of justification. You cannot expect to eliminate distortions produced by particular relations of power, say the class system, Foucault would say, because these relations are *inextricably* dependent on various other things that make our society or culture what it is. It is this claim about *inextricability* that makes Foucault's position untenable, for it suggests that error and distortion cannot be eliminated and our critical analyses of social phenomena will always be radically compromised by the ideologies of our class or, more generally, our society. For Foucault, notions like justice are formed within overlapping structures of discourse and political power: they 'have been formed within our civilization, within our type of knowledge, and our form of philosophy, and as a result form part of our class system.' The type of knowledge and form of philosophy are causally related to the class system, but this relationship is so radically determined—or perhaps just so irreducibly complex—that it undermines any attempt to analyze the distortion produced by any one of them. That explains why (according to Foucault) even the search for slightly better, slightly less distorted, views of human nature or social and political justice is impossible.<sup>4</sup> It is this crucial thesis about the analytical inextricability of power and truth, the reduction of all analysis to ideology, that makes Foucault's epistemological holism extreme and implausible, and it on this kind of holism that the myth of an otherworldly, asocial (and always necessarily impossible) objectivity is based.

Chomsky, on the other hand, argues that we need better values, that often our social struggles are best served not only by carefully articulated critiques of what exists but also carefully elaborated visions of how the social arrangements we are criticizing could be different and better, more humane and just. His defense of the need for 'better' concepts of justice is based on the view that our most valuable notions of justice are firmly grounded in a plausible (though necessarily partial) view of human nature. 'Our concept of human nature is certainly limited; it's partially socially conditioned, constrained by our own character defects and the limitations of the intellectual culture in which we exist. Yet at the same time it is of critical importance that we

know what impossible goals we're trying to achieve, if we hope to achieve some of the possible ones. And that means that we have to be bold enough to speculate and create social theories on the basis of partial knowledge, while remaining very open to the strong possibility, and in fact overwhelming probability, that at least in some respects we're very far off the mark' (175). Here is a view of how partly speculative notions like human nature are not only necessary but also legitimate; it outlines an epistemological approach I take for granted in the second section of this paper, where I propose an alternative to the Foucauldian (and, more generally, the postmodernist) account of values. Foucault is deeply suspicious of all evaluative concepts because, as he claims, power and knowledge are so deeply intertwined that we cannot 'extrapolate' from our current ideologically tainted concepts to less ideological, more 'objective' ones. This claim about the relationship of power and knowledge, as I have shown, is based on an extreme form of epistemological holism, which is an implausible version of the legitimate postpositivist thesis about the theory-dependence of all knowledge. It is this kind of implausible holism which sanctions Foucault's own view of objectivity as a kind of (absolute) epistemic neutrality, a view that mirrors the widely criticized positivist conception of objectivity. The net effect of these theses is that Foucault's skepticism about values (and perhaps all knowledge) becomes an a priori matter; notwithstanding the numerous statements about current ideologies and political arrangements, the skepticism itself is entirely independent of any empirical understanding of actually existing societies. Even though Foucault claims that he cannot find historical justification for the hope that we will be able to come up with better values and visions than what exist, his own skepticism about values is itself free of empirical support or justification. And there does not seem to be much room left open for seeking such support for it. Once we adopt this extreme thesis about values, that better values, genuinely better ones, must make no reference at all to the fundamentals of our society, culture, and civilization, the skeptical position follows automatically. And the skepticism is insulated from any real empirical testing and elaboration. For there can be no genuine empirical elaboration of a claim without the possibility that the claim might itself be proved wrong. When we acknowledge such a possibility, this overly inflexible skeptical stance, this suspicion of normative theory as such, becomes untenable. In the realm of social analysis, such a priori skepticism becomes dogmatic or doctrinaire, since it leaves open no room for its own empirical or theoretical errors. Oddly enough (or, some would say, naturally enough), such a doctrinaire approach bases itself on claims about the ubiquity of ideological error and the need for a rigorous analysis of socially based distortions.

It must be evident by now that even though Foucault has been talking about political and ethical values—namely justice—the argument I have identified would extend his skeptical stance to aesthetic values as well. In fact, it is easier to see why one should be a skeptic about aesthetic values. The deeper argument against the possibility that some aesthetic values can be objective is not the empirical fact that there is a great deal of cross-cultural difference, variety, and indeed disagreement over aesthetic judgments (the purely empirical argument we often get from some multiculturalists) but rather the very one about

the ubiquity of theory that I identified earlier. The deeper argument will see aesthetic value as socially situated and hence culturally subjective for the very same reasons that all values (especially ethical and political ones) are subjective; it identifies a problem with values *as such*, and how we justify them. The deeper justification for skepticism about aesthetic values must derive from a version of epistemological holism in which all value judgments are contextual and culture-specific by definition. Just as ethical and political notions like justice are inextricably tied to what Foucault calls the ‘fundamentals of our society’ (any society), so—it must be argued—are aesthetic notions, which are deeply entwined with the society’s cultural and ethical notions.

The literary theorist Barbara H. Smith, who has written widely cited essays and books on value, has argued that we should define values as no more than ‘positive effects’ (‘Value/Evaluation,’ 180). Here is how she supports this idea:

In recognizing the tacit assumptions built into value judgments, we can also recognize that, when we frame an explicit verbal evaluation of a text, we are usually not expressing only how we feel about it ‘personally’ but, rather, observing its effects on ourselves and estimating its value for other people: not all other people, however, but a limited set of people with certain relevant characteristics—usually, though not necessarily, characteristics that they share with us. (183)

This is the same kind of claim as the one Foucault makes, but instead of referring to the entire civilization or culture as Foucault does, Smith refers to smaller social groups (‘sets’) within a culture. The underlying claim is, however, the same: the possibility of objective value judgments is ruled out in advance because values refer primarily (and perhaps even essentially) to social context. ‘[W]ith respect to values,’ Smith claims, ‘everything is always in motion with respect to everything else. If there *are* constancies of literary value, they will be found *in those very motions*: that is, in the relations among the variables. For, like all value, literary value is not the property of an object *or* of a subject but, rather, *the product of the dynamics of a system*’ (*Contingencies*, 15–16; emphases in the original). The ‘system’ is defined in social and historical terms, for while Smith does indeed admit to some ‘species-wide’ features of human nature, such features are defined in highly restrictive behaviorist language. They do not point (*at all*) to deeper human needs and capacities, for instance, but instead only to ‘mechanisms of perception and cognition ... as they relate to ... verbal behavior.’ Such ‘presumably biophysiological mechanisms,’ Smith clarifies, ‘will always operate differentially in different environments ... and, therefore, the experience of literary and aesthetic value cannot be altogether accounted for, reduced to, or predicted by them’ (*Contingencies*, 15). Culture and social context determine value more than do any deep features of human nature, and thus values are no more than positive *effects*. The possibility that is ruled out in advance is that the different ways in which different social groups make value judgments may also be evaluated from a perspective that is not limited to any of these groups.

Such evaluation would partly depend, as I have been suggesting, on an analysis of different kinds of socially based error, and of the different sources and causes of these errors. Once we engage in such an analysis we have to keep open the possibility that in some instances some kinds of error can be eradicated through appropriate adjustments in our methodologies, our back-

ground assumptions and theories, or the cultural information we take for granted. Empirical inquiry becomes essential if we are to understand not only particular kinds of error but also what values are; it is the only genuine way to substantiate and test the skeptical claim Smith (and Foucault before her) wants to make about the epistemology of value. Such empirically grounded theoretical inquiry would help us see whether Smith's desire to narrowly circumscribe values as merely 'positive effects' is justified or whether it tethers us to an implausible behaviorist view. An equally essential part of my theoretical proposal in the next section is a thesis about the links between value and human nature; like Chomsky, I would like to argue that values are not *only* socially determined, because often they also refer to deeper features of human nature, our species-wide needs and capacities, which set limits on how historically 'contingent' legitimate evaluations can be. Our evaluations can be objective, I suggest, because they are often about features of human nature which are independent of our own socially shaped judgments and attitudes. Despite their enormous social variability, our evaluations can thus be more than merely positive effects, and more than unacknowledged political interests. One of the key challenges for any theory of value, then, is to account for *both* the social and historical variability of values *and* (simultaneously) the possibility of objectivity.

### How Values Can Be Objective

I would like to outline a proposal about how to define value so that we avoid the pitfalls of the skeptical position, and in particular its a priori approach to the epistemic status of values. I propose that many of our deepest evaluative concepts, whether ethical ones or aesthetic, refer not only to the cultures and social contexts in which they were produced but also, as it were, 'outward': they refer both to genuine properties of human nature and to what we know about our social and political possibilities. Such evaluative notions will naturally reflect the underlying biases and ideologies, the theoretical prejudices and empirical limitations, of our own cultural views. But they also reflect—either badly or well, reflecting degrees of error and distortion but also accuracy and objectivity—what we currently know about humankind and its possibilities. When I talk about 'reference' here, I mean a process and a relation that are dynamic rather than static: our deeper evaluative notions are linked not to unique and singular objects in the world but instead to complex objects and the way we gain epistemic access to them. On this view of reference, then, as a culture acquires more accurate knowledge of, say, human potentials and capacities, its central evaluative notions and concepts will become richer. Such knowledge depends on a number of factors, from everyday practical experiments with, say, child-rearing or forms of education to more self-consciously reflexive and methodologically systematic kinds of research conducted within institutions. There is room here for both objective knowledge and error, since our deepest evaluations—regarding such things as social justice, for instance—refer not only to what we, in a given culture, know *now*, but also, necessarily, to what we may come to know later about the object of inquiry. Our values are thus 'open-textured' in nature, open in the same way that any knowledge-gathering process is. Since they depend

on what we know (or can imagine realistically) now, our values are historically and socially embedded. In referring outward to the object of an ongoing inquiry, they remain partial and incomplete theses or theories about something objective and transculturally valid.<sup>5</sup>

I submit that this way of defining value is better than the purely skeptical or relativist approaches I have identified. On this general view, the question of objectivity is raised in the context of our empirical and theoretical analyses of error. Such error arises more from cultural than from purely individual biases, for in linking values to our knowledge of our social and political possibilities, I have indicated why values are not simply inside an individual's head, reflecting merely idiosyncratic and purely subjective beliefs. They are social, even when they are refracted through an individual's beliefs and personal needs. But they should not be seen as purely internal to a given society, culture, or civilization either. At bottom, my epistemological defense of values is based on the specifically realist claim that some of our deepest evaluations refer to (properties of) objects that exist *independently* of our local social and cultural beliefs. In this context, then, 'objectivity' should be understood as more than an epistemic stance or attitude (such as, say, neutrality), because *in these crucial cases* our evaluations can be right or wrong about these objects. Human nature is such an *object* about which we (entire cultures or societies) can be right or wrong. Unlike Foucault, I argue that (some of) our values track real 'objects' of inquiry. It is possible to be objective in our evaluations because our deepest evaluations are often about complex objects in the world, objects which we are attempting to understand and know and which cannot be reduced to our ideological constructions.

Thus, our evaluations are necessarily shaped by answers to questions that might be asked in local cultural conditions but that are not thereby limited to the local. Here is a set of closely entwined questions that suggest how values are dependent on ongoing empirical and theoretical research and how they refer outward beyond a local culture or society; an interesting feature of the questions, you will notice, is that it is difficult to neatly separate the ethical from the aesthetic, the political from the scientific: How much fruitful cooperation and interchange are humans capable of? Are altruism and the capacity for sympathy for others fully realized in the societies with which we are familiar, or are there social forms and arrangements that might enhance, even beyond our wildest imagination, these traits and capacities? To what extent are human cognitive powers dependent on the affective dimension of our lives, and how does affective growth expand even our theoretical imagination? And finally, is the imagination one underlying cognitive faculty, with deep connections and interdependencies among its various activities—in the realms of, say, science, ethics, and aesthetics—or would it be legitimate to talk about various faculties, various kinds of imagination—moral, aesthetic, and so on? Answers to such questions cannot be purely speculative but will need to be empirically grounded as well, and so such answers will entail the possibility of our being wrong at times and right at times, of both error and distortion on the one hand and of knowledge on the other (or at least of a better account, a less distorted one). It also seems clear that our accounts of both what we consider error and what we consider objective knowledge will themselves involve both empirical and theoretical considerations. Judgments about error



or knowledge will, quite typically, arise out of complex negotiations among competing theories and even bodies of theory, including normative theory. In this way, even such basic judgments will be socially embedded, tied to ideologies and the social practices of our own cultures. But notice, once again, that on the realist view I am advocating here, the pursuit of such questions (at least in these crucial cases) has to be shaped by 'objects' that are not purely cultural or ideological. The thesis here (going back to contrast the claim with what Foucault says) is that even though there is a bourgeois conception of human nature and a proletarian conception of human nature, there is a human nature that may well not be accurately and adequately depicted by either conception, and it is this that is *also* the subject of inquiry. The implication of this thesis is that even though, say, the bourgeois view of the human capacity for cooperation will be limited and shaped by the ideology and experience of the bourgeoisie, to ask questions about such a capacity for cooperation is to inquire, in a way that transcends any particular ideology, about a property that is shared by all humans, both members of the bourgeois class and the proletariat. So it would be unnecessarily limiting to consider the questions themselves to be purely ideological, open only to intracultural descriptive analysis.

# Visual Culture Studies: Questions of History, Theory, and Practice

*What is visual culture or visual studies? Is it an emergent discipline, a passing moment of interdisciplinary turbulence, a research topic, a field or subfield of cultural studies, media studies, rhetoric and communication, art history, or aesthetics? Does it have a specific object of research, or is it a grab-bag of problems left over from respectable, well-established disciplines? If it is a field, what are its boundaries and limiting definitions? Should it be institutionalized as an academic structure, made into a department or given programmatic status, with all the appurtenances of syllabi, textbooks, prerequisites, requirements, and degrees? How should it be taught? What would it mean to profess visual culture in a way that is more than improvisatory?*

W.J.T. Mitchell<sup>1</sup>

By asking this series of questions at the onset of his article, 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture,' W.J.T. Mitchell, one of the scholars responsible for the emergence of sustained and critically engaging discussions of visual culture studies in recent years, goes on to encourage his readers to confront some of the field's limitations, pointing to the pervasive myths and fallacies upon which the study of visual culture at present is based.<sup>2</sup> While here is not the place to rehearse his argument, what is of note is that his considerations begin with a series of questions that provoke an engagement, and as such these key questions also need to be foregrounded by us for they are central in any deliberation on the thorny subject of 'visual culture studies.' This is because his questions are questions of definition, of disciplinarity, and of the 'object' of visual culture, as well as questions for the institution and for pedagogy. Mitchell's questions lead us to ask: what do we call this discipline? Is it in fact a discipline, or, perhaps, a sub-discipline, an inter-discipline even, or something else? What objects or artifacts or media or environments are 'appropriate' for or particular to this field of inquiry? What does it mean for visual culture or visual studies or visual culture studies to be taught, and how should this teaching take place?

There are many more questions here than there are answers. This is one of the troubles, also one of the pleasures, of visual culture studies—as we shall go on to discover. With this in mind, this chapter will propose complex ways of engaging with these deeply complex questions which have enormous implications for those of us concerned with the study of the past, present, and future of our visual cultures. To this end, the chapter will seek to ask further questions that at first sight appear deceptively straightforward: what is visual culture

studies? Why are the bonds between visual culture studies and its intersecting fields of inquiry, the very fields that inform it, so tense? And finally, what is the purview or object domain of visual culture studies, or, rather, what is the 'object' of study of visual culture studies? Each of these questions will have one section in this chapter devoted to it. In addition, the final section on the 'object' of visual culture studies will conclude by offering a case study, a visual culture study, on the awkward historical, conceptual, and aesthetic question of 'place.'

The case study is presented as an example of how we might go about 'doing' visual culture studies, and the topic of 'place' has been chosen for three reasons. Firstly, because it is impossible to consider 'place' without being cross- and interdisciplinary from the beginning: in this case study, for instance, we need to take account of debates within and between the disciplines of art, architecture, and urban studies, cultural geography, anthropology, philosophy, and postcolonial studies. Secondly, because the intricate and multifaceted nature of 'place' foregrounds our need for lateral thinking, we must explore issues of location, migration, exile, belonging, home, cultural memory, nation, and landscapes, geographies, cartographies, and visual iconographies of travel. Thirdly, because 'place' needs to be considered in these ways it comprises an instance of how a visual culture study that begins from the question of 'place' itself makes it possible to imagine and engender new subjects and objects of research, of writing, and of practice. The question of 'place,' then, offers itself up as a perfect instance of all the problems, challenges, and possibilities embodied in the fraught emergence and future development of the field of visual culture studies.

### **What is Visual Culture Studies?**

If we go to our university or college library, to a local bookshop or to any online bookshop, we will encounter numerous books with 'visual culture' in the title. When they are not in a section of their own—which rarely happens—visual culture books are shelved throughout the library or bookshop in sections that are in keeping with the categorizing systems of libraries and bookshops and the programmed drifting of the potential purchaser. These books appear in sections as diverse as art history or art theory or aesthetics or critical theory or philosophy or film and media studies or women's studies or black studies or theater and drama or architecture or queer theory or anthropology or sociology. No one quite knows where to put 'visual culture' books and no one quite knows where to look for them. Neither authors, publishers, retailers, nor customers are entirely clear as to what a visual culture book should do or where it should be placed.<sup>3</sup>

Why is this? Because books with 'visual culture' in the title come in all shapes and sizes, they provide an almost infinite diversity of texts that seem to want to address all historical periods, explore any and every geographical location, conceive of all manner of thematic—and recommend an encyclopaedia of accompanying methodological—tools and practices. So, for example, some books are gathered together diachronically, marking a broad historical time-frame from the Middle Ages to the present, while others amass synchronically across diverse territories from Wales to Latin America. Books that set themselves apart by identifying their frames of reference in these two ways

include *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages; Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America: 1450–1650; The Visual Culture of Wales*; and *The Visual Culture of American Religions*. Others cut across a variety of themes or subject matter such as race, class, gender, and sexuality that have been at the heart of debates in the humanities for three decades, and thus are central to the emergence of visual culture studies as a political and ethical field of study. These include *Diaspora and Visual Culture; Displacement and Difference: Contemporary Arab Visual Culture in the Diaspora; The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*; and *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Culture*.

Ultimately, we find that the majority of books with ‘visual culture’ in their titles are introductions or readers or textbooks, often edited collections, frequently written for pedagogical purposes—for students—and sometimes concerned with pedagogical matters themselves. In the main these books are what we might call methodological inquiries, cabinets of curiosity, since they offer a variety of interpretive ways of engaging with our past and present visual cultures—including semiotics, Marxism, Feminism, historiography, social history, psychoanalysis, queer theory, deconstruction, postcolonial theory, ethnography, and museology. In addition to being concerned with the production, circulation, and consumption of images and the changing nature of subjectivity, they are also preoccupied with what Irit Rogoff has called ‘viewing apparatuses,’ which include our ways of seeing and practices of looking, and knowing, and doing, and even sometimes with our misunderstandings and unsettling curiosity in imagining the as-yet un-thought.<sup>4</sup> Examples here include *The Visual Culture Reader; The Block Reader in Visual Culture: An Introduction*; and *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*.

The diversity of books addressing visual culture is certainly testament to the potential historical range and geographical diversity of the study of visual culture, the array of themes visual culture studies is willing to address, that comprise it even, and the multiple methodological practices it is able to put forward in order to engage with the objects and subjects and media and environments included in and thus composing its purview. It is also worth pointing out that these books consider all manner of visual culture—from high culture to popular, mass, and sub culture; from the elite to the everyday; from the marginal to the mainstream; from the ordinary to the extraordinary—and that the objects and subjects and media and environments embraced by visual culture studies can include anything from painting, sculpture, installation, and video art, to photography, film, (terrestrial, cable, satellite) television, the Internet, and mobile screenic devices; fashion; to medical and scientific imaging; to the graphic and print culture of newspapers, magazines, and advertising; to the architectural and social spaces of museums, galleries, exhibitions, and other private and public environments of the everyday.

Interestingly, these books recognize most acutely the points where images and objects and subjects and environments overlap, *blur* and converge with and mediate one another. They argue for instance, that interacting with newspapers or the Internet always involves a coming together of text and image, of reading and looking simultaneously; that cinema always comprises sight and sound, viewing and hearing at once; that video phones necessitate a confluence of text (texting), image (photographing/videoing), sound (ringtones),

and touch (the haptic or tactile bond between the user and his or her unit).<sup>5</sup> These books recognize, then, that every encounter taking place between a viewer, participant, or user *and* her or his visual (and multi- or inter-sensory) culture makes it possible to imagine a distinct new starting point for thinking about or doing visual culture studies, as well as a new 'object' of visual culture.

In addition, as I have already mentioned, these books present us with an almost inexhaustible diversity of critical tools, models and methods, and mechanisms and techniques, as well as tropes, figures, modalities, and morphologies. And they do so both to engage with the objects and subjects and media and environments of visual culture themselves *and* to facilitate our doing so by providing us with the meanings by which to grasp, understand, and navigate the numerous historical, conceptual, and contemporary ways of seeing, practices of looking, scopic regimes, and visual metaphors that are crucial to our encounters with visual culture and our studies of it.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the huge number of books tells us that the phrase 'visual culture' is becoming ubiquitous, omnipresent, that it can and is being used to signify works or artifacts or spaces from *any* historical period, geographical location, thematic concern, or combination of methodological practices.<sup>7</sup> Because of this, the phrase visual culture conveys little that is specific to our past or present visual culture *per se*. It seems that visual culture is everywhere, and thus nowhere, wholly over-determined and almost meaningless simultaneously.

So where does this leave us with regard to the question with which we began this section: 'What is visual culture studies?' As has become obvious in this brief trawl through books with 'visual culture' in their titles, the phrase seems to be wholly pervasive, indicating that visual culture studies is fast becoming a prevailing field of inquiry in the humanities and beyond, and yet is also ubiquitous, an unhelpful indicator of both what it is and what it does. What is astonishing about all these books, and somehow not unexpected, is that there is no real common consensus as to what the term 'visual culture' actually signifies. The answers to this question very much depend on the specific nature of the inquiry undertaken in each book. Sometimes 'visual culture' is employed to characterize an historical period or geographical location such as the visual culture of the Renaissance or Aboriginal visual culture, or as Svetlana Alpers has put it in her discussion of Dutch visual culture, a culture that is bustling with a plethora of 'notions about vision (the mechanisms of the eye), on image making devices (the microscope, the camera obscura), and on visual skills (map making, but also experimenting) as cultural resources.'<sup>8</sup> Sometimes 'visual culture' is used to designate a set of thematic individual or community-based concerns around the ways in which politically motivated images are produced, circulated, and consumed to both construct and reinforce *and* resist and overthrow articulations of sexual or racial ontologies, identities, and subjectivities—such as black visual culture, or feminist visual culture, or lesbian and gay visual culture. Sometimes 'visual culture' marks a theoretical or methodological problematic that can be caught up in epistemological debates, or discussions of knowledge, of what determines our looking, seeing, or viewing practices, and how we can articulate this in terms of questions of disciplinarity, pedagogy, and what constitutes an 'object' of visual culture.

All in all, then, it's not in fact true, as it often seems, that visual culture studies simply includes anything and everything that is visual—although it's certainly the case that the field of inquiry is preoccupied with the problem of visibility.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the phrase is always used in particular ways for specific ends—and if this doesn't seem to be the case, it may well be that an author is using the phrase in a number of ways simultaneously. So, this is why asking the question 'What is visual culture studies?' *in any given instance* is always more valuable than finding an answer to it.

### Disciplines, Inter-disciplines, Indisciplines

Later we will go on to consider visual culture as what Douglas Crimp has called an 'object of study,' what that 'object' might be, and how it is established or shaped.<sup>10</sup> In this section, we need to concentrate on the question of the status of visual culture studies as a field of inquiry: is visual culture studies a discipline, in the sense that philosophy or history are disciplines? Is it a sub-discipline, a component, or an off-shoot of a more established discipline such as art history or anthropology—or even of a newer discipline such as film studies or media studies? Is it, like cultural studies, what we might call an inter-discipline—something that exists between disciplines and emerges from within this grey area so that visual culture studies operates between visual cultural practices and ways of thinking? Is it indeed the spark itself created by either the sympathetic or the hostile friction of disciplines rubbing together? Or is it something else altogether? Entertaining these questions of disciplinarity reveals that there are a number of interwoven accounts of the genealogy or the emergence of visual culture studies as a discursive formation.<sup>11</sup>

1. The search for origins: Some accounts of 'visual culture' do their best to locate the origins of the area of study as specifically as possible, trying, for instance, to identify the person who first used the phrase 'visual culture,' and in so doing identify the founding moment of the discipline. The two often cited winners of this contest are Michael Baxandall for his *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, a social history of style and the period eye, and Svetlana Alpers for *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, a study of seventeenth-century Dutch description, representation, images, appearance, cartography, and visibility.<sup>12</sup> I would argue, though, that this quest for beginnings is a red herring—at best it gives us an 'official' starting point, although I'm not sure what the purpose of this would be, and at worst it wilfully misleads by intimating that the 'naming' of a field of inquiry necessarily pinpoints the first time a certain kind of interrogation has taken place. This is simply not the case: analyses of visual culture were being carried out long before 'visual culture' or 'visual studies' emerged as academic fields of inquiry, and similarly universities in the UK such as Middlesex and Northumbria have been delivering undergraduate degrees in visual culture studies—without being named as such—for over 25 years in some cases.

2. The return of the 'forefathers': What is more useful to my mind is not to isolate individuals using the phrase 'visual culture' reasonably recently, but rather to follow researchers and academics who have begun to excavate the humanities and visual arts for the writings of earlier generations of scholars



and practitioners working in and against a variety of disciplines that has led to the emergence of the study of visual culture as a truly interdisciplinary project. Such visual culture studies scholars *avant la lettre* might include Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky, Sigfried Kraacauer, Walter Benjamin, André Malraux, Roland Barthes, Raymond Williams, John Berger, and Gerhard Richter. Calling these scholars ‘forefather’ is meant to be facetious; they do nonetheless offer earlier prototypical models or visual cultural practices that form part of the genealogy of visual culture studies and a series of methodological techniques that are ‘proper’ to its interdisciplinary nature, its criticality, and its often awkward arrangement of images, objects, and environments of study. See for example Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* (c.1925–9), Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk* (1927–40), Malraux’s *The Voices of Silence* (c.1950), or Richter’s *Atlas* (1961–present).

3. The practices of pedagogy: One more useful account of the emergence of visual culture studies as a field of inquiry charts its historical development back to the 1970s and 1980s in the university, former polytechnic, adult education, and art and design school sector of the British education system. Here, art history and design history and studio staff work toward equipping practice-based as well as academic-stream students with the interdisciplinary tools necessary for their craft: to introduce social history, context, and criticality into a consideration of art history and fine art practice; to present students with a history of (not just fine art) images; to furnish them with the resource of a diverse visual archive; and to mobilize practice itself. As a history of visual culture studies that emerges specifically from pedagogical and practice-based imperatives, in the main this is a push to encourage students to think outside of or past the tenets of formalism within the discourse of modernism.

4. The limits of disciplinarity: Concomitant with this account, another suggests that visual culture studies as a reasonably distinct series of interdisciplinary intellectual practices surfaces around the same time, and that it is brought on by feelings of discontent experienced by academics struggling within art history, design history, comparative literature, and other disciplines in the humanities to become more self-reflexive about their own disciplinary practices. Individuals, clusters of academics, and in some cases whole departments are frustrated by what they feel are the limitations of their own discipline: what subjects and objects can they include in their purview? What range of critical tools do they have at their disposal, and do they have the wherewithal to wield them? How best to motivate their students in a critical analysis of the historical, conceptual, and aesthetic nature of an ever-changing visual culture? Needing to converse with new visual, tactile, sonic objects of convergence, as well as other spaces and environments—how, for instance, would the discipline of art history deal fully with the intricate and inter-sensory multivalences of performance art or video art or installation art or site-specific art?—they were driven by an impulse if not to break down then certainly to *question* established disciplines and to *pressure* existing disciplinary boundaries.<sup>13</sup>

5. Theorizing between disciplines: Allied to this is the impact of ‘theory.’ As well as attending to new forms of visual arts practice, along with the emergence of the Marxist and feminist ‘New Art History’ in the late 1960s and early 1970s exemplified by the work of T. J. Clark, Linda Nochlin, and

Baxandall, scholars began to pay close attention to allied developments in film studies, in particular to semiotics and psychoanalysis. At the same time, they began to integrate the interests of cultural studies—just as cultural studies had drawn on anthropology. For while questions of class and gender and race had already been integral to the development of the new art history, cultural studies offered a means to address analogous concerns focusing more on the ordinary, the everyday, and the popular, and on the politics of representation, difference, and power in ways that reminded us how *cultural practices themselves do make a difference*. Thus emerged what we might call a visual ‘take’ on cultural studies. Here visual culture studies, like cultural studies before it, begins to function as an inter-discipline, drawing from existing disciplines and ways of thought, and because of it finding techniques to articulate the objects of visual culture differently.

6. Conferences and programs: Still another flashpoint in the development of visual culture studies is the period 1988–9 during which two events took place. The first was a conference on vision and visibility held in 1988 at the Dia Art Foundation in New York. Participants included Norman Bryson, Jonathan Crary, Hal Foster, Martin Jay, Rosalind Krauss, and Jacqueline Rose. The proceeds of this event went on to appear as the influential collection *Vision and Visuality*, edited by Foster. Of this collection, Martin Jay has recently remarked that its publication ‘may be seen as the moment when the visual turn ... really showed signs of turning into the academic juggernaut it was to become in the 1990s [because] a critical mass beg[a]n to come together around the question of the cultural determinants of visual experience in the broadest sense.’<sup>14</sup> The second event is the establishment in 1989 of the first US-based graduate program in visual and cultural studies at the University of Rochester, which gave a certain academic and institutional legitimation to visual culture (founding staff in the program included Mieke Bal, Bryson, Lisa Cartwright, and Michael Ann Holly).

Offering this account of the genealogies of visual culture studies is part of the process of legitimizing it as an academic field of inquiry, a discipline in its own right, or at least as a discursive formation, a site of interdisciplinary activity, a ‘tactic’ or a ‘movement.’<sup>15</sup> This is necessary because the question of the disciplinary status of visual culture studies matters, and it matters for two reasons in particular. Firstly, because introducing such accounts of the emergence of visual culture studies as a potentially legitimate discipline, as I have done here, makes us aware of the fact that it *does* have its own distinct, albeit interwoven, histories that need to be acknowledged and articulated. For a field of inquiry that is so often accused of ahistoricism, it is imperative to recognize that visual culture studies did not simply appear from nowhere, as if by magic, at some point in, say, the late 1980s, but does in fact have a series of much longer divergent and interconnecting genealogies. The status of visual culture studies continues to be hotly contested, and everyone has a different story to tell about its origins. Secondly, this question of the disciplinary status of visual culture studies matters because, as I will argue in the final section of this chapter through my case study on ‘place,’ it offers new ways of thinking, and of thinking about objects, such that it *is* a distinct field of inquiry.

As Martin Jay points out, visual culture studies *did* become an academic, intellectual, and publishing juggernaut in the 1990s—the number and range of books I listed above testifies to this. With the exception of the ‘Visual Culture Questionnaire’ published by the prominent journal *October* in 1996, on the whole the 1990s and the early years of the first decade of the twenty-first century have seen a multitude of triumphant books and journals, conferences, departments, centers, programs, courses, minors, and modules bearing the name ‘visual culture’ or ‘visual studies.’<sup>16</sup> If visual culture studies was inaugurated out of frustration in relation to the stifling effects of disciplinary policing and border controls, as a call to look self-reflexively both inwardly toward the limitations of one’s own discipline and outwardly to the opportunities made available by others, it can safely be said that it continues to do this, and to productive ends. In working with and against other disciplines and between fields of inquiry, following its counter- or anti-disciplinary impetus it has led to disciplines questioning their own foundations and imperatives, even as it has also displayed outward hostility toward the prospect of its own conditions of possibility. Perhaps even more importantly, it has found its own methodologies and its own objects of study. It is a true example of what Barthes, paraphrased by Mieke Bal, says of interdisciplinary study, that it ‘consists of *creating a new object that belongs to no one.*’<sup>17</sup>

Finally, in bringing this section to a close, I would like to offer a word of caution: in its ongoing and ever-more successful search for legitimation, visual culture studies has the potential to become too self-assured, and its devotees too confident. In so doing, it can all too easily lose sight of its drive to worry or problematize other disciplines. It must remember to continue plotting a fractious course between disciplines, learning from them and teaching them lessons in return; and to continue engendering new objects or mobilizing more established things in new ways, by carrying on *doing* the work that it does. Visual culture studies should be careful not to lose, as Mitchell puts it, its ‘turbulence,’ its ‘incoherence,’ its ‘chaos,’ or its ‘wonder’ as an *indiscipline*: the ‘anarchist’ moment of ‘breakage or rupture’ when ‘a way of doing things ... compulsively performs a revelation of its own inadequacy.’<sup>18</sup>

In fact, it is at this point that one comes to realize it is not its disciplinary status that is of interest so much as the prospect that visual culture studies might be a whole new *strategy* for doing research, of seeing and knowing, of outlining our encounters with visual culture, and mining them for meaning, constituting its own objects and subjects and media and environments of study that belong to no one, as Barthes would have it, *and* that can only come into existence, be made, and made sense of as ‘a way of doing things’ that is particular to visual culture studies. It is in this way that the ‘object’ of visual culture, and the question of the ‘object’ in visual culture studies, comes into view.

### **What is the ‘Object’ of Visual Culture Studies?**

This conception of visual culture studies as an *indiscipline* is very appealing. Here, the chance to consider attending to the field of inquiry as ‘a way of doing things’ is fascinating, as is gesturing toward the extent to which studies of visual culture have the potential to make evident their own limitations as a

necessary part of their capacity and willingness to comprehend and perform these new 'way[s] of doing things.' So given the work that visual culture studies *does*, with what objects does it engage, and how are they constituted?

Some academics are happy simply for visual culture studies to include an expanded field of vision, an expanded purview, an expanded object domain, to include all things 'visual.' (Of course some would say that in certain quarters the discipline of art history has already been doing this for years.<sup>19</sup>) Other scholars are more attentive to its particular character. In writing of and on visual culture studies they have returned, explicitly and implicitly, to mull over meticulously the full implications of Roland Barthes' remarks on interdisciplinarity mentioned earlier. Rogoff for instance, has drawn on Barthes' ideas in thinking of visual culture studies, and its interdisciplinarity, as 'the constitution of a new object of knowledge.'<sup>20</sup> Bal has recently made similar comments, pointing out that '[i]f the tasks of visual culture studies must be derived from its object, then, in a similar way, the methods most suitable for performing these tasks must be derived from those same tasks, and the derivation made explicit.' Likewise in suggesting that this field of inquiry has the potential to be an example of interdisciplinarity in an 'interesting' sense, James Elkins has suggested that it 'does not know its subjects but finds them through its preoccupations.'<sup>21</sup> All of this is to say that, whether we are discussing objects or subjects or media or environments or ways of seeing and practices of looking, the visual, or visibility, visual culture studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry has the potential *to create new objects of study*, and it does so specifically by *not determining them in advance*.

What does this actually mean? It means that visual culture studies is not simply 'theory' or even 'visual theory' in any conventional sense, and it does not simply 'apply' theory or visual theory to objects of study. Rather, it is the case that between (1) finding ways of attending to the historical, conceptual, and material specificity of things, (2) taking account of 'viewing apparatuses,' and (3) our critical encounters with them, the 'object' of visual culture studies is born, emerges, is discernible, shows itself, becomes visible. In these moments of friction, the 'object' of visual culture studies comes into view, engendering its own way of being, of being meaningful, of being understood, and even of not being understood. It is not a matter of *which* 'objects' are 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' for visual culture studies, but of how beginning from the specifics of our visual culture, our preoccupations and encounters with it, and the acts that take place in and by way of visual culture, *none of which are determined in advance*, make it possible for us to focus, as José Esteban Muñoz has said, 'on what acts and objects do ... rather that [sic] what they might possibly mean.'<sup>22</sup>

With this in mind, I would like to turn to a project, a case study, a visual culture study, an instance of how visual culture studies can make such a thing possible.

### **A Case Study: 'The Poetics of Place: Histories, Theories, Practices'**

Let me offer an example of how a new object of study, a study of visual culture, might be constituted by such encounters—where what acts and objects *do* is more important than what they might possibly *mean*. The example I offer is

of a cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research project I am coordinating on the historical, conceptual, and aesthetic question of 'place' in our visual culture.<sup>23</sup> The project itself, entitled 'The Poetics of Place: Histories, Theories, Practices,' circles around and links together ontological states, states of being and becoming, embodied in the themes of exile, migration, nation, and belonging. In order to confront these challenges, this project cuts across and between fields of inquiry such as art and architectural history, fine art practice, cultural geography, postcolonial studies, critical theory, anthropology, and philosophy.

Based at my host institution, Kingston University, in Kingston-upon-Thames in South West London, the site of the coronation of seven kings of England in the tenth century, the project's objective is to show how the question of 'place' in all of its historical, geographical, and aesthetic complexity also needs to be understood in its specificity. That is, when it comes to research projects and in this instance to the question of 'place,' we have to consider both the general and the particular, the global and the local, the overall story and the details, the wood and the trees.

Because of this dual focus, in putting the project together, it soon became apparent that *no one person* was capable of doing this on her or his own, and that conversation or discourse *between* individuals—whether they agree with one another or not—was the most productive way to proceed. To this end, I decided to assemble a group of individuals who, *together*, could realize such a project: the Italian academic Giuliana Bruno from the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University, whose writings cut across the fields of geography, art, architecture, design, cartography, and film, and whose thought is both materialist in its attention to history and rhythmic in its rhetoric; the American curator Vivian Rehberg from ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, who has curated international exhibitions and coordinated catalogues on place and globality; and the French artist Jean-Baptiste Decavèle, who works with video/photography responsive to the grain of location, travel, and memory. Each of these individuals was asked to participate in this research project because the character of her or his practice—as writers, curators, and makers—emerges out of a sensitivity to the complex nature of our visual culture. Their starting point is not an abstract idea, or disembodied theory, but, rather each attentive in her or his own way to the particular and peculiar features, contours, disposition of 'place' and its way of articulating itself. As such, each of them offers a chance to inscribe the possibility of a nuanced encounter with visual culture itself, and with each other, which is not determined in advance.

In order to carry out its task of thinking the general and the particular at the same time, the project has to do two things simultaneously. On the one hand, it should be self-reflexive; on the other hand, it needs to be attentive to detail. That is to say, on the one hand, it should be speculative and curious about its own practices, its own conduct, its own mechanisms. In so doing it can better instigate and take account of the creative links between a group of researchers from distinct environments, with diverse backgrounds and knowledge of the subject at hand, and dissimilar critical tools with which to unearth the problematic disposition of the question of 'place.' Along with such discrepancies, at the same time members of the research team need to share a cross-disciplinary

commitment to establishing collaborative research, writing, informal seminars, public lectures, curating, and making, across and between their respective interdisciplinary areas of expertise into ideas around 'place.'

On the other hand, the project needs to attend to the historical, phenomenological, and material fact of 'place' in its specificity. To this end, it draws on and engages critically with visual and textual archives (engravings, illustrations, paintings, and photographs, postcards, documents, and texts—images, objects, artifacts, and items that are all simultaneously both visual and textual) relating to forced migration to Kingston-upon-Thames and its environs. In so doing the project will generate debate on the themes of nation, exile, belonging, slavery, cultural memory, and geographies or topographies of travel, making use of various local archives and museums, including the Kingston Museum and the Kingston Local History Centre, and it will interrogate these and other unique archives as well as the local census, parish records, and cemetery records.

The research will begin in the middle of the eighteenth century, the first point at which tangible records are made of a black presence in Kingston and its neighboring districts. These records show the 1761 arrival in Kingston from Senegal of the five-year-old Caesar Picton, who was presented by Captain Parr to St. John Philipps of Norbiton, for whom he began working. Picton was later made a free man and set himself up as a successful coal merchant and gentleman. His former residence, Picton House, where he lived from 1788 until 1807, is a site of local interest and its former resident has been commemorated with a plaque. This biographical narrative will form a starting point for the research project.

In being self-reflexive and attentive to detail, this collaborative research project will, then, address questions relating to the visual and material culture of 'place' that both have wider implications for the study, analysis, and understanding of 'place' in our post-colonial and trans-cultural communities but are also specific to the modern, colonial history of Kingston-upon-Thames and its environs. Key research questions to ask are: How do collaborative research practices and the links that individual experts make between one another as a group offer a more complete and detailed understanding of the history of 'place' and future discussions of it? In what ways do history, cultural memory, museology, and heritage contribute to the facts and fantasies of nation, landscape, and geographies, cartographies, and visual iconographies of travel? And what can these visual and textual archives, these histories and biographies, tell us about the experience of new ways of living in exile as a member of a migrant population?

As we observed at the beginning of this chapter, there are always more questions than there are answers, and learning how to ask the right questions is key to the study of visual culture, as it is to any critical study. In this instance, asking these kinds of multi-part questions that mingle self-reflexive thought and an attention to historical, material, and aesthetic detail will be particularly productive. For they will make it possible to enter into dialogue across and between history, theory, curating, and practice in order to both bridge the perceived divide between these areas of concern *and* show that it is only by weaving them together that we can begin to discern a precise sense of 'place' and its sensibility in all of its complexity. Starting from the specificity of 'place'



itself, with all of its intricacies, supports our efforts to ask new questions *of* and thus generate new methodologies *from* it that emerge out of the convergence and interweaving taking place in the enactment of the project itself.

Thinking across and between areas of inquiry and across and between visual and textual archives, images, artifacts, and practices, it is the project itself, in fact any given visual culture study, that has the potential to generate new objects of visual culture yet to suggest themselves, that belong to no one, and yet come into being or are materialized in the very 'doing' of the project itself. They are made, constituted, by way of the project, by way of the encounters between individuals thinking through a specific topic, and between the historical, conceptual, and material specificity of that topic. Research itself, then, becomes determined by the interdisciplinary nature of the material gathered *for* the project, *in* the project, that comes together *as* the project. It is through debate, collaboration, self-reflexive practices, and convergences between methodologies, archives, encounters, objects, subjects, media, environments, and ways of seeing and doing that a visual culture study takes shape. And it is only *in this taking shape*, through such contingencies, that pressing questions are asked, uncertainties, understanding, and knowledge is generated, unexpected insights come to the fore, and new objects of visual culture become known to us.

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# ‘Life-like’: Historicizing Process and Responsiveness in Digital Art

Some currents of contemporary theory expand the notion of life to include the organic, the inorganic, the material, and the virtual. This entails an understanding of nature as constantly unfolding—as linked to a dissolution of boundaries between bodies, objects, and environments. Basing his ideas on the work of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, theorist Manuel de Landa explains: ‘... reality is a single matter-energy undergoing phase transitions of various kinds. ... Rocks and winds, germs and words, are all different manifestations of this dynamic reality, or, in other words they all represent the different ways in which this single matter-energy expresses itself.’<sup>1</sup> This understanding of nature also involves a reconceptualization of space from static to active, a space that, in the words of architect Greg Lynn, has properties of flow, turbulence, viscosity, and drag.<sup>2</sup> Such ideas also call into question the Cartesian division of mind and body, distinctions between the virtual and the material, and the presumed objectivity and reliability of perception.

Following the work of Deleuze and his frequent collaborator Félix Guattari, theorists Brian Massumi and Elizabeth Grosz, among others, have argued that the human body is simultaneously material and virtual. According to Massumi, the relation between the virtual and the corporeal is analogous to the relation of energy to matter: they are mutually convertible dimensions of the same reality. He explains:

This would make the incorporeal something like a phase-shift of the body in the usual sense, but not one that comes after it in time. It would be a conversion or unfolding of the body *contemporary* to its every move. ... This movement-slip gives new urgency to questions of ontology, ontological difference, inextricably linked to concepts of potential and process and, by extension, event—in a way that bumps ‘being’ straight into becoming.<sup>3</sup>

From these perspectives, works of art should no longer be conceived as static autonomous entities but as *evolving processes* that unfold in relation to both the user and the environment. Massumi and de Landa each call for the development of a process-oriented art where the artist is the initiator of a process but is not in control of its outcome.<sup>4</sup> This entails jettisoning ideas of art as object, as well as of the artist’s mastery and control of materials engrained in traditional conceptions of artistic practice.

In the contemporary context, process-oriented art is facilitated by computer technology. The computer enables instantaneous communication, the creation and proliferation of images, creatures and environments, and permits

the acceleration of processes such as development, reproduction, and death of synthetic life forms. These procedures are central to artificial life, a field of research concerned with the simulation of living organisms and the generation of lifelike behavior within computers and other synthetic media. According to its founder, scientist Christopher Langton, 'there is nothing ... that restricts biology to carbon-based life; it is simply the only kind of life that has been available to study.'<sup>5</sup> Artists have adopted techniques of artificial life—that is, computational processes that emulate or model aspects of biological processes such as evolution and population genetics—to create works that exhibit self-organization, evolution, and various forms of agency and interaction. While the interest in perception, virtuality, embodiment, process, instability, and the relation of various life forms to their environments are central to contemporary digital art, it is important to recognize that these concerns *already* were fundamental to a reconceptualization of artistic practices after WWII.

Pamela Lee has persuasively argued that the 1960s were characterized by an obsession with time. She finds evidence of this preoccupation in Norbert Wiener's theory of cybernetics, art historian George Kubler's influential 1962 book *The Shape of Time*, and the work of multiple artists including Jean Tinguely, Robert Smithson, and On Kawara. Expanding on Lee's excellent exposition, I argue that theorists and artists manifested their concern with time by investigating specific processes and interactions rather than through abstractions. Many artists explored the transformations that objects and materials displayed by interacting with their environment and other entities in it. This led to reflections not only on time but on qualities of liveliness and on the nature of life itself. Some of these early works entailed the construction of 'intelligent machines,' challenging traditional differentiations between the natural and the artificial, the animate and the inanimate.<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, I will discuss works of kinetic, conceptual, and/or electronic art that involve some of these ideas, as well as their applicability to digital art. My discussion is less a history than a historical exercise. In relating past to present, I intend neither to reduce contemporary work to the art of the past nor to construct a linear history. Rather, my purpose is to discern commonalities while acknowledging differences among diverse works. In order to orient my discussion to digital art, first I must summarize some of the technological and theoretical bases of digital culture.

Contrary to the widespread assumption that the history of digital art is short and simple because it is relatively recent, the history of digital art is vast and multidisciplinary. A cursory examination of this field involves not only the histories of art, science, and technology but also intellectual, social, and military histories. The heterogeneity of this art demands that the history of art expand its frame of reference to include scientific and technical ideas. Without such associations, any discussion of the works would be superficial.

## The Foundations of Digital Culture

Scholars trace the beginnings of computer technology to the nineteenth century or even earlier, including among its pioneers the seventeenth-century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz and the nineteenth-century

mathematicians George Boole, Charles Babbage, and Ada Lovelace. The concepts of energy and entropy, central to the science of thermodynamics developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, are also integral to this history. In 1865, Rudolf Clausius coined the word 'entropy' to refer to a measure of the energy unavailable for work in a closed physical system. Entropy was thus the negative of energy.<sup>7</sup> In the twentieth century, the concept of entropy would be translated to 'information,' a move that, as Katherine Hayles, among others, has argued, would link the natural sciences, the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts.<sup>8</sup>

During WWII, the necessity for inscription and decryption of communications exponentially accelerated computer development. Alan Turing's work in crypto analysis and theories of computability led to the invention of the University of Manchester MK1, the first programmable digital computer. Parallel efforts in the USA guided by the Hungarian-born mathematician John von Neumann resulted in the ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer).<sup>9</sup> After the War, the US Department of Defense continued to fund computer research generously in order to maintain US technological leadership during the cold war.

Artists active in the late 1950s and 1960s inherited the technological advances achieved during the previous decades, as well as a variety of newly created disciplines including information theory, cybernetics, general systems theory, and artificial intelligence. These disciplines would exercise a lasting influence on artistic practices, although their impact has gone largely unrecognized in the established histories of modern and contemporary art.

In a book entitled *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949) engineer Claude Shannon, in collaboration with the mathematician Warren Weaver, advanced a mathematical analysis of communication that became known as 'information theory.' Employed at Bell Labs, Shannon and Weaver were concerned with finding an efficient way to transmit maximum information in telephone networks. In their analysis, this entailed encoding the data into electronic signals by means of an encoding apparatus, transmitting the signals through a specific communication channel with the minimum amount of error, and decoding the message in a receiving apparatus. Shannon and Weaver understood communication exclusively as the replication in the receiver of the data pattern entered by the sender. From this perspective, the semantic content as well as the receiver's interpretation of the message were irrelevant to communication.

Mathematician Norbert Wiener developed cybernetics, a field contemporaneous and related to information theory, which he defined as the science of communication and control between animals and machines as well as between machines and machines.<sup>10</sup> The interaction of a machine with the external world involved the introduction of data (input) to elicit the machine's effect on the world (output). The quality of communication among entities was affected by factors such as feedback, noise, and entropy. For Wiener, feedback was the act of controlling a machine on the basis of its performance. Elements of the machine itself, which he called 'sensory members,' evaluated the machine's performance.<sup>11</sup> He identified as 'noise' elements extraneous to a message which effect its transmission. Like Shannon, Wiener borrowed the term 'entropy' from thermodynamics. But while for Shannon entropy was the

information measure of a system (he gave entropy the same sign as information), for Wiener it was the degree of disorganization or randomness in a system, the negative of information.<sup>12</sup>

General systems theory, first articulated by the Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, concerned the organization and communication of complex entities both biological and social. Von Bertalanffy's theories merged biology with thermodynamics by proposing that biological organisms were whole systems that interacted with their environments. Just as in Shannon and Weaver's information theory information was independent from the material specificities of the transmitter, for von Bertalanffy, the attributes of systems were independent of their biological and material qualities. Thus he identified the objectives of the biological sciences as the discovery of the principles of organization and behavior. Like contemporary theorists, von Bertalanffy refuted strict differentiation between the organic and the inorganic, biology and physics, the behavioral and the hard sciences.<sup>13</sup>

Artificial Intelligence (AI) originated in the mid 1950s in the work of multiple scientists including mathematician John McCarthy from Dartmouth University, Herbert Simon from the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and Marvin Minsky from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). AI had as its goal computer emulation of intelligent behavior and higher intellectual functions such as mathematical problem solving and creativity by the logical manipulation of symbolic systems. In contrast to the more recently established science of artificial life discussed later in this chapter, AI was based on a paradigm of centralized control. The computer was conceived as analogous to the brain in the sense that it governed all functions of the system to be studied. Communications theory, cybernetics, general systems theory, and AI all had in common the study of processes of organization, development, and interaction, concerns shared by various contemporary scientists and philosophers.<sup>14</sup>

### **Process in Kinetic and Early Cybernetic Art**

Visual artists were similarly interested in processes from the early twentieth century on. The properties of light, the impact of movement on vision and the instability of sensory perception can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s in the work of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, László Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, Len Lye, and Thomas Wilfred. These interests persisted in kinetic art and op art of the 1950s and 1960s. A series of works produced by Israeli artist Yaacov Agam, for example, informed by both the Talmud and scientific literature of his time, depended on the movement of the spectator to unfold. Titled after musical compositional structures (contrapuntal, polyphonic etc), his paintings from the early 1950s revealed various compositions as the spectator walked in front of them. His concern with transience and transformation was evident in his play-objects, where forms and images emphasized transitions from one element to another and vibrations among related elements.<sup>15</sup> Agam's *The Red Touch* (1963) thus consisted of a number of springs mounted on a wooden surface. As the spectator/participant ran her hand across them, the springs moved and visual patterns appeared, transformed, and disappeared. Formally, the work was unstable, for no two spectators achieved the



same results. Agam's large-scale games often had *aural* components as the artist amplified the sound from the vibrations of the elements.<sup>16</sup> Agam continued to stress interactions between his works and the user during the rest of his career, involving cybernetics and computers in his later work.<sup>17</sup>

In the late 1940s Nicholas Schöffer, a Hungarian sculptor living in Paris, developed his theory of spatio-dynamism—the dynamic integration of space in a plastic work.<sup>18</sup> He coined the terms 'lumino-dynamism' and 'chromo-dynamism' to describe the movement of light and color on the surface of a construction according to a pre-determined or random cycle. His *C°SP* sculpture series, combines in its name the first letters of cybernetics and spatio-dynamism. In 1956, choreographer Maurice Béjar commissioned *C°SP I* for the Festival of Avant-Garde Art in Marseille. The work consists of a steel and aluminum frame with 16 movable plates of colored translucent and transparent Plexiglas set on a base mounted on four rollers. *C°SP I* could travel in all directions at two speeds and rotate, setting in motion the colored plates. Photoelectric cells and a microphone allowed it to react with movement to variations in color, light, and sound intensity in its environment. *C°SP I* exemplified the cybernetic principles of input, output, and feedback. Through simple electric sensors it received messages from its environment and responded by acting on the external world.

Cybernetician Gordon Pask and artist Roy Ascott were key figures in the development of cybernetic art in Britain. Pask, who was a familiar figure in London artistic circles, produced the 1953 project *Musicolour* in collaboration with mathematician, Robin McKinnon Wood. *Musicolour*, a cybernetic system for the theater, projected visual images in response to a musician's performance. The machine reacted to the cues of the music by projecting visual images on to a large screen and the performer could then respond to *Musicolour*, closing the loop.<sup>19</sup> In 1961 Pask published the important book *An Approach to Cybernetics*. Ascott also had an instrumental role in promoting cybernetics in the art world; his work from the 1950s already demonstrated interest in systems and interactivity, and from 1963 to 1970 he wrote influential essays on the applications of cybernetics to art and introduced cybernetics to art education in Britain.<sup>20</sup>

In these early writings Ascott described an art in which process was more important than results, an art characterized by formal ambiguity and instability as well as by the active participation of artist and spectator in the act of creation.<sup>21</sup> Ascott recognized that modern art was no longer purely visual, thus he proposed the term 'behavioral art' to refer to work that employed tactile, postural, aural components.<sup>22</sup> Ascott's propositions were prescient and are still timely, although other artists and theorists have since elaborated sophisticated arguments along similar lines.<sup>23</sup>

Both Pask and Ascott contributed projects to the large-scale 1968 Institute of Contemporary Art exhibition in London, *Cybernetic Serendipity*, which was organized by Jasia Reichardt.<sup>24</sup> Pask's installation, *Colloquy of Mobiles*, included male and female mobiles equipped with a set of programs to determine their possible movements and behavior. Anticipating current artificial-life (a-life) art, Pask provided each mobile with a set of goals and, in order to achieve these objectives, the mobiles had to learn to communicate, cooperate, and compete with one another. The piece also shared the limitation of con-

temporary a-life narratives in its elaboration of a heavily gendered narrative (the males aggressively compete for the attention of the females) to explain the behavior of the agents.<sup>25</sup>

Edward Ihnatowicz, a Polish artist resident in Britain and a pioneer of robotic art, contributed the piece SAM (Sound Activated Mobile) to the Cybernetic Serendipity exhibition. SAM was an interactive electro-hydraulic sculpture consisting of a four-petaled, flower-shaped fiberglass 'head' mounted on a custom-made, flexible aluminum structure reminiscent of a spinal column. Responding to the voices of gallery visitors, the microphone mounted on each petal activated hydraulic pistons, which caused the column to move.

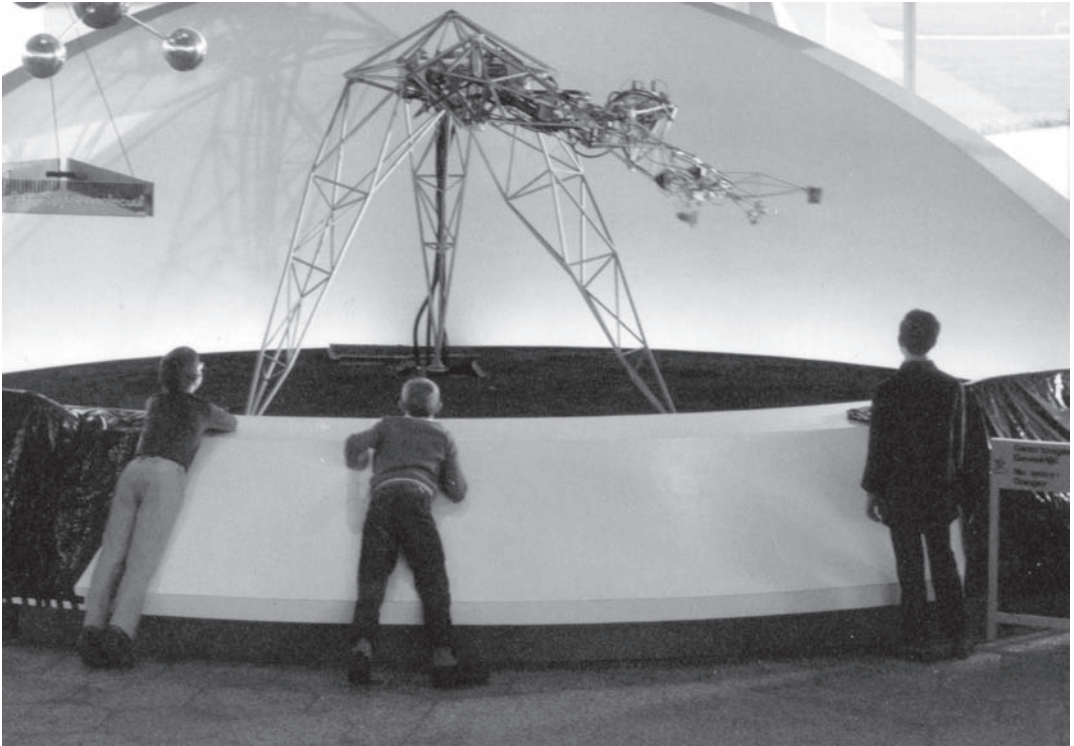
In 1969, the electronics company Phillips commissioned Ihnatowicz to build a computer-controlled robot, *Senster*, for the Evoluon, the Phillips exhibition hall in Eindhoven, Holland [62]. Completed in 1971, *Senster* consisted of six independent electro-hydraulic systems based on the articulation of a lobster's claw. Four microphones placed on its head, along with a close-range radar device, allowed the robot to identify the source of sound and movement and to respond to these stimuli. *Senster* responded to loud sounds and violent gestures by turning away from the participant. It approached only if addressed with a soft voice and gentle movements. *Senster* was a machine that could learn new behaviors according to the sophistication of its programming, thus complicating a clear behavioral differentiation between animals and machines. Although both *SAM* and *Senster* appear as independent entities, the behaviors of each were elicited by the bodily cues of participants. The affective, playful qualities of these works surpassed the instrumentality of Wiener's cybernetic theories.

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Edward Ihnatowicz, *Senster*,  
1971 (*in situ*).

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In 1969 *Cybernetic Serendipity* traveled from London to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington but, due to its technical complexity, the museum finally declined to install it. The Corcoran Gallery of Art agreed to host the exhibition but, in the opinion of artist and critic Douglas Davis, the inexperience of American curators with technological art was apparent in the Corcoran's installation. The pieces were arranged side by side, as if they were traditional painting or sculpture, without consideration paid to their sound and movement.<sup>26</sup> Thus the show contributed little to advance technologically-based art in the United States.

### Process, Art, and 'The Systems Approach'

In a chapter of his book *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968) entitled 'Cyborg and Robot Art,' American artist and critic Jack Burnham recognized the impact of cybernetics and systems theory on contemporary artistic practices, arguing that 'cyborg art' was becoming the next and perhaps the ultimate stage of sculpture.<sup>27</sup> For Burnham, the term 'cyborg' referred to both electromechanical systems with lifelike behavior and man-machine systems that, through feedback, paralleled some of the properties of single biological organisms. Anticipating recent claims by a-life artists, he wrote: 'For the first time, the word 'organic' ceases to be an unobtainable ideal held out to the artist; following in the wake of cybernetic technology, systems with organic properties will lead to 'sculpture'—if it can be called that—rivaling the attributes of intelligent life.'<sup>28</sup>

In a 1968 essay entitled 'Systems Esthetics' published in *ArtForum*, Burnham recognized the impact of cybernetics and systems theory on contemporary artistic practices, making clear the need for interdisciplinarity in the education of artists, a need that is only beginning to be recognized in art programs today. Burnham maintained that the de-objectification of art, evident in the art of his day, suggested that contemporary artists were intuitively aware of the importance of the systems approach. De-objectification entailed rejection of the idea of art for art's sake and of craftsmanship, stressing instead the expression of *relations* in the work of art.<sup>29</sup> This required emphasizing connections among the component parts of a work (thus revealing its organizing principles), as well as the interaction of the work with aspects of its environment. In his view, the work of Moholy-Nagy, Robert Smithson, Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, David Medalla, Otto Piene, the French collective GRAV (*Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel*), the Japanese group Gutai, and Allan Kaprow (a key figure in the development of Happenings) exemplified the systems approach. Burnham's limited overview of cybernetic art of the 1960s included diasporic artists such as the Argentines Julio Le Parc and Enrique Castro Cid, as well as the Chilean Juan Downing and Korean Nam June Paik. (The scarce number of women and people of color working in this way—the few women working with early 'cybernetic art,' including Bridget Riley, Martha Botto, and Lilianne Lijn, produced primarily graphics and kinetic light works—might be explained by the poor representation of those groups in both modern art and science).

Hans Haacke, a German artist residing in New York and Medalla, a Filipino living in London, engaged both natural and cybernetic systems in

their work. Both artists worked with natural elements such as water and air and explored natural processes, interdependent systems, environmental responses, and instability in material objects. Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963) consisted of a Plexiglas box containing air and a little water. Over time, the liquid condensed, changing the appearance of the transparent walls. The form of the work depended on the condensation cycle, stressing the relation of the object with its environment. Because the artist could not determine the final outcome of the process, i.e. the patterns of droplets on the transparent surface, Burnham described Haacke's sculptures as self-organizing and self-stabilizing systems that manifested evidence of natural feedback and equilibrium.<sup>30</sup>

Medalla designed and built machines that transformed natural materials including mud, sand, smoke, coffee beans, salt, and soap through the repetition of simple rhythms. He described himself as both 'a poet who celebrates physics' and as 'hyzologist,' after the ancient Ionian pre-Socratic philosophers who believed all matter to be alive.<sup>31</sup> Medalla's sculpture *Cloud Canyons* (1964) consisted of a set of plywood boxes containing a mixture of soap and water. Air pumps gradually transformed this mixture into foam, which changed form in response to air gravity, atmospheric pressure, and the shape of the boxes. The sculpture thus took form only with interaction with its environment and demonstrated the instability of matter as the elaborate bubble sculptures evaporated. In 1964, Medalla's proposals for future art works included machines for writing instant poetry; 'Hydroponic rooms with ceilings planted with a million edible mushrooms'; sculptures incorporating living organisms including shrimps, snails, and ants; transparent sculptures that sweat, perspire, and palpitate; and a flock of 'radio controlled flying sculptures.'<sup>32</sup> Indicating the continual crosspollinations between artistic ideas and commercial and military technologies, Medalla's proposals were partially possible at the time they were written—in 1965–8, American artist Charles Frazier developed small, radio-controlled, gas-powered flying sculptures capable of flying one mile. Medalla's idea of a flock of robotic birds capable of independent behavior also resembles in an uncanny way the 'swarms' of small autonomous flying devices, favored by recent military research.<sup>33</sup>

Although many American artists engaged the systems approach in their work during the mid and late 1960s, cybernetic art in the United States remained marginal. Built in 1966 by Thomas Shannon, *Squat*, a robot electrically connected to an ivy plant placed on a table in the same room, was one of the earliest pieces in the US to explore issues of interspecies communication, feedback, and the interaction of organisms with their environment. Revealing the interdependence of various life forms, in *Squat* the plant responds to the participant's touch with a change in its electrical potential, and this change is amplified and conveyed to the robot, turning its various motors on and off.<sup>34</sup>

## Experiments in Art and Technology

The indefatigable efforts of Swiss engineer Billy Klüver to promote collaborations between the sciences and the arts resulted in a brief period of effervescence in the creation of cybernetic art in the United States. A researcher at

Bell Laboratories studying the physics of infrared lasers, Kluver continuously offered his expertise to New York artists. He collaborated with Jean Tinguely, Andy Warhol, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg, among others. With Rauschenberg he organized *Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering* in 1966, which took place at the 69th Regiment Armory on Lexington Avenue in New York City, the location of the famous 1913 Armory Show (the show that introduced Americans to European-style modernism). As a series of collaborations between engineers and artists, including John Cage, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Alex Hays, and David Tudor, *Nine Evenings* was a pioneering event, but art critics declared it an artistic flop because of frequent technical breakdowns and unrehearsed performances.

After *Nine Evenings*, Kluver, Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, and Fred Waldhauer founded Experiments in Art and Technology Inc. (EAT) in 1967. The organization had as its object to facilitate collaborations between engineers and artists. EAT's founders compiled lists of interested parties, organized lectures, published a newsletter, lent out equipment, and sought support from business and industry. In 1968, after receiving more than 100 entries from various parts of the world, they organized the exhibition *Some More Beginnings* at the Brooklyn Museum as an open competition for both artists and engineers.<sup>35</sup> The Pepsi Cola Pavilion at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan, was EAT's most ambitious project [63]. The pavilion was built in the shape of a geodesic dome measuring 50 meters in diameter. Created by the Japanese artist Fujiko Nakaya in collaboration with Tom Mee, a physicist and specialist in cloud formations, a fog 'sculpture' sensitive to atmospheric conditions enveloped the building. The form of the sculpture was highly unstable as it depended on light and atmospheric conditions.

The entrance to the pavilion had the form of an inclined tunnel; each visitor received a handset that picked up audio signals from loops embedded on the floor. Listening to the sounds of running and gurgling water, the visitor walked to a dark interior referred to as the clam room, where she or he was showered with colored laser lights. Stairs connected this level with the dome room above, where a hemispherical mirror designed by Robert Whitman and measuring 90 feet in diameter delimited the contours of the space. Here, as is characteristic of spherical mirrors, the mirror produced a three-dimensional inverted image. This inverted image multiplied as the spectator stepped toward the center of the room, producing the impression of multiple holograms shifting in appearance depending on his or her position in the room. The acoustics of the mirror room (with sound system designed by experimental composer David Tudor) were as complex as its visual environment. The floor was divided into ten sections of various materials matched with associated sounds (such as, in the 'grass' section, the sounds of 'ducks, turkey gobbling, birds, aviary, frogs, cicadas, lion roaring').<sup>36</sup>

The Pepsi Pavilion (described by Kluver as a 'living responsive environment,' and as 'total instrument' that could be played by the participants) set an important precedent for future collaborations between artists and scientists and exemplified an environment *responsive* to the behavior of the visitors.<sup>37</sup> As envisioned by EAT, the pavilion functioned only for a limited time; due to an inflated budget and disagreements between the company and the artists, Pepsi Cola withdrew financial support for the operation of the building





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Fujiko Nakaya, *EAT, Pepsi Cola Pavilion*, Osaka Japan, 1970.

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shortly after the exhibition opened. After dismissing EAT, Pepsi put on its own show, substituting band music for the experimental sound program and a light and color show for the mirror dome.

### **Liveliness and Responsiveness in Early Video Art**

From 1970 to the late 1980s cybernetic art was marginalized in the art world because of its associations with the military, with commerce, and, in the popular imagination, with the on-going Vietnam War. While, until the late 1960s, cybernetic and conceptual artists had been included in the same exhibitions, the exhibition *Conceptual Art*, organized by Kynaston McShine at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1970, marked the break between cybernetic and conceptual art for it included no cybernetic artists.<sup>38</sup> While cybernetic art had thus lost the limelight, numerous practitioners, including Robert Adrian, Lillian Swartz, Harold Cohen, and Roy Ascott, worked on, and in the 1970s a growing number of artists (including Nam June Paik, Woody and Steina Vasulka, Otto Piene, Wolf Vostell, Allan Kaprow, Marta Minunjin, Les Levine, Bruce Naumann, and Keith Sonnier) began to experiment with contemporary media technologies such as television, video, and to a lesser extent, computers. The writings of Marshal McLuhan superimposed on a lingering interest in systems and cybernetics provided the theoretical backbone for these experiments.

Following McLuhan's insights some artists sought to democratize television by offering the viewer the opportunity to contribute to its content. These early attempts at interactivity took various forms: from allowing the partici-



pants to alter colors and forms in the television screen, to transmitting to the viewer information excluded from the mass media, such as alternative news. Artists referred to information recorded in the video tape as 'software,' also the title of an exhibition organized by Jack Burnham at the Jewish Museum in 1970.<sup>39</sup> The utopian expectations that artists and other cultural workers placed on video and television parallel later views of the computer as a liberatory technology and anticipate contemporary notions of life as exemplified in electronic images and artificial creatures.<sup>40</sup> Some artists even argued for the autonomy of the television image—Brice Howard, director at the Center for Experiments in Television at the public television station KQED in San Francisco, for example, argued that the TV picture was a 'live' light image creating itself on the inside of the cathode ray before the eyes of the viewer; consequently, as a living thing, it demanded an aesthetic based in movement rather than fixed forms.<sup>41</sup>

In the early 1970s, American computer scientist Myron Krueger was dissatisfied with the limited interaction the keyboard allowed as a computer interface. He designed spaces, which he referred to as 'responsive environments,' in which the computer perceived the actions of the participants and responded 'intelligently' through audio-visual signals.<sup>42</sup> Between 1970 and 1975 Krueger designed a series of works that allowed participants in contiguous or remote locations to interact via video and computer, and he exhibited the first version of his best known work, *Video Place*, at the Milwaukee Museum in 1975. This installation consisted of two or more environments; in each location the participant entered a darkened room where there was a screen on which her or his image along with the images of participants in the other space(s) were projected. The participants could interact on the screen through movement. Because the images were projected on a neutral background they could be easily digitized and manipulated by the artist. *Video Place* had strong sensorial and affective impact as the participant interprets the changes made to his image as actions upon his person.

### Telematics

The term 'telematics,' coined by French Government officials Simon Nora and Alain Minc in 1980, refers to the convergence of computers and communication systems.<sup>43</sup> Although artists such as Roy Ascott had long envisioned the artistic possibilities of this unification, access to computer systems had been limited before the development of the personal computer and the privatization of computer networks in the mid 1980s. Presciently, however, in the 1970s artists had begun to employ various networks to establish communication among remote participants. With the support of NASA (National Aeronautical and Space Administration) in 1977, Kit Galloway and Sherie Rabinowitz produced *Satellite Arts Project: A Space with No Boundaries*, a collaborative performance involving four dancers, two in Maryland and two in California, their performances unified by satellite composite imagery. *A Hole in Space*, a satellite link between two storefronts, one in New York and one in Los Angeles, followed in 1980. In contrast to the first project, conceived as an art performance, *A Hole in Space* facilitated access to expensive satellite

technology to people on the street. Arranged as part of the cityscape with no special signage or previous advertisements, a passerby who happened on the piece could communicate with people in the other city and see their images projected on the storefront. Building on this experience, in 1984 Galloway and Rabinowitz established the *Electronic Café*, initially a telecommunications project linking six distinct communities in Los Angeles. The customers exchanged images, played music, and wrote poetry.

Already in 1980, a network for artists had been founded by Robert Adrian and Bill Barlett under the auspices of I. P. Sharp Associates (IPSA), a time-sharing system based in Toronto that provided network computer services to businesses via telephone. The first prototype of this network, ARTBOX, was launched as ARTEX (Artists' Electronic Exchange System) in 1982. It remained in operation until 1990. In 1982, Adrian also organized 'The World in 24 Hours,' a multimedia event connecting artists in 24 cities using fax, e-mail, and slow-scan video.

The following year, Roy Ascott, an early subscriber to ARTBOX, presented *Plissure du Texte* (*The Pleating of the Text*) at the exhibition Electra, organized by Frank Popper at the Musée de l'art moderne de la ville de Paris. Inspired by Roland Barthes' 1973 book, *Pleasure of the Text*, Ascott's piece linked involved artists in 11 cities via computer network; the artists, working through what Ascott called 'distributive authorship,' created a collaborative text illustrated with ASCII images.<sup>44</sup> For Ascott this kind of creative networking was 'an unending process. ... In this sense art itself becomes, not a discrete set of entities, but rather a web of relationships between ideas and images in constant flux to which no single authorship is attributable, and whose meanings depended on those who enter the network. ... The observer of the 'artwork' is a participator who, in accessing the system, transforms it.' Ascott also envisioned networks as live entities. He declared: 'The creative use of networks makes them organisms.'<sup>45</sup>

All of these early telematic works utilized technology that would not become popularly available for yet a few years and were to that extent futuristic. In 1973, most computers were mainframes. In fact, it was that year that the first international e-mails in the military network ARPANET made their appearance. By 1979, only 16 ARPANET sites were located on campuses, the remaining 46 were in the military industrial complex. Alternative networks, including CSNET, were not financially stable until the mid 1980s.<sup>46</sup> Sharing the belief that the exchange of music, images, and text via a network and among people of various socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and languages exemplified 'communication,' many early telematic works unwittingly reinscribed Shannon and Weaver's notion of communication as data sent, encoded, and received.

### Interactive Installations

Process, communication, and embodied interaction have continued to be central to artists working in the 1990s and beyond. Roy Ascott's employment of telematics and his notion of 'distributed authorship' find new instantiations in online multi-user environments, which multiple artists have used to

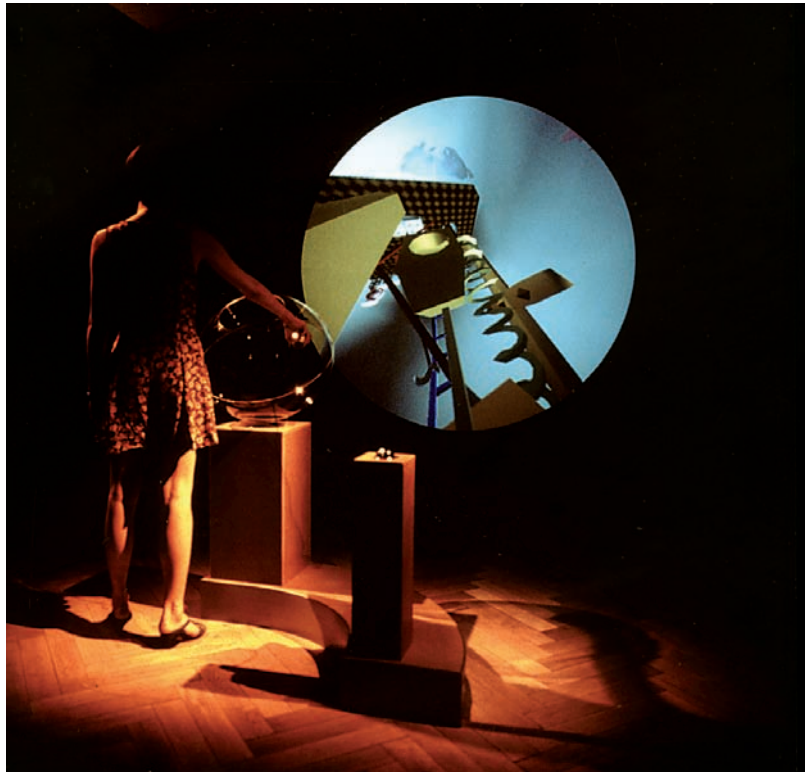
produce collaborative visual, literary, and theatrical works as well as game spaces.

Eduardo Kac and Ikuo Nakamura's *Essay on Human Understanding* of 1994 linked a plant in New York and a canary in Kentucky via a telephone line. Circuit boards, a speaker, and a microphone located on top of the canary's cage were wired to the phone system to transmit the bird's songs to the plant, while an electrode placed on one of the plant's leaves sensed its response to the singing of the bird. In turn, the micro voltage from the plant was then fed to a computer and analyzed by a program designed to interpret human brain waves. Another Macintosh computer transformed this information into sound.<sup>47</sup> According to Kac, the work explored communication between two different species. Although more complex, *Essay on Human Understanding* is reminiscent of Shannon's *Squat* in the interconnection of organic and inorganic systems.

In *Telematic Dreaming*, first exhibited in 1992 at the Kiasma Museum in Finland, British artist Paul Sermon explored affective dimensions of telematics. A video camera situated above a bed in one location sent a video image of the bed and a participant lying on it via a telephone line to the second location where another participant lay; a video camera in this second location sent the image of the projection of both participants interacting to a series of monitors placed around the bed at the first location. As in Krueger's *Video Place*, the participants reacted strongly to advances on their personal space and to the other participant's touch of their virtual images. The obligatory intimacy required by the piece was especially poignant at a time when AIDS was identified as an epidemic of worldwide proportions.<sup>48</sup>

Two artists influential in the development of immersive, responsive environments were Australian Jeffrey Shaw and Hungarian-born Agnes Hegedus. Practicing in Amsterdam in the late 1960s Shaw unified virtual and physical environments by projecting images on inflatable structures, as in his *Corpocinema* (1967) and *Movie Movie* (1967). Shaw's monumental interactive installations from the late 1980s and 1990s allowed participants to explore virtual environments using familiar objects as interfaces. In his celebrated *Legible City* (1988–91) textual narratives were superimposed on three city plans (for Manhattan, Amsterdam, and Karlsruhe) to constitute virtual cityscapes where giant letters replaced architecture. The participant could explore these 'legible' cities by riding a stationary bicycle located in the exhibition space. The coalescence of virtual and real space is a recurrent motif in Shaw's work.<sup>49</sup>

Agnes Hegedus's installation *Handsight*, exhibited at Ars Electronica (a prestigious festival of electronic art in Linz, Austria) in 1992, invited the viewer to reflect on the interactions of technology, perception, corporeality, identity, and memory [64]. The work was conceptually far more complex than most digital art of its time. The installation consisted of three main parts arranged in the front of a darkened room: a large circular screen onto which real-time computer imagery was projected; an interface in the form of a large eyeball, which the participant manipulated; and a Plexiglas sphere with a hole into which the participant could insert the eyeball, which contained a sensing device that transmitted its position and orientation, to explore the interior. As the eyeball traveled inside the sphere, images of the virtual environment



were projected on the screen and the eyeball thus functioned as an extension of the viewer's body. By making perception of the virtual environment dependent on the viewer's movement, the work exemplified the embodiment of vision. The literalness of having to hold the eyeball with one's hand in order to see delicately parodied the enthusiasm of contemporary artists and theorists—from novelist William Gibson, to artificial intelligence expert Hans Moravec and Australian artist Stelarc—for the obsolescence of the fleshed body.<sup>50</sup> *Handsight* suggested the interdependence of the virtual and the corporeal, an argument later developed by theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, and most recently by Brian Massumi and Mark Hansen.<sup>51</sup>

Virtual Reality (VR), a technology with multiple origins that became viable in the mid 1980s, can be described as the real-time coordination of stereographic display with the user's viewpoint in physical space. In one technical manifestation, this is achieved via HMD (head mounted display), with one screen for each eye and a head-mounted tracking sensor. In most cases, a second sensor tracks the position of the user's hand through a glove or pointer interface and renders the movement of the hand accurately with respect to the viewpoint of the user in the rendered image. VR allows the user to explore visually a three-dimensional virtual world by head movement. CAVE (Computer Automated Virtual Environment) is a three-meter cube in which three walls and the floor are stereographic projection surfaces. The users wear LCD shutter glasses synchronized to the frame-rate of the imagery. This results in

persuasive stereoscopic illusion. The primary differences between CAVE and the HMD technology are that the user can see her or his own physical body immersed in this illusory space in CAVE and is able to move freely. In the CAVE, a head tracker is usually used to determine viewpoint and the user often employs a pointer, mouse, or 'wand'.<sup>52</sup>

French artist Maurice Benayoun's installation *World Skin* exploited the immersive capabilities of the CAVE to stimulate the participant's reflection on the relation of individuals to complex systems such as world politics and the media. Exhibited at Ars Electronica in 1998, *World Skin* situated the viewer in a war zone, which she/he was invited to explore in three dimensions by walking around soldiers, tanks, and architectural ruins. Cameras dangling from the ceiling allowed the participant to photograph the virtual world of the CAVE. Taking a photograph had the visual effect of erasing the selected slice of this world from the landscape and transforming it into a shadow, making the participant into a virtual tourist of destruction. By letting the viewer experience a war zone, *World Skin* anticipated recent digital art work, such as two games developed by the artists' collaborative SWEAT™ under the direction of Rafael Fajardo—*Crosser* (2000), and *La Migra* (2002)—which offer viewers the possibility of virtually experiencing politically charged and violent situations.

### Artificial Life Art

In the last two decades, artists have engaged modes of artificial life to create works that behave, evolve, mutate, and form complex systems. In contrast to Artificial Intelligence, a-life, which separates life from its material substrate by focusing on organization and behavior, abandons centralized control in favor of distributed processes characteristic of the functioning of living organisms. A-life techniques include (but are not limited to): utilization of genetic algorithms that simulate genetic and evolutionary dynamics in digital computation; development of software agents that behave individually and with each other in an artificial-life world; and cellular automata—simple planar cell-based computer graphic systems which display emergent global behaviors.<sup>53</sup>

Although the discipline of a-life is less than 20 years old, its roots extend backward. Already in the mid 1940s John von Neumann developed a theory of self-reproducing automata based on a biological model.<sup>54</sup> In 1971, German scientist and philosopher Max Bense wrote an essay entitled 'The Project of Generative Aesthetics,' in which he described an evolving aesthetic based on mathematical and linguistic models. Anticipating a-life art, Bense differentiated the 'material carrier' of a work of art and the organization or 'aesthetic state' achieved by the carrier.<sup>55</sup> The concept of agents could be traced back to mathematical linguistic models from the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s artist William Latham, in collaboration with programmer Stephen Todd, developed art evolution software that allowed the artist to create 'ghost' sculptures (sculptures made of data which were then exhibited as prints or film). The program, 'FormGrow,' was based on a previous framework consisting of an evolutionary grammar that enabled the artist to build complex forms through the accumulation and transformation of simple elements. The resulting images resemble shells, coral, or plants dis-

torted by the addition of extraneous parts. A subsequent program, 'Mutator' (1991), offers the user a set of forms to be selected for further evolution, translating the trajectory of the user through form-space and producing the impression of evolutionary mutations.<sup>57</sup> The resulting images display aspects of the selection process and evolutionary procedures, not representations of physical or imaginary forms.

In 1993, artificial life scientist/artist Karl Sims constructed an art evolution system that allowed infinite numbers of mutations. In *Genetic Images* (1993), 15 video screens linked to a supercomputer displayed 15 images—each produced by a complex mathematical equation—which shifted every 30 seconds. Via a pressure-sensitive mat the visitors selected an image or pair of images to lead the next cycle of mutations. Metaphorically, the images bred other images, thus the work reproduced as a living organism, exemplifying a computer simulation of evolution.<sup>58</sup> Sims' later works apply these evolutionary principles to creatures that interact and reproduce in a digital environment.<sup>59</sup>

In *TechnoSphere* (1995), British artist Jane Prophet built an artificial-life system accessible to viewers through the Internet. The visitor constructed a synthetic creature from a series of elementary three-dimensional shapes and then released the creature into a virtual world. Unlike previous a-life environments *TechnoSphere* directly explored the ability of artificial-life forms to stimulate affective responses from users. The system regularly e-mailed the user to inform her or him of the creature's activities (including eating and mating) in the virtual world such that the owner could follow the progress of the creature from birth to death. *TechnoSphere* was tremendously popular, receiving between 70,000 and 80,000 hits per day. In addition to its affective qualities, this work shares with Pask's *Musicolour* and *Colloquy of Mobiles* a focus on agency and interaction.

After Inhatowicz's *Senster* other artists also have critically engaged the discipline of artificial intelligence through robotics and artificial life. Australian artist and theorist Simon Penny has investigated the affective capacities of real-time human-machine interaction through gesture and movement since the mid-1980s. Penny's robot *Petit Mal* (1992-5) was predicated on bottom-up concepts of reactive robotics exemplified by the work of roboticist Rodney Brooks. It navigated interior spaces and interacted with people through ultrasonic and pyroelectric sensors without the centralized mapping typical of traditional robotics and artificial intelligence. As with Schoffer's *C°SP* series and Inhatowicz's *Senster*, users quickly ascribe emotive qualities to *Petit Mal* and treat it as if it were a child or pet.

From 1995, Penny has collaborated with software engineer Andre Bernhardt in the design of machine vision systems capable of constructing three-dimensional models of users in an interactive space derived from multiple camera images, often under infrared light. This custom-made vision system was a central component of subsequent works such as *Traces* (1999) and *Fugitive II* (2004). *Traces*, presented at Ars Electronica and designed in collaboration with Jaime Schulte, Andre Bernhardt, Jeffrey Smith, and Phoebe Sengers, is an immersive environment with an infrared vision system designed for CAVE. *Traces* creates a real-time three-dimensional model of the user derived from data from the vision system. The behavior of the user in the space elicits behaviors from the system, which manifests as three-



dimensional forms that coexist with the user in the space of interaction. By means of a custom three-dimensional cellular automaton, the visual traces exhibit simple behaviors of their own—for example, throwing motions generate flocks of spheres arranged in serpentine formations loosely resembling Chinese dragons. These semi-autonomous agents interact with each other and respond to the user by gathering around her body.

*Traces* offers an alternative to other forms of immersive experience such as the goggle-and-glove form of Virtual Reality much publicized in the early 1990s. The participant needs no previous training, nor does he or she require any restrictive equipment to use the system. Dynamic forms are generated by moving the body as one does in everyday life. As the system responds to large body movement, it encourages the user to engage in active physical behavior. As Penny put it, the experience of *Traces* marks one of the few instances in which people leave an interactive work sweating and panting.<sup>60</sup>

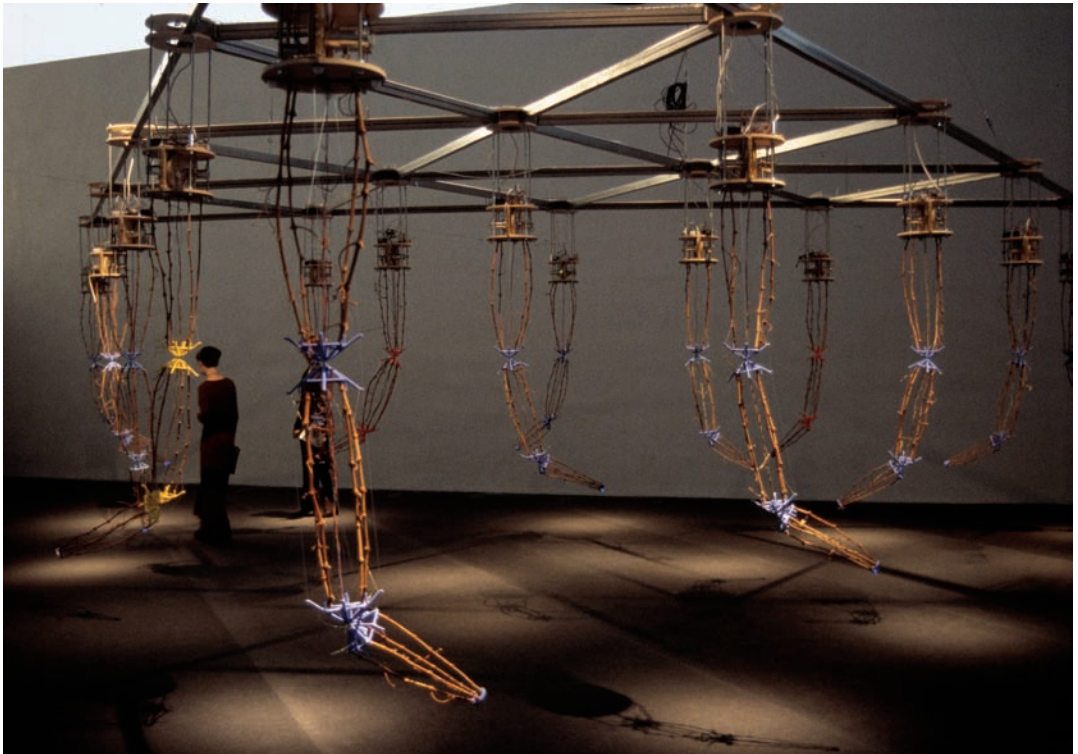
American artist Ken Rinaldo has consistently explored emergent and self-organizing behavior as well as intra- and inter-species communication. *Autopoiesis*, the title of which refers to a concept originated by biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, was commissioned by the Kiasma Museum in Finland in 2000 [65].<sup>61</sup> Maturana and Varela's 1980 book *Autopoiesis and Cognition* advanced the notion that a system's reality is determined by its internal, self-managing organization rather than its material structure. An autopoietic system recursively re-produces the elements and conditions of its organization to maintain its identity. To that end, Rinaldo's *Autopoiesis* consists of 15 robotic sculptures that interact musically

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Ken Rinaldo, *Autopoiesis*, 2000. *Alien Intelligence* exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki.

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and kinetically with each other and with the public, and modify their behaviors according to the actions and sounds of the participants and of other sculptures. Telephone tones enable the arms to talk to each other and allow the group to communicate with the viewer, while infrared sensors inform the sculptures of the position of the viewer and direct their movements. ‘Lipstick cameras’ mounted at the tip of two of the arms project images of their surroundings on the walls of the space, suggesting that the sculptures survey the participants. Rinaldo describes the behavior of *Autopoiesis* as ‘a cybernetic ballet of experience.’<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

The practices and the projects discussed here represent only a small fraction of the history of technologically-based art, but they suffice to demonstrate that a consideration of ‘process’ has been central to artistic practices for *at least* 50 years. While notions of process and procedurality are integral to contemporary digital art, it is seldom acknowledged that these concepts are less determined by technologies themselves than they are preoccupations of experimental art practices now absorbed into new media art practices. Contemporary critical theories enrich our understanding of this kind of work, yet theory alone is insufficient to understand its complex meanings. Theoretical knowledge must be paired with historical knowledge of both technology and art. Otherwise sophisticated pronouncements about the potential of contemporary art risk predicting developments that are already historical.

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# Epilogue

## The Art of Art History

Is there not in the word *vrai* a sort of supernatural rectitude? Is there not in the terse sound it demands a vague image of chaste nudity, of the simplicity of the true in everything? ... Does not every word tell the same story? All are stamped with a living power which they derive from the soul and which they pay back to it by the mysteries of action and the marvellous reaction that exists between speech and thought—like, as it were, a lover drawing from the lips of his mistress as much love as he presses into them

Honoré de Balzac, *Louis Lambert*

The modern practices of museology—no less than those of the museum's auxiliary discursive practice, art history (let us call this here *museography*)—are firmly rooted in an ideology of representational adequacy, wherein exhibition is presumed to 'represent' more or less faithfully some set of extra-museological affairs; some 'real' history which, it is imagined, pre-exists its portrayal; its *re*-presentation, in exhibitionary space.

However fragmentary, temporary, or terse the collection or exhibition, it exists today within the parameters of expectation established by two centuries and more of museums, galleries, salons, fairs, expositions, displays, and visual and optical demonstrations and experiments of many familiar kinds. Every exhibition is commonly understood as a fragment, or a selection out of, some absent and fuller whole. Every item in museological space is a *specimen*—a member of a class of like objects.

Each mode of modern exposition is in its own way the successor to, or a modern version of, one or more older 'arts', 'books', or 'houses' of memory, some of which are of very great antiquity in the West.<sup>1</sup> It may be useful to consider all such modes of exposition and display as comprising facets of an interrelated and mutually defining network of social practices or epistemological technologies which together make up the vast enterprise of modernity. Just as the set of practices which came to be orchestrated together as the modern museum may have had separate and distinct antecedents,<sup>2</sup> so too may it be useful to understand the museum as itself one of a *set* of techniques whose co-ordination and interrelation came about in connection with the evolution of the modern nation-state.

This essay is a meditation or reflection (the use of such words is inescapably part of that long tradition) upon the broad architectonic parameters, distinctive features, or systemic structures underlying the historical formation of art history and museology. In particular, it is an attempt to articulate what characterizes the *storied space* of museology in a manner which may help shed light on what may have been at stake in the origins of art history, itself a facet of a broader discursive field that might possibly be termed 'museography'.

This I will characterize loosely for the moment as a peculiarly modernist orchestration and *linking together of subjects and objects in a variety of stages or venues that became key operating components of the efficient functioning of the modern nation-state*. These would include not only the familiar features of professional art historical practice such as slide, photo, and electronic archives and teaching facilities, but also aspects of the tourist, fashion, and heritage industries. Museums and other modernist artefacts such as novels would be examples of such museographic practices. More on these distinctions below.

One motivation for what follows here is the pressing need to think art history *otherwise*: to consider it apart from two kinds of inertias: first, the obstinacies of millennialist scenarios of traditional disciplinary historiographies, which continue to articulate the 'histories' of art historical practices in a social and epistemological vacuum (thus recapitulating and simulating the 'art history' of art history); second, the recent satisfactions of reCanonization and the formulaic assimilation of various 'new art histories' that have largely expanded the ground of existing canons and orthodoxies rather than offering substantive alternatives to the *status quo*.<sup>3</sup> The format of what follows, then, reflects an attempt to stand apart from the discipline at an oblique and raking angle; to read it obliquely or *anamorphically*, as it were.

The evolution of the modern nation-state was enabled by the cumulative formation of a series of cultural institutions which pragmatically allowed national mythologies, and the very myth of the nation-state as such, to be vividly imagined and effectively embodied. As an imaginary entity, the modern nation-state depended for its existence and maintenance on an apparatus of powerful (and, beginning in the eighteenth century, increasingly ubiquitous) cultural fictions, principal amongst which were the *novel* and the *museum*. The origins of the professional discipline of art history, it will be argued here, cannot be understood outside of the orbit of these complementary developments.

The new institution of the museum in effect established an imaginary space-time and a storied space: a historically inflected or *funeous*<sup>4</sup> site. It thereby served as a *disciplinary* mode of knowledge-production in its own right, defining, formatting, modelling, and 're-presenting' many forms of social behaviour by means of their products or relics. Material of all sorts was recomposed and transformed into component parts of the stage-machinery of display and spectacle. These worked to establish by example, demonstration, or explicit exhortation, various parameters for acceptable relations between subjects and objects, among subjects, and between subjects and their personal histories, that would be consonant with the needs of the nation-state. To be seen in the storied spaces of the museum were not only objects, but other subjects viewing objects, and viewing each other viewing. And the smile of the Mona Lisa appearing not to smile for thee.

Museums, in short, established exemplary models for 'reading' objects as traces, representations, reflections, or surrogates of individuals, groups, nations, and races and of their 'histories'. They were civic spaces designed for European ceremonial engagement with (and thus the evocation, fabrication, and preservation of) its own history and social memory.<sup>5</sup> As such, museums made the visible *legible*, thereby establishing what was worthy to be seen, whilst teaching museum users how to read what is to be seen: how to activate



social memories. Art history becomes one of the voices—one might even say a major popular historical novel—in and of museological space.<sup>6</sup> In a complementary fashion, art history established itself as a window onto a vast imaginary universal museum, encyclopaedia, or archive of all possible specimens of all possible arts,<sup>7</sup> in relation to which any possible physical exhibit, collection, or museum would be itself a fragment or part.

Since its invention in late eighteenth-century Europe as one of the premier epistemological technologies of the Enlightenment, and of the social, political, and ethical education of the populations of modernizing nation-states, the modern museum has most commonly been constructed as an evidentiary and documentary artefact. At the same time, it has been an instrument of historiographic practice; a civic instrument for *practising* history. It constitutes in this regard a particular mode of fiction: one of the most remarkable genres of imaginative fiction, and one which has become an indispensable component of statehood and of national and ethnic identity and heritage in every corner of the world. In no small measure, *modernity itself is the museum's collective product and artefact; the supreme museographic fiction.*

What can it mean, then, to be a 'subject' in a world of 'objects' where some are legible or construed as *representative* of others because of their physical siting in the world, or the manner in which they are staged or framed? What constitutes such 'representation'? What exactly makes this possible or believable? The possibilities of representation in the modern world are grounded in much more ancient philosophical and religious traditions of thought regarding the nature of the relations between character and appearance. Nevertheless, as we shall see, there are aspects of civic and secular forms of representational adequacy and responsibility that are specific to the syntheses of modernity, being closely tied to what is made possible by the system of cultural technologies in service to, and simultaneously enabling, the nation-state.

We live in a world in which virtually anything can be staged or deployed *in* a museum, and in which virtually anything can be designated or serve *as* a museum. Although in the last two decades of the twentieth century there has appeared an immense and useful literature on museums and museology,<sup>8</sup> it has also become clear that significant progress in understanding the remarkable properties, mechanisms, and effects of museological practice remains elusive. In fact it is clear that nothing less is demanded than a major rethinking of not a few historical and theoretical assumptions, and modes of interpretation and explanation. The position taken here is that the Enlightenment invention of the modern museum was an event as profound and as far-reaching in its implications as the articulation of central-point perspective several centuries earlier (and for not dissimilar reasons).<sup>9</sup>

That this was truly a revolutionary social invention is increasingly clear. It was achieved abruptly in some places, and more gradually in others, as was the case with the European social revolutions that the new institution was designed to serve. The museum crystallized and transformed a variety of older practices of knowledge-production, formatting, storage, and display into a new synthesis that was commensurate with the eighteenth-century

development of other modern forms of observation and discipline in hospitals, prisons, and schools.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the museum will most usefully be understood as a primary site for the manufacture of that larger synthesis constituting modernity itself; it simultaneously stands as one of its most powerful *epitomes*.

The following three sections consist of, first (Part 1) a series of observations and informal propositions expanding on some of the ideas just outlined. Although much of this appears assertive and declarative, it is in fact written on a translucent surface beneath which you may be able to catch glimpses of descending layers of questions. Each proposition, then, may be taken as an anamorphic perspective on the entire set of observations; or as a provocation intended to move the discourse of museology out of its current muddy tracks. This is followed, in Part 2, by an expansion on the propositions and observations just set forth, which consists primarily of an examination of certain properties of the art of art history, particularly in its relationship to fetishism. The final section (Part 3) is an attempt to delineate in a systematic fashion the properties and features of the storied spaces of museology and museography, and is written as a response to the question: what was most deeply at stake in the foundation of the discipline of art history two centuries ago?<sup>11</sup>

## 1. Museology and Museography

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object.

Jacques Lacan<sup>12</sup>

1. Museums do not simply or passively reveal or 'refer' to the past; rather they perform the basic historical gesture of *separating out of the present* a certain specific 'past' so as to collect and recompose (to *re-member*) its displaced and dismembered relics as elements in a *genealogy* of and for the present. The function of this museological past sited within the space of the present is to signal alterity or otherness; to distinguish from the present an Other which can be reformatted so as to be legible in some plausible fashion as generating or *producing* the present. What is superimposed within the space of the present is imaginatively juxtaposed to it as its prologue.<sup>13</sup>

This museological 'past' is thus an *instrument* for the imaginative production and sustenance of the present; of modernity as such. This ritual performance of commemoration is realized through disciplined individual and collective use of the museum, which, at the most basic and generic level, constitutes a choreographic or spatiokinetic complement or analogue to the labour of reading a novel or newspaper, or attending a theatre or show.

2. The elements of museography, including art history, are highly coded rhetorical tropes or linguistic devices that actively 'read', compose, and allegorize the past. In this regard, our fascination with the institution of the museum—our being drawn to it and being held in thrall to it—is akin to our fascination with the novel, and in particular the 'mystery' novel or story. Both museums and mysteries teach us how to solve things; how to think; and how to put two and two together. Both teach us that things are not always as they

seem at first glance. They demonstrate that the world needs to be coherently pieced together (literally, re-membered) in a fashion that may be perceived as rational and orderly: a manner that, in reviewing its steps, seems by hindsight to be natural or inevitable. In this respect, the present of the museum (within the parameters of which is also positioned our identity) may be staged as the inevitable and logical outcome of a particular past (that is our heritage and origins), thereby extending identity and cultural patrimony back into a historical or mythical past, which is thereby recuperated and preserved, without appearing to lose its mystery.

In essence, both novel and museum evoke and enact a desire for panoptic or panoramic points of view from which it may be seen that all things may indeed fit together in a true, natural, real, or proper order. Both modes of magic realism labour at convincing us that each of us could 'really' occupy privileged synoptic positions, despite all the evidence to the contrary in daily life, and in the face of domination and power.

Exhibition and art historical practice (both of which are subspecies of museography) are thus genres of imaginative fiction. Their practices of composition and narration constitute the 'realities' of history chiefly through the use of prefabricated materials and vocabularies—tropes, syntactic formulas, methodologies of demonstration and proof, and techniques of stagecraft and dramaturgy.<sup>14</sup> Such fictional devices are shared with other genres of ideological practice such as organized religion and the entertainment—that is, the containment—industries.

3. The museum is also the site for the imaginary exploration of linkages between subjects and objects; for their superimposition by means of juxtaposition. The art museum *object* may be imagined as functioning in a manner similar to an *ego*: an object that cannot exactly coincide with the subject, that is neither interior nor exterior to the subject, but is rather a permanently unstable *site* where the distinction between inside and outside, subject and object, is continually and unendingly negotiated.<sup>15</sup> The museum in this regard is a stage for socialization; for playing out the similarities and differences between an *I* (or eye) confronting the *world* as object, and an *I* (or eye) confronting *itself* as an object among objects in that world—an adequation, however, that is never quite complete. See also (8) below.

4. In modernity, to speak of things is to speak of persons. The *art* of art history and aesthetic philosophy is surely one of the most brilliant of modern European inventions, and an instrument for retroactively rewriting the history of all the world's peoples. It was, and remains, an organizing concept which has made certain Western notions of the subject more vividly palpable (its unity, uniqueness, self-sameness, spirit, non-reproducibility, and so on); in this regard it recapitulates some of the effects of the earlier invention of central-point perspective.

At the same time, the art of art history came to be the paradigm of all production: its ideal horizon, and a standard against which to measure all products. In a complementary fashion, the producer or artist became the paragon of all agency in the modern world. As ethical artists of our own subject identities, we are exhorted to compose our lives as works of art, and to live *exemplary* lives: lives whose works and deeds may be legible as representative artefacts in their own right.

Museography in this regard forms an intersection and bridge between religion, ethics, and the ideologies of Enlightenment governance, wherein delegation and exemplarity constitute political representation.

5. Art is both an *object* and an *instrument*. It is thus the name of what is to be *seen*, read, and studied, and the (often occluded) name of the *language* of study itself; of the artifice of studying. As with the term 'history', denoting ambivalently a disciplined practice of writing and the referential field of that scriptural practice, *art* is the metalanguage of the history fabricated by the museum and its museographies. This instrumental facet of the term is largely submerged in modern discourse in favour of the 'objecthood' of art.<sup>16</sup> What would an art historical or museological practice consist of which was attentive to this ambivalence?

As an organizing concept, as a method of organizing a whole field of activity with a new centre that makes palpable certain notions of the subject, art renarrativizes and recentres history as well. As a component of the Enlightenment project of commensurability, art became the universal standard or measure against which the products (and by extension the people) of all times and places might be envisioned together on the same hierarchical scale or table of aesthetic progress and ethical and cognitive advancement. To each people and place its own true art, and to each true art its proper position on a ladder of evolution leading towards the modernity and presentness of Europe. Europe becomes not only a collection of artworks, but the organizing *principle of collecting*: a set of objects in the museum, and the museum's vitrines themselves.<sup>17</sup>

As Sir John Summerson astutely observed in 1960:

New art is observed as history the very moment it is seen to possess the quality of uniqueness (look at the bibliographies on Picasso or Henry Moore) and this gives the impression that art is constantly receding from modern life—is never possessed by it. It is receding, it seems, into a gigantic landscape—the landscape of ART—which we watch as if from the observation car of a train ... in a few years [something new] is simply a grotesque or charming incident in the whole—that whole which we see through the window of the observation car, which is so like the *vitrine* of a museum. Art is behind glass—the history glass.<sup>18</sup>

Art, in short, came to be fielded as central to the very machinery of historicism and essentialism; the very *esperanto* of European hegemony. It may be readily seen how the culture of spectacle and display comprising museology and museography became indispensable to the Europeanization of the world: for every people and ethnicity, for every class and gender, for every individual no less than for every race, there may be projected a legitimate 'art' with its own unique spirit and soul; its own history and prehistory; its own future potential; its own respectability; and its own style of representational adequacy. The brilliance of this colonization is quite breathtaking: there is no 'artistic tradition' anywhere in the world which today is not fabricated through the historicisms and essentialisms of European museology and museography, and (of course) in the very hands of the colonized themselves.

In point of fact, art history makes colonial subjects of us all.

In other words, the Enlightenment invention of the 'aesthetic' was an attempt to come to terms with, and classify on a common ground or within the grid of a common table or spreadsheet, a variety of forms of subject-

object relationships observable (or imagined) across many different societies. As object and instrument, this art is simultaneously a kind of thing, and a term indicating a certain relativization of things. *It represents one end in a hierarchized spectrum from the aesthetic to the fetishistic*: an evolutionary ladder on whose apex is the aesthetic art of Europe, and on whose nadir is the fetish-charm of primitive peoples.

6. Taking up a position from within the museum makes it natural to construe it as the very summa of optical instruments, of which the great proliferation of tools, toys, and optical games and architectural and urban experiments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries might then be understood as secondary servo-mechanisms and anecdotal emblems. The institution places its users in anamorphic positions from which it may be seen that a certain historical dramaturgy unfolds with seamless naturalism; where a specific teleology may be divined or read in geomantic fashion as the hidden figure of the truth of a collection of forms; and where all kinds of genealogical filiations may come to seem reasonable, inevitable, and demonstrable. Modernity itself as the most overarching form of identity politics.

It is the most extraordinary of 'optical illusions' that museological space appears baldly Euclidean in this anamorphic dramaturgy. The museum appears to masquerade (but then there's no masquerade, for it's all masquerade) as a heterotopic lumber-yard or department store of alternative models of agency that might be taken up and consumed, meditated upon, imagined, and projected upon oneself or others. What one is distracted from is of course the larger picture and the *determinations* of these storied spaces: the overall social effects of these ritual performances, which (a) instantiate an ideology of the nation as but an individual subject writ large, and (b) reduce all differences and disjunctions between individuals and cultures to variations on the same; to different but commensurate versions of the same substance and identity. In such a regime, we are all relatives in this Family-of-Man-and/as-Its-Works.

7. Within the museum, each object is a trap for the gaze.<sup>19</sup> As long as our purview remains fixed in place at the level of the individual specimen, we may find it comfortable or pleasing to believe in an individual 'intentionality' at play in the production and appearance of things, as its significant and determinate, and even final, cause. Intentionality becomes the vanishing point, or explanatory horizon, of causality. It is a catalyst of the ubiquitous museological exhortation, 'let the work of art speak directly to you with a minimum of interference or distraction.'<sup>20</sup>

8. The museum may also be understood as an instrument for the production of *gendered* subjects. The topologies of imaginary gender positions are among the institution's effects: the position of the museum user or operator (the 'viewer') is an unmarked analogue to that of an unmarked (usually, but not necessarily, male) heterosocial pose or position. But as an object of desire, the staged and storied museum artefact is simultaneously a simulacrum of an agential being or subject (usually, but not necessarily female) with whom the viewing subject will bond, or by whom he/she will be repelled.

In short, the superimposition of subjects and objects within the storied space of the museum creates the conditions for a blurring or complexifying

of male–female gender distinctions: the museum object, in other words, is gender-ambiguous. Such an ambiguity creates the need for more distinct gender-framing. What becomes clear in the process is that all art is drag, and that *both* hegemonic and marginalized sexualities are themselves continual and repeated imitations and reiterations of their own idealizations. Just as the viewer’s position in exhibitionary space is always already prefabricated and bespoken, so too is all gender (a) drag.<sup>21</sup>

Museology and museography are instrumental ways of distributing the space of memory. Both operate together on the relationships between the past and present, subjects and objects, and collective history and individual memory. These operations are in aid of transforming the recognized past *in* the present into a storied space wherein the past and present are imaginatively *juxta-*posed, where their virtual relationships cannot *not* be construed as succession and progression; cause and effect. Where, in other words, the illusion that the past exists in and of itself, immune from the projections and desires of the present, may be sustained.

Progress in understanding the museographical project, as well as the museology which is one of its facets, would entail taking very seriously indeed the paradoxical nature of that *virtual* object (what I elsewhere called the *eucharistic* object)<sup>22</sup> that constitutes and fills that space. The art of art history and its museology became an instrument for thinking representationally and historically; for imagining a certain kind of historicity commensurate with the (now universally exported) nationalist teleologies of European modernity.

## 2. Art History and Fetishism

To appreciate the extraordinary power and success of this enterprise, we would have to articulate in fine detail what was most deeply at stake two centuries ago in the invention of the modern nation-state. What came to be the canonical art of art history was indeed a magical and paradoxical object, perfectly suited to being an explanatory instrument in the enterprise of fabricating and sustaining the modern nation-state and its (statuesque) epitome, the citizen.<sup>23</sup> It becomes the product of the aestheticization of social life, and the embodiment of social desires.

Art was the complementary (civilized) foil to its implicit and imaginary obverse, that enigma of the Enlightenment, the (uncivilized) fetish: that ‘safely displaced synecdoche of the Enlightenment’s Other’, in the words of William Pietz.<sup>24</sup> It was a powerful instrument for legitimizing the belief that what you see in what you make is what in some deep, essential way you truly *are*. The form of your work is the *physiognomy* of your truth. At the same time, it provided a powerful instrument for making palpable the proposition that Europe was the brain of the earth’s body, and that all outside the edifice of Europe was its prologue. Of course that external anterior, that Other, was the necessary support and defining instance of what constituted the presence, the modernity, of Europe.<sup>25</sup>

The term fetish ultimately derives from the Latin adjective *factitius* (used by Pliny to refer to that which is the result of art or artifice), through the



Portuguese (*feiticaria*, a term applied to West African ‘witchcraft’ and idol-worship), the word *fetisso* referring to small objects or charms used in trade between West Africans and Europeans. Its early modern meaning may have more to do with a late Latin sense of the term as something imitative of natural properties (like sound, as in onomatopoeia).

At any rate, it came to be constituted as the uncivilized (read ‘black’) anterior to the imaginary ‘disinterestedness’ of European aestheticism. These two terms imply one another and cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Their dyadic *complementarity* has served as the skeletal support of all that art history has been for the past two centuries.

There are some processual parallels. If sexuality came to be privileged by European society as of the essence of the self—the innermost truth of one’s personality—then art might come to be its civilized and complementary obverse, the very mark of civilized interaction between subjects and objects. In modernity, moreover, art and sex are *commensurate*: like sex, art became a secret *truth* to be uncovered about all peoples everywhere; an omnipresent, universal phenomenon linking the caves of Lascaux with the lofts of lower Manhattan—a fictitious unity, to be sure, yet an immensely powerful and durable one.

Historically, art and fetish came to occupy opposite poles in what was none the less a spectrum of continuities from disinterestedness to idolatry, from the civilized to the primitive. Neither one, in short, can be understood in isolation from the other.

Art did not precede art history like some phenomenon of nature discovered and then explained by science. Both are ideological formations designed to function within specifiable parameters. Art history, aesthetic philosophy, museology, and art-making itself were historically co-constructed social practices whose fundamental, conjoint mission was the production of subjects and objects commensurate with each other, and possessive of a decorum suitable for the orderly and predictable functioning of the emergent nation-states of Europe.

At the same time, this enterprise afforded the naturalization of an entire domain of dyadic and graded concepts that could be employed as ancillary instruments for scripting (and then speaking about) the histories of all peoples through the systematic and disciplined investigation of their cultural productions.<sup>26</sup> Museography and its museologies were grounded upon the metaphoric, metonymic, and anaphoric associations that might be mapped amongst their archived specimens. They demonstrated, in effect, that all things could be understood as specimens, and that specimenization could be an effective prerequisite to the production of useful knowledge about anything.

This archive, in other words, was itself no passive storehouse or data bank; it was rather a critical instrument in its own right; a dynamic device for calibrating, grading, and accounting for variations in continuity and continuities in variation and difference. The epistemological technology of the museographical archive was and remains indispensable to the social and political formation of the nation and to its various legitimizing paradigms of ethnic autochthony, cultural uniqueness, and social, technological, or ethical progress (or decline) relative to real or imagined Others.

It works, in part, this way. The enterprises of mythic nationalism required a belief that the products of an individual, studio, nation, ethnic group, class,

race, or even gender would share demonstrably common, consistent, and unique properties of form, decorum, or spirit. Correlative to this was a paradigm of temporal isomorphism: the thesis that an art historical period or epoch would be marked by comparable similarities of style, thematic preoccupation or focus, or techniques of manufacture.<sup>27</sup>

All of this makes sense only if time is framed not simply as linear or cyclic but rather as *progressively unfolding*, as framing some epic or novel-like adventure of an individual, people, nation, or race. Only then would the notion of the period be pertinent, as standing for a plateau or stage in the graded development of some story. (It would have to be graded; or delineated into chronological parts or episodes, so as to be vividly perceptible to an audience.) The period would mark gradual changes in things—as the gradual change or transformation of that Thing (or Spirit) underlying things.

Museology and museography fabricated object-histories as surrogates for or simulacra of the developmental histories of persons, mentalities, and peoples. These consisted of narrative stagings—historical novels or novellas—that served to demonstrate and delineate significant aspects of the character, level of civilization or of skill, or the degree of social, cognitive, or ethical advancement or decline of an individual, race, nation.<sup>28</sup>

Art historical objects have thus always been *object-lessons* of documentary import in so far as they might be deployed or staged as cogent ‘evidence’ of the past’s causal relationship to the present, enabling us thereby to articulate certain kinds of desirable (and undesirable) relations between ourselves and others. Rarely discussed in art historical discourse in this regard is the silent contrast between European ‘progress’ in the arts in contradistinction to the coincident ‘decline’ of Europe’s principal Other in early modern times, the (comparably multinational and multi-ethnic) world of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

It is in this connection that we may understand the enterprises of museography and museology as having served, in their heyday (which is still now) as a very powerful and effective modern(ist) *concordance* of politics, religion, ethics, and aesthetics. It still remains virtually impossible, at the end of the twentieth century, *not* to see direct, causal, and essential connections between an artefact and the (co-implicative) moral character and cognitive capacity of its producer(s). Such idealist, essentialist, racist, and historicist assumptions as were so explicitly articulated in museology and art history in their historical origins still commonly comprise the subtext of contemporary practices, underlying many otherwise distinct or opposed theoretical and methodological perspectives.

The nation as the *ark* of a people: a finite and bounded artefact with a trajectory in time; a storied space. Museology and art history as cybernetic or navigational instruments; optical devices allowing each passenger (who is also always permitted to play the role of ‘captain’ of his or her own fate) both to see behind the ship, the direction whence it came (its unique and singular past), and to steer and guide it forward along the route implied by its prior history: the reflection back from the vanishing-point in the past to the ideal point of fulfilment in the future.

Its substance is ‘art’, that extraordinary *artifice* (or anti-fetishist fetish) which is the art of art history; the Enlightenment invention designed/designed to become a universal *language of truth* (revelatory along a sliding scale

from primitive fetish to art). It is the common frame within which all human manufacture could be set, classified, fixed in its proper places, and set into motion in the historical novel of the nation.

*The art of art history is the Latin of modernity*: a universal medium of (formerly religious, latterly scientific) truth. At the same time it is a golden standard, mean, or ideal canon, relative to which all forms of (manu)facture are anticipatory; relative to whose ideal orotundities each utterance is an approximation, as each botanical entity is a realization of certain ideal internal formal relationships.<sup>30</sup>

This was nothing less than a brilliant gesture and a massively devastating hegemonic act, this transformation of the world into not simply a 'picture' but an image of what would be visible from the specific central-point perspective of Europe masquerading *as* a snapshot, or archive, or museum, of the world, exported and assimilated around the world as the natural and 'modern' order of things. This making of Europe into the *brain of the earth's body* and a vitrine for the collection and containment of all the things and peoples of the world: the most thoroughgoing and effective imperialist gesture imaginable. Eurocentrism was more than any of the myriad ethnocentrisms ubiquitous elsewhere, but was a co-option of all possible centres.<sup>31</sup>

Modernity, the nation-state, as an effect of the *aestheticization* of social relations; as a *factitious*-object which is simultaneously a space and a time. What would have been needed to effect this transformation? How might it have worked? Just what is this 'space'?

What follows is a preliminary sketch or blueprint of this technology.

### 3. Art History in Space and Time

#### I

First, a small *frontispiece*.<sup>32</sup>

The Paris Exposition of 1900 was organized spatially in such a manner that the 'palaces' built to house the products of the two major French colonies of Algeria and Tunisia were situated between the Trocadero Palace on the right bank of the Seine and the Eiffel Tower on the left bank. Looking north from the elevated eye of the Tower towards the Trocadero across the river, you would see these colonial buildings embraced by the two arms of the Trocadero's 'Neo-Islamic' style façade. France's North African colonies—indeed all of them—would appear to occupy a place within the nurturing and protective arms of the French nation, whose own identity would appear to be figured as assimilative, and thus supportive of, the peoples<sup>33</sup> and products that were contained and exhibited in and by these colonial edifices.

Taking up the view from the opposite direction, looking south from the Trocadero towards the Exposition ground across the river, there is a markedly different morphology. The entire fairground is dominated by the Eiffel Tower, that gigantic technological feat of modern French engineering. Dwarfing all the colonial edifices like a colossus (or a colossal figure of the sublime),<sup>34</sup> its four great piers are grounded amongst the massed buildings of the colonial possessions. Appearing to have been built up on top of these buildings, the Tower, one might say, puts things (back) in a proper perspective.<sup>35</sup>

This extraordinary image—a veritable two-way mirror—is a clear and poignant emblem both of the imaginary logic of nationalism (and its imperialist correlates), and of the rhetorical carpentry and museological stagecraft of art historical practice. Consider the following.

From a eurocentric point of view, art history is constru(ct)ed as a universal empirical science, systematically discovering, classifying, analysing, and interpreting specimens of what is thereby instantiated as a universal human phenomenon. This is the ('natural') artisanry or 'art' of all peoples, samples of which are all arranged relative to each other both in museum space and in the more extensive, encyclopaedic, and totalizing space-time of museography, a distillation and refraction of Universal Exposition. All specimens in this vast archive sit as delegates or 'representatives'—that is, as representations—in a congress of imaginary equals, as the myriad of manifestations making up a Universal World History of Art. To each is allotted a plot and display space, a platform or a vitrine.

And yet, if you shift your stance just a bit—say by taking up a position amongst the objects and histories of non-European (or, in recent disciplinary jargon, 'non-Western') art, it becomes apparent that this virtual museum *has* a narrative structure, direction, and point. All its imaginary spaces lead to the modernity of a European present, which constitutes the apex or observation-point; the vitrine within which all else is visible. Europe, in short, *is* the museum space within which non-European specimens *become* specimens, and where their (reformatted) visibility is rendered legible.

European aesthetic principles—in the guise of a reinvented generic modern or neo-classicism (or 'universal principles of good design'<sup>36</sup>)—constitute the self-designated unmarked centre or Cartesian zero-point around which the entire virtual museographic edifice circulates, on the wings of which all things may be plotted, ranked, and organized in their differential particularities. There is no 'outside' to this: all different objects are ranked as primitive, exotic, charming, or fascinating distortions of a central classical (European) canon or standard—the *unmarked* (and seemingly unclassed, ungendered, and so on) point or site towards which all others may be imagined as aspiring. A veritable Eiffel Tower, if you will.

What would be pragmatically afforded by this archive was the systematic assembly or re-collection of artefacts now destined to be constru(ct)ed as material *evidence* for the elaboration of a universalist language of description and classification: the vocabulary of art history. Even the most radically disjunctive differences could be reduced to differential and time-factored qualitative manifestations of some pan-human capacity; some collective human essence or soul. In other words, differences could be reduced to the single dimension of different (but ultimately commensurate) '*approaches* to artistic form' (*the Inuit, the French, the Greek, the Chinese, and so on*). Each work could be seen as approximating, as attempting to get close to, the ideal, canon, or standard. (The theoretical and ideological justification for 'art criticism' is thus born in an instant, occluding whilst still instantiating the magic realisms of exchange value.)<sup>37</sup>

In short, the hypothesis of art as a universal human phenomenon was clearly essential to this entire enterprise of commensurability, intertranslatability, and hegemony. Artisanry in the broadest and fullest sense of 'design' is positioned—and here of course archaeology and palaeontology have their say—as one of the defining characteristics of humanness. The most *skilled*

works of art shall be the *widest* windows onto the human soul, affording the *deepest* insights into the mentality of the maker, and thus the clearest refracted insights into humanness as such.

The art of art history is thus simultaneously the instrument of a universalist Enlightenment vision *and* a means for fabricating qualitative distinctions between individuals, peoples, and societies. How could this be?

Consider again that essential to the articulation and justification of art history as a systematic and universal human science in the nineteenth century was the construction of an indefinitely extendable *archive*,<sup>38</sup> potentially coterminous (as it has since in practice become) with the ‘material (or “visual”) culture’ of all human groups. Within this vast imaginary museographical artefact or edifice (every slide or photo library as an *ars memorativa*)—of which all museums are fragments or part-objects—every possible object of attention might then find its fixed and proper place and address relative to all the rest. Every item might thereby be sited (and cited) as referencing or indexing another or others on multiple horizons (metonymic, metaphoric, or anaphoric) of useful association. The set of objects displayed in any exhibition (as with the system of classification of slide collections) is sustained by the willed fiction<sup>39</sup> that they somehow constitute a coherent ‘representational’ universe, as signs or surrogates of their (individual, national, racial, gendered) authors.

The pragmatic and immediately beneficial use or function of art history in its origins was *the fabrication of a past that could be effectively placed under systematic observation for use in staging and politically transforming the present*.<sup>40</sup> Common to the practices of museography and museology was a concern with spectacle, stagecraft, and dramaturgy; with the locating of what could be framed as distinctive and exemplary objects such that their relations amongst themselves and to their original circumstances of production and reception could be vividly imagined and materially envisioned in a cogent and useful manner. This is useful above all to the production of certain modes of civic subjectivity and responsibility. The problem of historical causality, evidence, demonstration, and proof constituted the rhetorical scaffolding of this matrix or network of social and epistemological technologies.

Needless to say, much of this was made feasible by the invention of photography—indeed, art history is in a very real sense the child of photography, which has been equally enabling of the discipline’s fraternal nineteenth-century siblings, anthropology and ethnography.<sup>41</sup> It was photography which made it possible not only for professional art historians but for whole populations to *think art historically* in a sustained and systematic fashion—to put Winckelmann, Kant, and Hegel into high academic gear, as it were, thereby setting in motion the stage machinery of an orderly and systematic university discipline.

It also, and most crucially, made it possible to envision objects of art as *signs*. The impact of photography on determining the future course of art historical theory and practice was as fundamental as Marconi’s invention of the wireless radio six decades later in envisioning the concept of arbitrariness in language—which, as linguists of the 1890s very rapidly saw, paved the way for a new synthesis of the key concepts of modern linguistics.

As we have seen, a clear and primary motivation for this massive archival labour was the assembly of material evidence justifying the construction of historical novels of social, cultural, national, racial, or ethnic origins, identity, and development. The professional art historian was a key instrument for scripting and giving voice to that archive, providing its potential users, both lay and professional, with safe and well-illuminated access routes into and through it. Museology itself became a key art of this museography, this House of Historicist Memory, evolving as it did as a paradigmatic instrument for the *instituting* of archivable events.

Once again: What kind of *space* is here delineated?

## II

*Not a conclusion, but a proposition:*

The space of museography, the edifice of art history, is a virtual space in three dimensions, each of which affords and confers a specific mode of legibility upon objects in their relationship to subjects. This social and epistemological space may be imagined as having been constructed, historically, through a *triple superimposition* beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century.

(A) The *First Superimposition* (this might be called the dimension or axis of Winckelmann) entailed the superimposition of objects and subjects wherein the object is seen by a subject as through a screen of the erotic fetishization of another subject:<sup>42</sup> the object, in short, is invested with erotic agency.

[The object is deployed as an object of sublimated erotic desire]

(B) The *Second Superimposition* (this might be called the dimension or axis of Kant) affords a linkage of erotics and ethics, or the hierarchized markedness of eroticized objects: their ethical aestheticization. This hierarchization constitutes a spectrum or continuum from the fetish to the work of fine art. Aesthetics is thereby entailed with a superior ethics, fetishism with an inferior one: but both were commensurate *as* ethical.<sup>43</sup>

[The ethically eroticized object of desire is rescued from cultural and ethical relativism]

(C) The *Third Superimposition* (this might be called the dimension or axis of Hegel) affords the *historicization of ethically eroticized objects*, a hierarchization of time in terms of teleology. This museographical space in which ethically eroticized objects are rendered legible is thus a *storied* site, within which objects become protagonists or surrogate agents in historical novels (one version of which is the modern museum) with a common underlying theme: the search for identity, origins, and destinies.

[Ethically superior objects of desire are teleologically marked, their time-factored truth positioned in contradistinction to objects exterior (and thus always already anterior) to time's leading edge, which is the European present; the point of seeing and of speaking; the vitrine in which is re-collected the rest of what has thus become a *remaindered* world]<sup>44</sup>

The result of these superimpositions is the spatiotemporal economy of modernity, the storied space and museographic artefact of an unending process. These superimposed coordinates are realized on a variety of fronts, which include but are not exhausted by the museum and art history. As a key com-



ponent of the operating engines of the modern nation-state, museography worked toward the systematic historicization of ethically eroticized objects of value as *partners* in the enterprises of the social collective.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, the framed and storied artefacts or monuments were invested with a *decorum*, wherein objects would be legible in a disciplined manner, construable as emblems, simulacra, or object-lessons; as 'illustrating' (or 'representing') desirable and undesirable social relations in the (perpetually) modernizing nation (whose faults, it may be added, would seem to lie not in its nature, but in the relative abilities of its citizens to realize the national potential).

In addition, artworks, monuments, archives, and histories are the *sites* where the hidden truth of the citizen, the modern individual, is to be rediscovered and read. (Of course there is never a final monument.)<sup>46</sup> The art historical object is the *elsewhere* of the subject, the place where it is imagined that unsaid or unsayable truths are already written down. Museography might have been a 'science', then, both of the idea of the nation, and of the discovery of the truth of individuals (nations, ethnicities, races, genders) in their objects and products.

Such a science, however, did not exist as a single professional field, but rather as the generic protocol of modern disciplinarity as such; as 'method' itself. It existed perhaps at such a scale as to be invisible in the ordinary-light spectrum of individual perceptions. It could be known and recoverable today through an examination of traces and effects dimly legible in its later twin progeny (separated at their disciplinary birth), namely, history and psychoanalysis,<sup>47</sup> or through a critical historiography of a discursive practice—art history—that was always a superimposition of the two before their modern schism, and that in its oscillatory and paradoxical *modus vivendi*, continues to bridge, albeit at times in the dark, what has since become their difference. Its oscillations *are* that bridge.

Traces of this superimposition are palpable in that ambivalent and paradoxical object that has constituted the *art* of art history since the Enlightenment, with its perpetual oscillation between the ineffable and the documentary, the eucharistic and the semiotic.<sup>48</sup> The art of art history circulates in a virtual space whose own dimensions are the result of the triple superimpositions described above.

Modernity is thus the paradoxical *status quo* of nationalism. It exists as a virtual site constituting the edge between the material residues and relics of the past and the adjacent empty space of the future. That which is perpetually in between two fictions: its origins in an immemorial past and the destiny of its fulfilled future. The fundamental labour of the nation and its parts, this cyborg entity conjoining the organic with the artefactual, was to use the image of the latter fulfilment as a rear-view mirror oriented back towards the former, so as to reconstitute its origins, identity, and history as the reflected source and truth of that projective fulfilled destiny. A hall of mirrors, in fact.

You might *picture* it this way:

You're standing in the middle of a small room. The wall ahead of you is all mirror. That behind you is also mirrored. When you stand in such a place,

watching your image reflected *ad infinitum*, you can usually see, after a dozen or so repeated reflections, that your images recede in a gradually accelerating curve, in one direction or another—up or down, or to one or another side. After a while you notice that the reflections are not infinite at all, but rather *disappear* behind one of the room's structural boundaries, or behind your own image. And you can't see the spot where the vanishing-point actually vanished: you are occluded by your own image or by its frame.

Of course, at a quick glance you *do* seem to go on for ever, your finitude safely invisible.

Or, you might phrase it this way:

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.<sup>49</sup>

Comprehending art history's past is a prerequisite to coping with its present, and productively imagining its futures, should it have any. So much would seem obvious. But to do so effectively would mean at the very least abandoning certain comfortable academic habits of viewing art history's history as a straightforward practice—as simply a history of ideas about art, or as genealogies of individuals who had ideas about art and its 'life' and its 'history', or as an episode in the evolutionary adventure of the history of ideas—as increasingly refined protocols of interpreting objects and their histories and their makers: all those 'theories and methods' from Marxism to feminism, or from formalism and historicism to semiology and deconstruction; and all those disciplinary object-domains from fine art to world art to visual culture, which by hindsight seem so very much cut from the same cloth.

Art history was a complex and internally unstable enterprise throughout its two-century history. Since its beginnings, it has been deeply invested in the fabrication and maintenance of a modernity that linked Europe to *an ethnically superior aesthetics grounded in eroticized object-relations*, thereby allaying the anxieties of cultural relativism, wherein Europe (and Christendom) were, in their expanding encounter with alien cultures, but one reality amongst many.<sup>50</sup>

It has been argued here that art history was always a facet of a broader set of practices that I have termed museography, and that to isolate art history and its history from the circumstances and motivations that conferred viability and substance upon it would be to perpetuate the obstinacies of disciplinarity itself. Effectively remembering what the millennialist discipline with the innocuous name of 'the history of art' *did* may, in its own ironic way, and at the same time, require *forgetting* art history: thinking it *otherwise*, so as to recollect it more completely.

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# Coda

## Plato's Dilemma and the Tasks of the Art Historian Today

*Plato, and Greek classical antiquity in general, had a very different experience of art [from the 'art of art history' of modern times], an experience having little to do with disinterest and aesthetic enjoyment. The power of art over the soul seemed to him so great that he thought it could by itself destroy the very foundations of his (ideal) city; but nonetheless, while he was forced to banish it, he did so reluctantly, 'since we ourselves (in Plato's own words) are very conscious of her spell.'*

Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 4

Deeply embedded in the modern Western institution and profession of art history is an enduring and largely unaddressed conundrum. This is Plato's proposed banishment of art from the ideal city or community projected by him 2,500 years ago in *The Republic*. Rather than being simply an early instance of iconoclasm, however, the dilemma faced by Plato in delineating the reasons for banishing the arts (in particular the mimetic arts) continues to haunt all modes of art historical practice today, raising as it does (and did then) the problematic connections and distinctions between art and religion, or artistry and spirituality.

Art was clearly understood in European antiquity to be amongst the most powerful, dangerous, and terrifying of human phenomena, evoking 'divine terror' or sacred fear (*theios phobos*). While this may seem incomprehensible today, understanding what was at stake for Plato is essential to our own understanding of what joins and what separates 'art' and 'religion' today. Our own modern understanding of art is by comparison safely domesticated by the institutions of art. That is, what is promoted and perpetuated by the industries, businesses, and professions of artistry and spectacle is very different from Plato's invocation of the absolutely terrifying *uncanniness* of art; about *its ability to simultaneously fabricate and problematize the political and religious power imagined as being materialized, embodied, signified, or represented in a people's forms and practices*.

This concerns the ambiguity of artistry or artifice as such in not simply reflecting (or representing) but also in fabricating the actual world in which we really do live, which is precisely the problem encountered in *The Republic*. Art, especially the pantomimic or mimetic arts, problematized seemingly

secure conventional oppositions between what we might commonly designate as fact and fiction; history and poetry; reason and emotion; art and science—all of which are distinctions created and maintained by social and cultural conventions.

What art created for Plato was not some ‘second world’ alongside the everyday world in which we live; he was quite clear that what artistry created *was* the very real world in which we actually *do* live our daily lives. The problem he attempted to address was fundamental to what are distinguished as art, philosophy, politics, and religion. If we believe that a particular made thing—an artwork or poem or a dance or an entire built environment—represents (i.e. re-presents, or makes present again) some essence—either metaphorically ‘contained’ in some thing such as this text, or something absent and elsewhere—for example, things like the ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ or ‘character’ or ‘mentality’ or ‘intelligence’ of a person, people, time, or place—then it is obvious that the essence purportedly ‘represented’ *might also be represented in other ways*, thereby *problematizing* the existence of that essence itself. That is to say, Plato was promoting the notion that there was a ‘right’ way to organize and represent the ideal state. But since that representation is just that, a representation, then it is *also* possible for a representation to be incorrect. Leading one to imagine that the essence supposedly represented is in fact *the product* of its so-called ‘re-presentation’; its fabrication; its methods of knowledge production; its epistemological technology.

Such an awareness obviously has the potential to *radically destabilize and undermine* the claims of any hegemonic power—political or religious—to truth and security. Art problematizes any form of compliance or obedience claimed by those in power to be natural. As Plato was perfectly aware in his attempt to describe what would constitute an ideal state. It is precisely this paradox of *mimesis* (what I’m terming ‘Plato’s dilemma’) that is the central conundrum of the practices of theology and of art and architectural history, theory, and criticism. Art is essentially duplicitous: it potentially empowers *and* disempowers. It is therefore not simply ‘entertainment’ but potentially also *containment*.

The ‘godlike terror’ (*theios phobos*) that (exposure to) art induced in the ancient Greek soul was essentially the *terrifying awareness of exactly this*: that works of art don’t simply ‘imitate’ some imaginary essence or ‘idea’; they rather *create and open up* a world, and keep it in existence, as Heidegger famously put it in discussing the ontologically creative potential of artworks in his 1930s essay ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, where he takes the experience of art to be fundamentally ‘religious’ in nature. Or more precisely, where he argued that the common distinction between art and religion was itself problematized by the direct experience of the power of artistry.

The fundamental issue here is that the truth or falsity of all representation made by art, regardless of its style, mode of presentation, or the cultural identity of the maker, is a work of human creativity rather than the product of some ideal essence, immutable truth, or transcendent reality, as built into monotheistic religions and echoed in and by modernist discursive practices such as art history or visual culture studies.

The ontological status of artistic representation was precisely the problem that so directly engaged later religious thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas,

both of whom articulated the profound challenge of art to religious faith. Are works made by human hands the *effects* of a pre-existing 'spirit', soul, character, or mentality, or is that spirit or mentality an *after-effect* or product and projection of artifice itself? The fundamental problem of representation is whether the idea of a god is a product and effect of a work of artifice, or whether a sacred text is the materialization or embodiment of the (allegedly pre-existing) 'words' of the 'god'.

Seen in this light, the discursive structure of the modern discipline of art history has always been doubly articulated, uneasily balancing closely detailed attention to the material and formal facture or quiddity of made things (however chosen as objects of analysis), and the purported social, historical, political, philosophical, or religious significance, meaning, value, or import of those things: what is supposed or claimed to be re-presented or signified by them. At times in the history of the professional discipline and in the work of a variety of historians, theorists, and critics, this uneasy marriage of modes of attention has melded into a stereoscopic perspective on objects worthy of attention, while at other times—and variously in different places—these nominally distinct modes of seeing and construing things have functioned as semi-autonomous or virtually separate and distinct or opposed sub-disciplines with their own schools, ideologies, and methodologies.

Institutionally and professionally, this nominal bifurcation of formal and contextual attention to the significance of things has its roots in very ancient philosophical and religious perspectives in the Western tradition on the nature of signification or representation as such, as indicated by the remarks above about what motivated Plato's banishment of the arts from his ideal city.

It is commonly assumed, on the one hand, that to speak of works of art (or of other cultural products in any medium) is to speak of or simultaneously evoke the character, morality, or mentality of their makers and users: particular persons, peoples, places, and times. Things worthy of attention are commonly taken as re-presentations of such allegedly pre-existing and determining forces, characters, mentalities, or circumstances. On the other hand, the significance of objects is located in and as their material formation: the content in and of the form itself, seen as autonomous or semiautonomous of the circumstances of its production and reception.

Disciplinary attention has long oscillated between the two poles of these twin chimeras of form and meaning; formation and signification; wherein form is presumed to re-present meaning, which in turn is presumed to be embodied in that material formation. The discourse of what was evolving as the history of art was from its modern professional and institutional beginnings deeply entailed and made possible by positions taken on the nature of meaning itself—a nexus of concerns with profound philosophical, religious, social, and political implications. In a very real sense, art history has evolved precisely as a(n) ambivalent set of positions taken on signification and representation, and remains trapped by the dilemma addressed by Plato 2,500 years ago.

In the Western tradition, the early modern rise of art history and the invention of the philosophical discourse of aesthetics was fundamentally linked to the evaporation or segregation of religion from either practice and to the 'liberation' of the aesthetic qualities of things from their traditional

and largely religious functions, missions, and motivations. Much of this was tied to the articulation of a discourse on art and artistry as a service industry in the formation and evolution of the modern nation-state and its citizenry, wherein the mutual entailment of subjects and objects might be circumscribed, contained, and decorously domesticated. Yet what has continually haunted the discourse of art history is its foundational role, beginning most forcefully in the Romantic era, as a secular theology or coy religiosity, which emerged in tandem with its articulation as a coy scientism.

Yet the (re-)emergence of the problem of religion in art and art history goes well beyond the turns to or returns of certain specific or parochial methodological concerns (the object; visuality; history; etc.) as it signals a profoundly enduring ambivalence as well as a deep amnesia regarding what is most deeply implied by our entailment with things. There is a differential intricacy of and an obverse complementarity between artistry and religiosity, art and religion, which, pursued in all its implications, would necessarily lead to a fundamental recasting of our entire understanding of both art and religion: a recasting wherein both these nominally and institutionally distinct practices are more importantly understood as different perspectives upon a common concern—the nature of representation or signification as such. In which case art and religion have no existence apart from their existence as differential perspectives on representation and signification; on what may be represented or signified.

Plato argued that the mimetic arts should ideally be employed to give *proper or appropriate expression* to a city and its social structures. Its social hierarchies must be clearly mapped onto and into civic space and time—the distribution of citizens and their livelihoods as a map or materialization of the ideal truth of the city or community itself. Everybody and everything should ‘know its place’ in an overall scheme of things. A world in which what is materially fabricated evokes and signifies a ‘true’ order believed (by those holding or desiring power, of course) to constitute that world or *cosmos*, and which moreover—and this is crucial—is *imagined to have an existence prior to and independent of its ‘expression’ or ‘materialization’*. As if the human world itself were a simulation of some pre-existing or divinely given essence or truth or natural law, which is why Plato set an infallible ‘philosopher-king’ as ruler of his ideal city: a legal ‘representative’ (and enforcer) of a ‘divine order’, whose ‘god’ speaks to and ‘through’ him (invariably male).

But in fact (as Plato was well aware) any piece of artifice is a witness *both* to what it may be taken to represent *and to its opposite*, as well as witnessing the arbitrariness of claims to representational truth. This concerns the arbitrariness of representation or signification as such—which is the *fundamental problem of all religion*; on which the very possibility or cogency of any religion is made possible in the first place. What is termed religion, in short, is an epistemological technology concerned with the assignment of values to a set of phenomena or characteristics that are claimed (by those claiming and using power) to have already existed in the world or in a given community. This—and this is precisely where religiosity is in denial of its artistry—concerns the enforced postulation of a social, aesthetic, and philosophical *decorum* whereby material phenomena are linked (as if really ‘re-presenting’)



their allegedly preexisting ideas, values, mentalities, truths, or essences. As if one's cuisine or costuming or sexuality was an embodiment of one's 'truth'; of the essence of who one truly is. The deadly absurdities of contemporary identity politics (or of the phantasmagorias constituting the fashion and heritage industries) are manifestations and effects of this secular religiosity; this aesthetic decorum.

To put this another way, the essential 'secret' of religion is that there really is no secret at all that is separate from its alleged 'expression'. Being is not distinct (except nominally or verbally) from interpretation, which is to say not distinct from artifice. The point is that religion is a mode of artistry which is in denial of (or is duplicitous regarding) the fabricatedness of its own inventions, commonly attributing that artifice to the 'design' of an immaterial, and (for sectarian believers) a pre-existent and originating, force or being.

Plato (in this he was followed by the literalist branches of all later monotheist orthodoxies and theocracies) would have banished the mimetic arts from his ideal city-state because of their potentially destabilizing influence on the imaginations of its ordinary citizens, causing them to literally *think otherwise* than what they are legally compelled to believe. Plato was no democrat; one sometimes overlooks the fact that he was writing against the messiness and the 'indecorousness' of contemporary Athenian democracy; he was very clear that when it comes to the arts, everything including our identities and our very existence as social beings is radically and fundamentally at stake. Something that Augustine, Muhammad, the iconoclasts of Byzantium or of early radical Protestantism clearly appreciated in their profound fears of art, which they attempted to legally enforce, commonly on pain of death. Such profound terror has underlain the persistent threat of aspects of contemporary religious orthodoxies and fundamentalisms toward civil society and democracy.

The acknowledgement of the existence of art and religion as instances of artifice is thus one of the foundations of philosophy itself (the ancient Greek antidote and alternative to theocracy) as critique and discernment; as a dialectical and dialogic questioning of the 'naturalness' of nature; as incessant vigilance about how and why and what we tend to take for granted. For philosophy, hypotheses are points of departure and of inquiry, of contention and negotiation—versus socially, legally, and politically instituted religiosities, where such hypotheses are on the contrary promoted and fabricated as first principles; as if they were ontological truths demanding obedience.

For Plato (and for Augustine half a millennium later, as well as for the entire subsequent tradition of utopian theocratic thought of all sectarian persuasions across the world), politics, to be effective, sustainable, and lasting, would have to be seen to be effectively grounded in putative 'permanent truths' that were to be believed (by the ordinary citizen, that is; by the ruled subject) to be above and beyond the mutable world of daily life; to be beyond question. Plato's *dilemma* in other words was thus a very powerfully real one: how do you instill a securely unquestioned belief in one's city or state or nation or culture or ethnicity or identity (and not so coincidentally in one's rulers and lords) that is *amnesiac* with regard to its fabricatedness? How do you

design amnesia? One traditional way to do so has been to distribute amnesia differentially between classes.

The task of the art historian today would entail a re-engagement with the discipline's most fundamental dilemma: the uncanny power of artistry or artifice to *both fabricate and problematize* mooted social realities and institutions; to both empower and disempower; to delight and thwart, simultaneously entertain and contain. This task minimally entails a mindfulness regarding the fabricatedness of artistic (and all disciplinary) fabrications. This is the ongoing practice—the core art historical practice, and what deeply links it to other fields of knowledge production—of *critique*.

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# Notes

## Introduction

**Donald Preziosi:** Making the Visible

Legible

1. The following books may provide useful overviews of the historical development of the modern discipline; many of these are discussed in the chapters of the text below: Oskar Baetschmann, *Einführung in die Kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt, 1984); Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art, 1: From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (New York, 1990); Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, 1985); Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago, 1987); Heinrich Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin* (Frankfurt, 1979); Paul Duro and Michael Greenhalgh, *Essential Art History* (London, 1992); Eric Fernie (ed.), *Art History and Its Methods* (London, 1995); Ernst Gombrich, *Reflections on the History of Art: Views and Reviews* (Princeton, 1987); Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (New York, 1959); A. L. L. Lees and F. Borzello, (eds.), *The New Art History* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988); W. E. K. Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* (New York, 1971); Vernon Minor, *Art History's History* (New York, 1994); Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (New York, 1955); Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven, 1982); Marcia Pointon (ed.), *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America* (Manchester, 1994); Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven and London, 1994); Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven and London, 1989); Mark Roskill, *What is Art History?* (2nd edn., Amherst, 1989); Hans Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit: Zur Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte* (Hamburg, 1978); Herbert

Spencer (ed.), *Readings in Art History*, vols. i and ii (New York, 1969, 1972, 1983).

2. These issues are discussed in some

detail in D. Preziosi, 'The Question of Art History', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Winter 1992), 363–86.

3. On the Vasari legacy in Art History, see the discussion in Ch. 1.

4. A fuller examination of these approaches to explanation, demonstration, and proof may be found in Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*.

## Chapter 1. Art as History

1. G. Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani da Cimabue insino a tempi nostri* (Florence, 1550; 2nd edn., 1568).

English trans. A. B. Hinds, ed. William Gaunt, Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (rev. edn., London, 1963), vol. i, preface, p. 18.

2. J. J. Winckelmann, *Geschichte des Kunst des Alterthums* (Dresden, 1764). The only complete English translation is that of G. H. Lodge: Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art* (Boston, 1880), in 4 vols.

3. Vasari, *Le vite*, 17.

4. See Licio Collobi, *Il libro del disegno del Vasari* (Florence, 1974).

5. See Marjorie Garber, *Vice-Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York, 1995), for an elaboration of this theme.

6. An excellent contemporary translation by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton, pub. 1987 (La Salle, Ill.), includes the complete German text. The selections reprinted here are taken from this edition.

7. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York, 1988), trans. by Tom Conley of *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris, 1975), esp. part I, pp. 17–112.

**Johann Winckelmann:** Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works Winckelmann's own notes have been included, exactly as

they appear in the original German edition; they are placed within parentheses and are preceded, for purposes of identification, by 'W':

1. (W: Plato in Timaeo, edit. Francof.

p. 1004.) Plato wrote in *Timaios* that the goddess Athena (Minerva) founded the Athenian state in the Grecian landscape because 'the happy combination of seasons there was best suited for the breeding of wise people.'

2. A reference to paintings from the collection of Rudolph II, which were taken from Prague to Dresden by the conquering Swedes in 1648.

3. 'The great August' is the Electoral Prince August I of Saxony, who also ruled Poland under the title of August II (August the Strong). His son and successor was Friedrich August, to whom Winckelmann dedicates this work. Winckelmann flatters him here by comparing him with the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus, who was known as a particularly beneficent ruler.

4. A famous marble group representing Laocoon and his two sons in the coils of two snakes (see n. 14).

5. Dido was the legendary founder of Carthage and a figure in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Odyssey*.

6. Polyclitus was a Greek sculptor of the 5th c. BC, who was the first to develop universally valid laws of proportion, with the help of which he wanted to create the ideal form of the human body.

7. The Medicean Venus was a copy of an Aphrodite (Venus) statue, made during the time of the Roman Imperium, later in possession of the Medici family.

8. A mythical hero of the Trojan War.

9. (W: Proclus in *Timaeum Platonis*.)

10. Hercules was the son of Zeus and Alcmene, Iphicles, the son of Amphitryon and Alcmene. According to Hesiod's account they were born as twins.

11. A person dedicated to luxurious living, an epicure. The name is derived from the inhabitants of Sybaris in southern Italy.

12. An area on the west coast of the Peloponnesian peninsula. The most famous games of antiquity took place there in the valley of Olympia.

13. Diagoras was the hero of an ode by Pindar. (W: v. Pindar. *Olymp. Od. VII. Arg. & Schol.*)

14. Laocoon: this marble group, which represents Laocoon, priest of Apollo at Troy, and his two sons in the coils of two snakes, was created apparently in the

1st c. BC by Agesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes. It was rediscovered in Rome in 1506 and transferred to the Vatican. Since Virgil in his *Aeneid* describes the death throes of Laocoon in similar fashion (*Aeneid* II, 213–24) it is assumed that he knew this sculpture. In Virgil, to be sure, Laocoon's 'terrible screaming' during the struggle is described, and Lessing's disagreement with Winckelmann's interpretation of the statue and what it depicted provided the initial impulse for Lessing's critical work, *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (*Laocoon or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*).

15. Jacopo Sadoletto dedicated his Latin poem 'De Laocoontis statua' to this marble group, which had just been rediscovered.

16. Philoctetes, who inherited the bow and arrows of his friend Hercules, was bitten by a snake during the journey of the Greeks against Troy and had to be left on the island of Lemnos because of the unbearable odour of his wound. He lived there in needy circumstances until Ulysses and Diomedes (in Sophocles: Neoptolemus) brought him to Troy where his skill with the bow was needed and where he killed Paris with one of his poisoned arrows. Sophocles' tragedy *Philoctetes* was discussed in detail by Lessing in his *Laocoon*.

17. Metrodorus of Athens, painter and Epicurean philosopher, went to Rome in 168 BC in order to tutor the children of L. Aemilius Paulus and to produce paintings glorifying the military triumphs of Paulus.

18. Parenthyrsos was originally a term used in rhetoric, signifying exaggerated, out-of-place pathos.

19. An Italian term for 'openness', 'sincerity', 'frankness'.

20. Italian for 'contrast'. In sculpture it signifies an asymmetrical pose involving a strong contrast between the position of the leg carrying the body weight and the other leg.

21. Ajax was the strongest and wildest Greek hero of the Trojan War, a rival of Ulysses, who in his madness killed a herd of sheep and then himself. Capaneus was a figure in the cycle of legends concerning Thebes, known for his arrogance. He was one of the 'Seven against Thebes'; as he was storming the wall during the siege of the city, he boasted that not even Zeus could keep him out, and the angry Zeus struck him down with a lightning bolt.

22. Hyperbole: poetical or rhetorical exaggeration.
23. 'So that everyone thinks he can do it too; yet, however hard he sweats and strives, his attempt is in vain' Horace, *Ars poetica*, 240–3.
24. Raphael portrays the legendary encounter between the king of the Huns and Pope Leo I, who is referred to here in his capacity as Bishop of Rome. When Attila and his army attacked Italy in the year 452, the Pope is said to have succeeded in persuading him to spare Rome.
25. 'When they see then a man so worthy and venerable, they all keep silence and listen attentively' Virgil, *Aeneid*, 151 f.
26. (*W*: v. Wright's Travels.)
27. A reference to Joseph Addison (1672–1719), whose poem 'The Campaign' (1704) eulogizes the Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722), under whose leadership an English army conquered the French in the battle of Blenheim.
28. This 'Sistine Madonna' had been brought to Dresden in 1753.
29. An ancient city in Central Greece.
30. Winckelmann includes in his notes an eleven-line quotation in Italian ascribed to 'Vasari, Vite de' Pittori, Scult. & Archit. edit. 1568, Part. III, p. 776', which we shall omit here. The Reclam edition of *Gedanken...* comments thus on W.'s description of Vasari's report: 'Winckelmann's hypothesis that Michelangelo established the contours of sculptural models with the aid of a water container, could only be based on a reference in Giorgio Vasari's *Vite de' Pittori*, in which the delineation of sculptural lines by means of a water surface appears only as a figurative comparison. The procedure which Winckelmann describes in such detail is therefore probably a pure invention of Winckelmann or of his friend Adam Friedrich Oeser, as Carl Justi has conjectured' (Carl Justi: *Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen*, 5. Aufl. Bd 1, Köln 1956, S. 474–481). (Reclam quotation is from Ludwig Uhlig's edition of Winckelmann's *Gedanken...*, Universal-Bibliothek #8338 (2), 1977, p. 131, as translated by us.)
31. (*W*: Turnbull's Treatise on Ancient Painting, 1740. fol.)
32. A fresco of the 1st c. AD, rediscovered in Rome in 1606.
33. The legendary Attic national hero, Theseus, killed the monster Minotaur which every year, at the behest of the Cretan king, Minos, had received five Athenian boys and girls to devour.

**Whitney Davis:** Winckelmann Divided

1. This paper began as a presentation to the session 'Art History Within and Without' at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Art Historians, London, England, Apr. 1990, and was delivered in forms resembling the present one at the Midwest Art History Society meetings, Columbus, Ohio, Apr. 1991, and the International Congress of the History of Art, Berlin, July 1992. Some parallel reflections have been published as 'Founding the Closet: Sexuality and the Invention of Art History', *Art Documentation*, 11 (1992), 171–5.
2. For Winckelmann's *History*, the only complete English translation, by G. H. Lodge (4 vols., Boston, 1880) is unsatisfactory in several respects; a new rendition is long overdue. The French translation (by M. Huber, but not credited in the publication) is worth consulting for its more subtle representation of Winckelmann's nuanced prose (*Histoire de l'art chez les anciens, par Winckelmann, avec des notes historiques et critiques de differens auteurs* (Paris, 1802–3). For Winckelmann's publications of gems and other antiquities, see his *Description des pierres gravées du feu Baron de Stosch* (Florence, 1760) and *Monumenti inediti antichi*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1767). For his treatise on allegory, see *Versuch einer Allegorie, besonders für die Kunst* (Dresden, 1766). A convenient but very partial English selection of Winckelmann's writings can be found in *Winckelmann: Writings on Art*, ed. David Irwin (London, 1972). The standard, complete German edition is *Johann Winckelmanns sämtliche Werke*, ed. Joseph Eiselein, 12 vols. (Donaueschingen, 1825–9); see also *Kleine Schriften, Vorreden, Entwürfe*, ed. Walther Rehm (Berlin, 1968), an edition of Winckelmann's briefer works with excellent annotations.
3. Two judicious views can be found in Heinrich Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin* (Frankfurt, 1979), and Wolf Lepenies, 'Der andere Fanatiker: Historisierung und Verwissenschaftlichung der Kunstauffassung bei Winckelmann', in *Ideal und Wirklichkeit der bildenden Kunst im späten 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol, and Eva Maek-Gerard (Berlin, 1984), 19–29.
4. See esp. Peter D. Fenves, *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World History in Kant* (Ithaca, NY, 1991).
5. See Alex Potts, 'Political Attitudes and the Rise of Historicism in Art

Theory', *Art History*, 1 (1978), 191–213; id., 'Winckelmann's Construction of History', *Art History*, 5 (1982), 377–407; id., 'Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution', *History Workshop Journal*, 30 (1990), 1–21. Potts's studies are the foundation for any further work on Winckelmann; for other studies on Winckelmann's French and German reception, see Henry Hatfield, *Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948); Ludwig Uhlig, *Griechenland als Ideal: Winckelmann und seine Rezeption in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1988); Edouard Pommier, 'Winckelmann et la vision de l'antiquité classique dans la France des lumières et de la Révolution', *Revue de l'art*, 83 (1989), 9–21; Michael Embach, 'Kunstgeschichte und Literatur: Zur Winckelmann-Rezeption des deutschen Idealismus', in *Arts et Ecclesia: Festschrift für Franz J. Ronig zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans-Walter Stork (Trier, 1989), 97–113.

6. See Sigmund Freud, 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence' (1938), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London, 1952–74), vol. 23: 275–78.

7. See Potts, 'Winckelmann's Construction of History'.

8. It will not quite do to say that what we now describe as Greek 'Archaic' art was unknown to Winckelmann. Although he did not know the range of *kouroi* from the late 7th, 6th, and early 5th centuries, he understood, for example, that Greek sculpture sprang from 'crude stone' beginnings and that it could be taken—although he disagreed with the idea—to be related conceptually and formally to Egyptian art. Moreover, he knew preclassical Greek art in the form of small metal figures and vase paintings.

9. See esp. Sigmund Freud, 'The Dynamics of Transference' (1912), *Standard Edition*, 12: 99–113.

10. Only a handful of studies have attempted to integrate Winckelmann's aesthetic and art-historical writing with an account of his sexuality. The most successful, although still problematic in one way or another, are Leopold D. Ettlinger, 'Winckelmann, or Marble Boys are Better', in Moshe Barasch and Lucy Freeman Sandler (eds.), *Art the Ape of Nature: Studies in Honor of H. W. Janson* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1981), 505–11; Hans Mayer, 'Winckelmann's Death and the Discovery of a Double Life',

in *Outsiders: A Study in Life and Letters*, trans. Denis M. Sweet (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) 167–74; Denis M. Sweet, 'The Personal, the Political, and the Aesthetic: Johann Joachim Winckelmann's German Enlightenment Life', in Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma (eds.), *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe* (Binghamton, NY, 1988: *Journal of Homosexuality*, 16, nos. 1/2 (1988), 147–61); Seymour Howard, 'Winckelmann's Daemon: The Scholar as Critic, Chronicler, and Historian', in *Antiquity Restored: Essays on the Afterlife of the Antique* (Vienna, 1990), 162–74, 278–83; Kevin Parker, 'Winckelmann and the Problem of the Boy', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 25 (1992), 523–40. For Winckelmann's life, see the unsurpassed biography by Carl Justi, *Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen*, 3 vols., 5th edn., ed. Walther Rehm (Cologne, 1956); his fascinating letters, an essential source for understanding his personal erotics, are collected in *Briefe*, ed. Walther Rehm, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1952–5), with excellent annotations. Winckelmann's *Nachlass*, a large proportion of which are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, give a sense of his wide reading (they contain many excerpts).

11. In addition to Gerard and Hekma (eds.), *The Pursuit of Sodomy*, valuable information has been compiled by several authors in R. Maccubbin (ed.), *Unauthorized Sexual Behavior in the Enlightenment* (= *Eighteenth Century Life*, 9 (1985)), and G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds.), *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988).

12. See *Monumenti inediti antichi*, vol. 1: 73, vol. ii: no. 59; the head is now in the Glyptothek, Munich (no. A618). It was originally a post-Polykleitan athlete's head, reworked, at a later point, into a faun's head.

13. For a recent edition of Goethe's famous essay, see J. W. von Goethe, H. Holtzauer (ed.), *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert in Briefen und Aufsätzen* (Leipzig, 1969).

14. See Sweet, 'The Personal, the Political, and the Aesthetic', and Wolfgang von Wangenheim, 'Casanova trifft Winckelmann oder die Kunst des Begehrens', *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken*, 39 (1985), 106–20.

15. See James D. Steakley, 'Sodomy in Enlightenment Prussia: From Execution to Suicide', in Gerard and Hekma (eds.), *The Pursuit of Sodomy* 163–74.

16. See G. S. Rousseau, 'The Pursuit of Homosexuality in the Eighteenth



Century: 'Utterly Confused Category' and/or Rich Repository?' in Maccubbin (ed.), *Unauthorized Sexual Behavior*, 155, and id., 'The Sorrows of Priapus: Anticlericalism, Homosocial Desire, and Richard Payne Knight,' in Rousseau and Porter (eds.), *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, 101–53. It should be said, however, that documenting the homosocial practices of the residents of Papal Rome at the end of the 18th c.—and the homoerotic interpretation of Rome by 18th-c. European society in general—is still very incomplete.

17. A good English translation can be found in *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, Ill., 1987).

18. See esp. Ettliger, 'Marble Boys are Better', Parker, 'Winckelmann and the Problem of the Boy', and Barbara Maria Stafford, 'Beauty of the Invisible: Winckelmann and the Aesthetics of Imperceptibility', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 43 (1980), 65–78.

19. In an insightful study of the problematic temporality of the modern 'imitation' of ancient art as recommended by Winckelmann, Michael Fried approaches the issue I raise here from a different vantage point; see his 'Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation', *October*, 37 (1986), 87–97.

20. *The Absolute Bourgeois*, rev. edn. (Princeton, 1980), preface.

21. For the relation of 'conviction' and 'transference' in art-historical interpretation, and their connection with a 'homosexual' subjectivity, see further Whitney Davis, 'Sigmund Freud's Drawing of the Dream of the Wolves', *Oxford Art Journal*, 15 (1992), 70–87.

22. Versions of these debates and contrasts can be found e.g. in Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Mediations on a Coy Science* (New Haven, 1989); David Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park, Pa., 1991); Selim Kemal and Ivon Gaskell (eds), *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge, 1991); Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (eds.), *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (New York, 1991).

23. See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), *Standard Edition*, xiv. 239–52; Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (New York, 1987).

24. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 245.

## Chapter 2. Aesthetics

1. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (1750; enlarged edn. 1758; Hildesheim, 1961). Baumgarten collaborated in his work on aesthetics with a former student, Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–77), whose *Foundations of All Fine Sciences* appeared in 1754 (Meier, *Anfangsgründe aller schoenen Wissenschaften*, Hildesheim, 1976).

2. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin, 1790). The best recent English translation is by Werner S. Pluhar: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis, 1987), with a foreword by Mary J. Gregor. The translator's preface and introduction (pp. xix–cix) are especially valuable in outlining the argument of this (Third) *Critique* in elucidating its relationship to the other two *Critiques*, the First (*of Pure Reason*, pub. 1781) and the Second (*of Practical Reason*, pub. 1788).

3. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764).

4. In the words of Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert de Laohaia (Chicago, 1993), 97.

5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Aesthetik* (Berlin, 1835–8), in 3 vols. The English translation used here is that of T. M. Knox, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford, 1975).

6. See also the Coda to this volume, below, 'Plato's Dilemma and the Tasks of the Art Historian Today'.

### Immanuel Kant: The Critique of Judgement

1. Where one has reason to suppose that a relation subsists between concepts, that are used as empirical principles, and the faculty of pure cognition *a priori*, it is worthwhile attempting, in consideration of this connexion, to give them a transcendental definition—a definition, that is, by pure categories, so far as these by themselves adequately indicate the distinction of the concept in question from others. This course follows that of the mathematician, who leaves the empirical data of his problem indeterminate, and only brings their relation in pure synthesis under the concepts of pure arithmetic, and thus generalizes his solution.—I have been taken to task for adopting a similar procedure (*Critique of Practical Reason*, Preface, p. 16) and fault has been found with my definition of the faculty of desire, as a *faculty which by means of its representations*

is the cause of the actuality of the objects of those representations: for mere wishes would still be desires, and yet in their case every one is ready to abandon all claim to being able by means of them alone to call their Object into existence.—But this proves no more than the presence of desires in man by which he is in contradiction with himself. For in such a case he seeks the production of the Object by means of his representation alone, without any hope of its being effectual, since he is conscious that his mechanical powers (if I may so call those which are not psychological), which would have to be determined by that representation, are either unequal to the task of realizing the Object (by the intervention of means, therefore) or else are addressed to what is quite impossible, as, for example, to undo the past (*O mihi praeteritos, & c.*) or, to be able to annihilate the interval that, with intolerable delay, divides us from the wished-for moment.—Now, conscious as we are in such fantastic desires of the inefficiency of our representations, (or even of their futility,) as causes of their objects, there is still involved in every wish a reference of the same as cause, and therefore the representation of its causality, and this is especially discernible where the wish, as *longing*, is an affection. For such affections, since they dilate the heart and render it inert and thus exhaust its powers, show that a strain is kept on being exerted and re-exerted on these powers by the representations, but that the mind is allowed continually to relapse and get languid upon recognition of the impossibility before it. Even prayers for the aversion of great, and, so far as we can see, inevitable evils, and many superstitious means for attaining ends impossible of attainment by natural means, prove the causal reference of representations to their Objects—a causality which not even the consciousness of inefficiency for producing the effect can deter from straining towards it.—But why our nature should be furnished with a propensity to consciously vain desires is a teleological problem of anthropology. It would seem that were we not to be determined to the exertion of our power before we had assured ourselves of the efficiency of our faculty for producing an Object, our power would remain to a large extent unused. For as a rule we only first learn to know our powers by making trial of them. This deceit of vain desires

is therefore only the result of a beneficent disposition in our nature.

2. The definition of taste here relied upon is that it is the faculty of estimating the beautiful. But the discovery of what is required for calling an object beautiful must be reserved for the analysis of judgements of taste. In my search for the moments to which attention is paid by this judgement in its reflection, I have followed the guidance of the logical functions of judging (for a judgement of taste always involves a reference to understanding). I have brought the moment of quality first under review, because this is what the aesthetic judgement on the beautiful looks to in the first instance.

3. A judgement upon an object of our delight may be wholly *disinterested* but withal very *interesting*, i.e. it relies on no interest, but it produces one. Of this kind are all pure moral judgements. But, of themselves, judgements of taste do not even set up any interest whatsoever. Only in society is it *interesting* to have taste—a point which will be explained in the sequel.

4. An obligation to enjoyment is a patent absurdity. And the same, then, must also be said of a supposed obligation to actions that have merely enjoyment for their aim, no matter how spiritually this enjoyment may be refined in thought (or embellished), and even if it be a mystical, so-called heavenly, enjoyment.

5. Models of taste with respect to the arts of speech must be composed in a dead and learned language; the first, to prevent their having to suffer the changes that inevitably overtake living ones, making dignified expressions become degraded, common ones antiquated, and ones newly coined after a short currency obsolete; the second to ensure its having a grammar that is not subject to the caprices of fashion, but has fixed rules of its own.

6. It will be found that a perfectly regular face—one that a painter might fix his eye on for a model—ordinarily conveys nothing. This is because it is devoid of anything characteristic, and so the idea of the race is expressed in it rather than the specific qualities of a person. The exaggeration of what is characteristic in this way, i.e. exaggeration violating the normal idea (the finality of the race), is called *caricature*. Also experience shows that these quite regular faces indicate as a rule internally only a mediocre type of man; presumably—if

one may assume that nature in its external form expresses the proportions of the internal—because, where none of the mental qualities exceed the proportion requisite to constitute a man free from faults, nothing can be expected in the way of what is called *genius*, in which nature seems to make a departure from its wonted relations of the mental powers in favour of some special one.

7. As telling against this explanation, the instance may be adduced, that there are things in which we see a form suggesting adaptation to an end, without any end being cognized in them—as, for example, the stone implements frequently obtained from sepulchral tumuli and supplied with a hole, as if for [inserting] a handle; and although these by their shape manifestly indicate a finality, the end of which is unknown, they are not on that account described as beautiful. But the very fact of their being regarded as art-products involves an immediate recognition that their shape is attributed to some purpose or other and to a definite end. For this reason there is no immediate delight whatever in their contemplation. A flower, on the other hand, such as a tulip, is regarded as beautiful, because we meet with a certain finality in its perception, which, in our estimate of it, is not referred to any end whatever.

**D. N. Rodowick:** Impure Mimesis, or the Ends of the Aesthetic

I dedicate this essay to the memory of Craig Owens, who offered so much to a contestatory criticism, thus fulfilling Nietzsche's motto: *Was fällt, das sollt Ihr stoßen!* I would also like to thank Dana Polan, Peter Brunette, and David Wills for their comments and criticisms of earlier drafts of this essay.

1. *Keywords* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 28. For a concise account of *aisthesis*, see F. E. Peters's *Greek Philosophical Terms* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 8–15 *passim*. This problem has been addressed recently in important and different ways in David Wellbery's *Lessing's Laocoön: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990), and Howard Caygill's *Art of Judgement* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

2. The former first appeared in book form as 'Parergon' in *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), pp. 21–168. I will cite mostly from Craig Owens's translation of pp. 41–94, which appeared as 'The Parergon' in *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 3–40. [Excerpts here are reprinted with permission from the University of Chicago Press.] An alternative translation by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod has appeared in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 34–82.

'Economimesis' was initially published in Sylviane Agacinski et al., eds., *Mimesis des articulations* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1975), pp. 57–93. I will cite from R. Klein's translation, which appeared in *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 3–25. [Excerpts here are reprinted with permission from the Johns Hopkins University Press.]

3. Owens uses J. C. Meredith's translation of the *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952 [1928]), p. 85. In his translation of 'Economimesis,' R. Klein uses the 1892 translation by J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951). When in my text I cite Derrida citing Kant, readers can assume that I am following Owens's and Klein's choices. On occasion I will also use Werner S. Pluhar's translation (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), which will be referred to as *COJ*. I have compared all translations to the version of the third *Critique* published in German as *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1974).

4. Derrida, 'The Parergon,' p. 12.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

8. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 6.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

10. *COJ*, p. 173.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 173–4.

14. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 10.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

18. Of great interest here is Derrida's reading of disgust, negative pleasure, and the sublime in Kant. See, for example, Derrida, 'Economimesis,' pp. 21–5.

19. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 19.

20. *COJ*, p. 200. Music's public character, which potentially impinges on the private and autonomous situation of aesthetic

contemplation, is treated by Kant with mild distaste: 'The situation here is almost the same as with the enjoyment [*Ergötzung*] produced by an odor that spreads far. Someone who pulls his perfumed handkerchief from his pocket gives all those next to and around him a treat whether they want it or not, and compels them, if they want to breathe, to enjoy [*genießen*] at the same time....' *COJ*, pp. 200–1. This is additional evidence for the recession toward an absolute interior that marks the third *Critique* and informs its parergonal logic. The purest experience of the aesthetic is not a public one; rather, the purest objects of taste are those that render the most private experience, encouraging the freedom and autonomy of the individual as detached from the mass.

21. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 17.
22. *COJ*, p. 196.
23. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 19.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
27. *COJ*, p. 92.
28. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 19.
29. Derrida, 'The Parergon,' pp. 13–14.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
33. *Ibid.*
34. See my 'Reading the Figural,' *Camera Obscura* 24 (1991): 11–44.
35. Derrida, 'Economimesis,' p. 5.
36. *COJ*, p. 182.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
38. See, in particular, Derrida's reading of the four 'sides' of the analytic of aesthetic judgment as a categorical 'frame' for the analytic of the beautiful, as well as the function of the table or tableau (*Tafel*) in Kant's logic, in 'The Parergon,' pp. 29–30 passim.
39. *New York Times Magazine* (2 April 1989): 27.

### Chapter 3. Form, Content, Style

1. Plato's Theory of Forms is developed in two of his dialogues, the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, and his ideas about the illusory nature of art appear in book 10 of the former. Among countless commentaries on these views, a useful recent summary of them as they apply to archaeology and art history is James Whitley, 'Art History, Archaeology and Idealism: The German Tradition,' in Ian Hodder (ed.), *Archaeology*

as *Long-Term History* (Cambridge, 1987), 11–15.

2. On which see S. Runciman, *Byzantine Style and Civilisation* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 81–9; and T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 38–42. See also Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite* (London, 2005), first published in Greek in 1967 as *The Theology of the Absence and Unknowability of God*. Translated by Haralambos Ventis, with a translator's 'Afterword' considering Yannaras's perspectives on Levinas, Feyerabend, Derrida, and Heidegger.
3. On the history of museums and collections, see D. Preziosi and C. Farago (eds. and contributors), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (London, 2004), a critical anthology complementing the present volume.
4. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (7th edn., New York, 1932) from the original *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neuern Kunst* (1915).
5. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, 1962).

**Heinrich Wölfflin:** *Principles of Art History*

1. In the German, *das Lineare* and *das Malerische*. The term *malerisch*, here translated as 'painterly', has no exact English equivalent.
2. In the German, *Fläche* and *Tiefe*.
3. *Klassisch*. The word 'classic' throughout this extract refers to the art of the High Renaissance. It implies, however, not only a historical phase of art, but a special mode of creation of which that art is an instance.
4. In the German, *Geschlossene Form* and *Offene Form*—what Wölfflin defined elsewhere in his book as *tektonisch* and *atektionisch*.
5. In the German, *Vielheit* and *Einheit*; later in his book, Wölfflin defines these terms as *vielheitliche Einheit* and *einheitliche Einheit*.
6. In the German, *Klarheit* and *Unklarheit*, in a later chapter of Wölfflin's book, these terms are further defined as *Unbedingte* and *bedingte Klarheit*.
7. In the German, *geistigen Sphären*.
8. Wilhelm von Bode, in *Königliche Museen zu Berlin, Die Gemäldegalerie des Kaiser-Friedrich-Museums*, ed. Hans Posse, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1909–11), I:v.

**Ernst Gombrich:** Style

1. René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York, 1949; 3rd edn., 1965), ch. II.
2. Stephen Ullmann, *Style in the French Novel* (Cambridge, 1957), 6.
3. Anton Daniel Leeman, *Orationis Ratio: The Stylistic Theories and Practice of the Roman Orators, Historians and Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1963).
4. E. H. Gombrich, 'The Debate on Primitivism in ancient Rhetoric', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 29 (1966), 24–38.
5. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York, 1963), 249.
6. Jan Bialostocki, 'Das Modusproblem in den bildenden Künsten', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 24 (1961), 128–41.
7. E. H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, 1966), 83–6.
8. Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, 1960).
9. O. Kurz, 'Barocco: Storia di una parola', *Lettere italiane*, 12:4 (1960).
10. S. Fiske Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo* (New York, 1964).
11. Gombrich, *Norm and Form*, 99–106.
12. Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resurrections in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960).
13. George Boas, 'Il faut être de son temps', in id., *Wingless Pegasus: A Handbook of Art Criticism* (Baltimore, 1950).
14. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York, 1955).
15. Paul O. Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12 (1951), 496–527, and 13 (1952), 17–46.
16. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936; revised edn., New York, 1958).
17. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960; 2nd edn., London and New York, 1961).
18. Gombrich, *Norm and Form*.
19. Thomas Munro, *Evolution in the Arts and Other Theories of Culture History* (Cleveland, 1963).
20. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study in the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (London, 1924).
21. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque* (London, 1964).
22. James S. Ackerman and Rhys Carpenter, *Art and Archaeology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1963).
23. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1956), 53.
24. Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*. For a detailed discussion, see Meyer Schapiro, 'Style', in Morris Philipson (ed.), *Aesthetics Today* (Cleveland, 1961), 81–113.
25. Heinrich Kulka (ed.), *Adolf Loos: Das Werk des Architekten* (Vienna, 1931).
26. T. H. Pear, *Personality, Appearance, and Speech* (London, 1957).
27. E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse, and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (London, 1963).
28. Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos: Biology, Behavior and the Arts* (Philadelphia, 1965).
29. Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (London and New York, 1963).
30. Geraldine Pelles, *Art, Artists and Society: Origins of a Modern Dilemma; Painting in England and France, 1750–1850* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, and London, 1963).
31. Renato Poggioli, *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (Bologna, 1962), 'Il Mulino'.
32. Joel E. Cohen, 'Information Theory and Music', *Behavioral Science*, 7 (1962), 137–63.
33. Alvan Ellegård, *A Statistical Method for Determining Authorship: The Junius Letters, 1769–1772*, Gothenburg Studies in English, 13 (Göteborg, 1962). Helmuth Kreuzer and R. Gunzenhäuser, *Mathematik und Dichtung: Versuche zur frage einer exakten Literaturwissenschaft* (Munich, 1965).
34. Friedrich von Hayer, 'Rules, Perception, and Intelligibility', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48 (1963), 321–44. Gombrich, *Norm and Form*, 127.
35. O. Kurz, *Fakes: A Handbook for Collectors and Students* (London, 1948).

**David Summers:** 'Form', Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description

1. See Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1969), 253–64.
2. *Ibid.* 262.
3. Meyer Schapiro, 'Style', in Morris Philipson, *Aesthetics Today* (Cleveland and New York, 1961), 97.

## Chapter 4. Anthropology and/as Art History

1. See Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (1975), translated by Tom Conley (New York, 1988) [*L'Écriture de l'histoire*, Paris, 1975], and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987).

2. Taine's *De l'idéal dans l'art* (Paris, 1867) was one of the most influential late nineteenth-century studies of the visual arts, and set forth the explicit concatenation of 'race-milieu-moment' as the determining factors in the appearance of an artwork. By 1909, Taine's text had reached its 13th edition, and his *Philosophie de l'art* (1865), the renowned lectures delivered at the École des Beaux-Arts which continually attracted huge crowds before his death in 1893, had gone to twenty editions by 1920. Among the many in all walks of life who attended his lectures in the 1870s was the young Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose posthumously published writings on language as a semiotic system (echoing some of Taine's theories) created a revolution in that subject. See Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, 89 ff., for a discussion of this connection.

3. Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin, 1893).

4. *Die Spätromische Kunst-Industrie, nach dem Funden in Oesterreich-Ungarn dargestellt* (Vienna, 1901–23), translated as *Late Roman Art Industry* by Rolf Winckes (Rome, 1985).

5. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), reprinted in the first edition of this volume, Chapter 6, for a more recent reappearance of this same systemic or structural logic, there expressed in the vocabulary of structuralist semiology of the 1970s.

6. Warburg's collected works: *Gesammelte Schriften hrsg. von der Bibliothek Warburg unter Mitarbeit von Fritz Rougemont hrsg. von Gertrud Bing*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1932).

7. Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) articulated a radical rethinking of Greek culture as a creative tension between warring forces—a calm 'Apollonian' spirit and an emotionally chaotic and violent 'Dionysian' one.

8. The library was moved to London in 1933, four years after Warburg's death, by art historian Fritz Saxl; it became the nucleus of the still-extant Warburg Institute, an advanced study division of the University of London. Warburg's

library was recently recreated in Hamburg; on the history of the library see F. Saxl in E. Gombrich's useful if ultimately idealistically reductive portrait, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography, with a Memoir on the History of the Library by F. Saxl* (Chicago, 1986).

9. See Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich, 2001); id., *The End of Art History?* (Chicago, 1987). See also below, Chapter 8.

### Alois Riegl: Leading Characteristics of the Late Roman *Kunstwollen*

1. In view of the skepticism which has hitherto met the investigation of such kind, it seems to be timely to emphasize right away that Augustine does not limit himself like modern philosophers of aesthetics to the postulation of general abstract doctrines, but—even though not very frequent, still often enough—talks about individual works of art or certain details of the creation of the individual objects. Hence, comes a comforting certainty that Plotinus was very well aware in which manner the general doctrines forwarded by him were expressed in the individual work of art in a clear and certain manner.

2. Augustine is thus one of the first who recognized the relativity between beauty and ugliness; how he opposed in that respect earlier antiquity will be demonstrated below. Ugliness as such he still defines in an entirely ancient spirit in that he determines this as shapeless (deformed), that is, not belonging to a completed individual shape. [...]

3. The naturalistic and idealistic side which any work of art without exception combines in itself, could not be defined more conclusively than it is done in this definition. However, to reclaim the 'naturalism' for particular styles can just lead to misunderstandings. The ancient Egyptian, who tried to represent the objects in their strictly 'objective' appearance, meant this to be as 'naturalistic' as one could imagine. The Greek, however, felt his own to be especially 'naturalistic' when he compared his with them. And could the master of the portraits of Constantine with its lively expression of the eyes not have felt he was a greater 'naturalist' than, for example, the master of the portrait of Pericles? Yet all three would have, in the most modern sense, taken 'naturalism' for something



purely unnatural. Indeed, each style of art strives for a true representation of nature and nothing else and each has indeed its own perception of nature in that he views a very particular phenomenon of it (tactile or optical, *Nahsicht*, *Normalsicht*, or *Fernsicht*). Entirely unscholarly (even though commonly done) to base 'naturalism' on the character of the motive. This reveals, it seems, the indestructable confusion between the history of art and iconography, even though the creative art is not concerned with 'what' but with 'how' and lets 'what' be presented, particularly through poetry and religion. Iconography reveals thus to us not so much the history of the *Wollen* in the visual arts but rather the poetic and religious *Wollen*. That there exists a bridge between the two was already emphasized in as much as the meaning, to which belongs to a deeper knowledge of the connection, has been pointed out emphatically; yet, in order to create this connection usefully it is necessary to separate that first one sharply. In the creation of a clear separation between iconography and history of art I see the precondition of any progress of art historical research for the near future.

4. ... omnis pulchritudinis forma unitas ... (Epist. XVIII: Augustinus Coelestino. t. II col. 85).

5. Thus a tree constitutes a unit with its completed individual shape (de Orandin lib. II. c. XVIII, c. I, cl. 1017) and no less with its individual *anima vegetativa*, to whom it owes its development and movement (growth). In the eyes of modern mankind the tree is, however, a collective being consisting of thousands of independent organisms; and in its action it follows also not one underlying force, but thousands, which influence it in a thousand manners. While the ancient artist meant to produce unity as nature and beauty of each individual object, the modern artist fulfills exactly the same purpose in that he means to express with one-sided emphasis the collective character of the natural objects in the work of art.

6. (*De vera religione*, c. XXX). Another dialogue about the same subject with artifacts at exactly the same place, c. XXXII, col. 148. It is characteristic that in either case the artist hesitates to respond to the question posed by Augustine: i.e. the beauty the artist is looking for in his works. Augustine wanted

thus to indicate that an artist of his time generally was embarrassed by such questions. This is very understandable at a time when artistic creation is restricted by firm typical lines: at a time of the modern hyper-individualism each individual artist thinks he should write a book about his own *Kunstwollen* based on a very understandable fear that his *Kunstabsicht* would not be understood by the public with his works alone.

7. et(ratio) terram coelumque collustrans, sensit nihil aliud quam pulchritudine sibi placere, et in pulchritudine figuras, in figuris dimensiones, in dimensionibus numeros (*De Ordine*, lib. II, c. XV, col. 1014). With 'figurae' are meant individual shapes, with 'dimensiones' the ones which are effective on the plane (height and width). About the identity of the words numeros and rhythm: *de Ordine*, lib. II. c. XIC. col. 1014, t. I.

8. *De vera religione*, c. XXX, t. III., col. 146 and 147.

9. The beginning of this process goes far back before the time of Constantine. Very characteristic for the ancient perception is a remark by Cicero (*De oratore*, lib. III, c. 48) about rhythm 'quem in cadentibus guttis quae intevalis distinguuntur, notare possumus, in amni praecipante non possumus'. Compare in opposition to this the modern *Kunstwollen* which seeks its satisfaction especially in the falling creek.

10. A number of those are quoted in Berthaud, pp. 44 ff.

11. About the relativity between beauty and ugliness and between light and shadow compare *de musica*, lib. VI, c. 13, c. I, col. 118–1184. Bright light and impenetrable shadows are disliked by men, but are the more liked by other beings.

12. *De civitate dei*, lib. XI, cap. 23 (Migne, *Patrologie der lateinischen Väter*, XLI, 336).

13. Now one also understands the analogue utterances as in *de civitate dei*, XI, 18; Contrariorum oppositione saeculi pulchritudo componitur or in the case, where *ordo* is defined as pulcherrimum carmen ex quibusdam quasi antithetis. Or, also: *Epistola, Nebridio Augustinus*, t. II, col. 65: Quid est corporis pulchritudo? Congruentia partium (Rhythm of the line) cum quadam coloris suavitate (of light and dark coloring). The postulate for *Fernsicht* can be concluded from the sentence: quod

horremus in parte si cum toto consideramus plurimum placet, which he demonstrates immediately by using an example from architecture: nec in aedificio iudicando unum tantum angulum considerare debemus (*De vera religione*, c. XL). The latter would have been perhaps possible in the Greek columnar hall, where each column for itself constitutes a completed shape, but not in the early Christian basilica.

14. Alchemy which was as much magic as it was chemistry constitutes certainly a direct connection between the late Roman perception of magic and the modern perception of the chemical connection between objects. Yet also the modern perception about continuous forces which are not dependent on the individuality of objects (for example, electricity) as well as the theory about the cells and the tissue is based on the post-antique dissolution of the individual shape into mass composition and on the perception that an object can be influenced through thousands and many thousands of other objects which are partly more distant while existing at the same moment.

15. Plan and character of this work do not permit to establish a parallel between the visual arts and the *Weltanschauung* of antiquity in all forms of expression. Just one point may be raised here, because one finds for it numerous connections particularly in my deliberations in the chapter on 'sculpture'. Particularly obvious is the imagined parallel in the simultaneous rise of a explicit dualism in Greek thinking and a consideration of the psychological effects in Greek figurative art. This contradicts the ancient Near Eastern and Greek archaic period with its materialistic monism (the soul seen as a fine material) and its objective representation of the material individual shape. We just seem to see during the concluding phase of antiquity the elements of the primitive step—monism and artistic objectivity—returned: in reality they are extremes. Monism is now spiritualistic (the body as a cruder shape of the soul) and objectivity is directed towards the appearance of the psychological element (one-sided emphasis of the eye as mirror of the soul, turning of the figures in the direction of the beholder); yet, as far as the bodily appearance as such goes objectivity now searches three-dimensional appearance which needs for

the perception of deep space a stronger inclusion of the mental consciousness—replacing the two-dimensional appearance towards which the Egyptian search for objectivity was directed. What was common to the first and the third step was the irresistible search for an absolute legal norm excluding as much as possible all subjective elements; hence, the art of the first and third step was objective and anonymous and very closely connected with the cults, its contemporary *Weltanschauung* was strictly religious or more precisely appropriate for a cult. In the classical phase (which exists in between the two) we find alone subjectivity and personality present in the *Weltanschauung* among the visual arts, philosophy, and sciences (which are both subjective and personal)—the closest parallel we find for the indicated process of development for the first two steps in a survey of the history of the visual arts since Charlemagne: during the middle ages the strife exists towards isolation of the objects (now in space rather than on the ancient plane) and towards an objective norm of its (three-dimensional) appearance and also towards a close connection with the cult (which is nothing else than an objective common legal norm which produces the subjective need of the individual for religion). In more recent times, however, we find the search for a connection of the objects (in space, this can be done with the line as it was done during the sixteenth century or it can be done with light as it was done during the seventeenth century or it can be done with individual coloring as done in modern art) and for a representation of its subjective appearance as well as for a disconnection with the cult which is then replaced by philosophy and the sciences (serving as disciplines which announce the natural connection of the objects).

**Aby Warburg:** Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America

1. E. Schmidt, *Vorgeschichte Nordamerikas im Gebiet der Vereinigten Staaten*, 1894.
2. Jesse Walter Fewkes, 'Archaeological Expedition to Arizona in 1895', in *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1895-6 (Washington, DC, 1898), 2:519-74.
3. Pótnia Qhrwñn see Jane E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1922), 264.
4. [Note from the 1988 German edition—M.P.S.] In the first draft of this passage,

Warburg explained the symbolic power of the serpent image in the following way: Through which qualities does the serpent appear in literature and art as a usurping imposter [cin verdrängender Vergleicher]? 1. It experiences through the course of a year the full life cycle from deepest, deathlike sleep to the utmost vitality. 2. It changes its slough and remains the same. 3. It is not capable of walking on feet and remains capable nonetheless of propelling itself with great speed, armed with the absolutely deadly weapon of its poisonous tooth. 4. It is minimally visible to the eye, especially when its colors act according to the desert's laws of mimicry, or when it shoots out from its secret holes in the earth. 5. Phallus. These are qualities which render the serpent unforgettable as a threatening symbol of the ambivalent in nature: death and life, visible and invisible, without prior warning and deadly on sight. 5. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 4.28.

**Edgar Wind:** Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft*

1. Warburg called his library 'Die kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg', and Wind's lecture was intended as an introduction to Warburg's theory of imagery. Wind is here attempting to put into systematic order the basic ideas he had learnt from Warburg in long conversations. On the meaning of 'Kulturwissenschaft' and the difficulty of rendering it in English, see Wind's introduction to the English edition of *A Bibliography on the Survival of the Classics*, 1 (1934), pp. v f. The background to Warburg's concern with *Kulturwissenschaft* is to be found in late 19th-c. writings by Windelband, Rickert, and Dilthey on the relationship between history and the natural sciences, cf. Wind's German introduction to the Bibliography, 1 (1934), pp. vii–xi, for his 'Kritik der Geistesgeschichte', not included in the English version. Warburg's particular contribution to historical method was to conceive of the humanities not only in their specificity and their totality, but primarily in their inter-relation.

2. *Psychologie des mimischen und hantierenden Ausdrucks*: Warburg's elliptic use of 'hantierend' for 'functional' or 'artefactual' expression derives from Carlyle's definition of man as a "Tool-using Animal (*Handthierendes Thier*)". Cf. *Sartor Resartus*, 1, v:

3. For Wölfflin's earliest definition of these 'optischen Schichten', or visual layers of style, see the final chapter of *Die klassische Kunst* (1899), which anticipates the principles as defined in *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (1915). See also Wind, 'Zur Systematik der künstlerischen Probleme', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 18 (1925), 438 ff.; *Art and Anarchy* (1969), 21 ff. and 126 ff.

4. *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 12.

5. Cf. *A Bibliography on the Survival of the Classics*, pp. vi ff.

6. On the origins of Riegl's method and the term 'Kunstwollen' or, as rendered by Wind, 'autonomous formal impulse', see E. Heidrich, *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, 19 (1920), 321–9; also Wind *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik*, 442 ff., and *Art and Anarchy*, 128 ff. and 170 ff. On the difference between 'Kunstwollen' and 'Kunstwillen', see O. Pächt, 'Alois Riegl', *Burlington Magazine*, 105 (1963), 488–93.

7. Of course, this conceptual scheme is quite different from Wölfflin's. There is no simple division of form and content, but a complex relationship of dynamic interaction between a conscious and autonomous 'formal impulse' and the 'coefficients of friction' of function, raw material, and technique. However, on closer inspection the dynamic element suddenly disappears from Riegl's method of procedure. For, in order to show that within a given period the most diverse forms of artistic phenomena are informed by the same autonomous 'formal impulse', Riegl can only resort to formalization. In the study of the history of ornament he explicitly bids us to abandon analysing the ornamental motif for its content and to concentrate instead on the 'treatment it has received in terms of form and colour in plane and space'. And in the study of the history of pictorial art in the wider sense, he similarly demands that we disregard all considerations of subject-matter which place the picture in a cultural-historical context, and concentrate instead on the common formal problems which link the picture with all other forms of visual art. 'The iconographic content', he writes, 'is quite different from the artistic; the function of the former, which is to awaken particular ideas in the beholder, is an external one, similar to the function of architectural works or to that of the

decorative arts, while the function of art is solely to present objects in outline and colour, in plane or space, in such a way that they arouse liberating delight in the beholder.' (A. Riegl, *Die spätromische Kunstindustrie im Zusammenhange mit der Gesamtentwicklung der bildenden Künste bei den Mittelmeerölkern*, 1, 1901, 119 f.) In this antithesis of utilitarian and artistic functions only what is literally 'optical' is allocated to the artistic, while the utilitarian is held to include not only material requirements, but also the ideas that are awakened by the work of art and are supposed to play a part in any contemplation of it. With this we come full circle to Wölfflin's point of view.

8. Wölfflin, 'Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur', in *Kleine Schriften 1886–1933*, ed. J. Gantner (1946), 44 f.; cf. *Art and Anarchy*, 21 and 127.

9. On their relationship see *Jacob Burckhardt und Heinrich Wölfflin. Briefwechsel und andere Dokumente ihrer Begegnung 1882–1897*, ed. J. Gantner (1948); also Wölfflin's obituary notice of Burckhardt, *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 20 (1897), 341 ff., reprinted in *Kleine Schriften*, 186 ff.

10. *Bildniskunst und Florentinisches Bürgertum. Domenico Ghirlandajo in Santa Trinita: Die Bildnisse des Lorenzo de' Medici und seiner Angehörigen* (1902), Vorbemerkung, p. 5, reprinted in *Die Erneuerung der Heidenischen Antike. Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der Europäischen Renaissance*, ed. G. Bing in collaboration with F. Rougemont, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1 (1932), 93.

11. *Idem*.

12. *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 13.

13. *Die spätromische Kunstindustrie*, i. 212 n.

14. Warburg himself habitually arranged and rearranged on portable screens the photographs of material he was studying; and such photographic demonstrations remained for some years a characteristic feature of the Warburg Institute's public exhibitions.

15. 'Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara', in *L'Italia e l'arte straniera, Atti del X congresso internazionale di storia dell'arte*, Rome, 1912 (1922), 179–93 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, ii. 459 ff., see esp p. 464).

**Claire Farago:** Silent Moves

This chapter incorporates some of the research material originally published in a venue that is not easily accessible, as

'Jean de Léry's Anatomy Lesson: The Persuasive Power of Word and Image in Constructing the Ethnographic Subject,' in G. Szöny, ed., *European Iconography East & West*, Jozsef Attila University, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1995, pp. 109–27. Deepest thanks to the editor of this volume, Elizabeth Mansfield, and Donald Preziosi for their extensive insights about the framing of this study. I am especially grateful to Beeke Sell Tower, who shared her own unpublished research on Karl May and nineteenth-century German fascination with the American West; and to my London audience at the International Congress on the History of Art, session on 'Chronology' chaired by Donald Preziosi and Stephen Bann, 5 September 2000. For a more extensive discussion of Warburg's visit to the Hopi, written from the viewpoint of New Mexican religious art, see my chapter, 'Re(f)using Art,' in C. Farago, D. Pierce, with M. Stoller *et al.*, *Suffering History: Art, Identity, and the Ethics of Scholarship in New Mexico*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming.

1. For an excellent critical discussion of ethnographic research methods, see W. Madsen, 'Religious Syncretism,' in R. Walpole, ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 6, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1967, pp. 369–91.

2. A. Warburg, 'A Lecture on Serpent Ritual,' *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1938–9, vol. 2, pp. 277–92.

3. A. Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, intro. and trans. M. P. Steinberg, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1995; *idem*, *Schlangenritual: Ein Reisebericht*, ed. U. Raulff, Berlin, K. Wagenbach, 1988; *idem*, 'Image in Movement; Souvenirs of a Voyage to Pueblo Country (1923), and Project from a Voyage in America (1927),' ed. P.-A. Michaud, *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, Spring 1998, vol. 63, pp. 113–66; P.-A. Michaud, *Aby Warburg et l'image en mouvement suivi de Aby Warburg. Souvenirs d'un voyage en pays Pueblo (1923) et Projet de voyage en Amérique (1927)*, preface by G. Didi-Huberman, Paris, Macula, 1998; *idem*, *Il rituale de serpente*, afterword by U. Raulff, Milan, 1996.

4. Citing P. Burke, 'Aby Warburg as Historical Anthropologist,' in H. Bredekamp, M. Diers and C. Schoell-

- Glass, ed., *Aby Warburg: Akten des internationalen Symposions Hamburg* 1990, Weinheim, VCH, 1991, p. 44. See also K. Forster, 'Aby Warburg: His Study of Ritual and Art on Two Continents,' trans. D. Britt, *October*, Summer 1996, vol. 77, pp. 5–24.
5. E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography, with a memoir on the history of the library by F. Saxl*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 91.
6. A clear statement of Warburg's objectives is the introduction to his lecture, omitted from the 1939 article but recently published by Steinberg (as in note 3), who translates: 'In what ways can we perceive essential character traits of primitive pagan humanity? How did it [pagan humanity] maintain itself "incapable of life, crippled by a dark superstition,"' a phrase eliminated as Warburg revised his manuscript. (Steinberg, 'Aby Warburg's Kreuzlingen Lecture: A Reading,' in Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians*, p. 80.) On Warburg's relationship to the psychology of perception, especially R. Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl; ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik*, Leipzig, H. Credner, 1873, and Vischer's predecessors including Johann Hebart, Hermann Lotze, Nietzsche, and others, see most recently M. Rampley, 'From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art,' *Art Bulletin*, March 1997, vol. 79, pp. 41–55. These interests in 'primitive' man cannot be disentangled from anthropology, especially important to Warburg's formation being Hermann Usener, his teacher: see U. Raulff, 'The Seven Skins of the Snake: Oraibi, Kreuzlingen and back: Stations on a Journey into Light,' pp. 64–74, and P. Burke, 'History and Anthropology in 1900,' pp. 21–7, both in B. Cestelli Guidi and N. Mann, ed., *Photographs at the Frontier: Aby Warburg in America 1895–1896*, London, Merrell Holberton with the Warburg Institute, 1998.
7. The burgeoning literature is too long to cite, but in addition to those references cited above, see in particular K. W. Forster's introduction to Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. D. Britt, Los Angeles, Getty Center, 1999, pp. 1–74; C. Naber, 'Pompeii in Neu-Mexico: Aby Warburgs amerikanische Reise,' *Freiburger*, 1988, vol. 38, pp. 88–97; P.-A. Michaud, 'Un Pueblo à Hambourg: Le Voyage d'Aby Warburg au Nouveau-Mexique, 1895–1896,' *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, 1995, vol. 52, pp. 43–73; C. Schoell-Glass, 'An Episode of Cultural Politics during the Weimar Republic: Aby Warburg and Thomas Mann Exchange a Letter Each,' *Art History*, March 1998, vol. 21, pp. 107–28; M. Iverson, 'Aby Warburg and the New Art History,' in H. Bredekamp, M. Diers and C. Schoell-Glass, ed., *Aby Warburg, Akten*, pp. 281–7, and other essays in the same volume.
8. Despite a thorough rehearsal of the facts by Steinberg, Forster, and others, cited above. The only writer to my knowledge who has questioned the literature from a perspective even vaguely critical of collusions between contemporary scholars and Warburg's cultural chauvinism is the review of Steinberg's book by J. L. Koerner, 'Paleface and Redskin,' *The New Republic*, 24 March 1997, pp. 30–8.
9. B. Cestelli Guidi, 'Retracing Aby Warburg's American Journey through his Photographs,' in B. Cestelli Guidi and N. Mann, ed., *Photographs at the Frontier*, p. 28. The text continues: 'With this image Warburg meant probably to emphasize the dancer's double identity, as a member of a symbolic world when wearing the mask and as a rational being when not. Warburg takes up this twofold identity the Indians assigned to all human beings, portraying himself as the protagonist of a magical transformation, when he draws a kachina mask over his own head.'
10. J. Suina, 'Pueblo Secrecy Result of Intrusions,' *New Mexico Magazine*, January 1991, vol. 70, p. 60. Thanks to Zena Perlstone for bringing this article to my attention.
11. The most prominent example in the recent past is the negative response by Native American academics Alison Freese, Joe Sando, and others to the controversial book by Chicano writer Ramón Gutierrez: 'Commentaries on Gutierrez, Ramón, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*,' *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Fall 1993, vol. 17.
12. C. M. Hinsley, 'The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,' in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, ed., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington-London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, pp. 344–66. On Warburg's relationship

- with the Wetherhill Brothers, see Steinberg and Forster, as cited above, who never criticize the German art historian for his entrepreneurial activities.
13. J. de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil autrement dite Amerique, le tout recueilli sur les lieux par Jean de Léry*, Geneva and La Rochelle, Antoine Chuppin, 1578. Subsequent editions were published in 1580, 1585, 1594, 1599–1600, and 1611, and excerpts were incorporated in other works. For modern critical editions with further information on the publication history of the book, see de Léry, *Viagem à terra do Brasil*, trans. and notes by S. Milliet, ed. P. Gaffarel, notes on the Tupinamba by P. Ayrosa, São Paulo, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1980 [orig. 1941]; and de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, trans. and intro. J. Whatley, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990. Subsequent references will be to the Whatley edition.
  14. M. de Montaigne, 'Des Cannibales,' in *Les Essais*, ed. M. Rat, 2 vols, Paris, Garnier, 1962, p. 1. On Montaigne's unacknowledged dependence on literary sources, see B. Weinberg, 'Montaigne's Readings for *Des Cannibales*,' in G. Bernard Daniel, ed., *Renaissance and Other Studies in Honor of William Leon Wiley*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, n. 72, pp. 261–79. On the continuity of de Léry's ideas in later early modern texts, see F. Lestringant, 'The Philosopher's Breviary: Jean de Léry in the Enlightenment,' *Representations*, Winter 1991, vol. 33, pp. 200–11, with further references.
  15. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, Paris, Plon, 1955; translation cited from *Tristes tropiques*, trans. J. Russell, New York, Atheneum, 1972.
  16. M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History* [1975], trans. T. Conley, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988.
  17. De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 217.
  18. J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1988. See also Clifford's useful historiographical overview of anthropology in his introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 1–26.
  19. On de Léry's textual precedents, see M. T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971 [orig. 1964].
  20. See N. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960*, Hamden, Archon Books, 1982, with an extensive bibliography.
  21. A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982; R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1952.
  22. P. Hulton and D. Quinn, *The American Drawings of John White, 1577–1590, with Drawings of European and Oriental Subjects*, 2 vols, London, British Museum, and Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1964; P. Hulton, *The Work of Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, a Huguenot Artist in France, Florida, and England*, 2 vols, London, British Museum, 1977.
  23. See F. Lestringant, *André Thevet: Cosmographe des derniers Valois*, Geneva, Droz, 1991; R. Schlesinger and A. P. Stabler, *André Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth-Century View*, Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986. On the impact of printing technology, see L. Febvre and H.-J. Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800* [1958], trans. D. Gerard, ed. G. Nowell-Smith and D. Wootton, London, NLB, 1976.
  24. This illustration occurs twice: it accompanies Chapter XIV, entitled 'Of the War, Combats, Boldness, and Arms of the Savages of America,' and Chapter XV, entitled 'How the Americans Treat Their Prisoners of War and the Ceremonies They Observe Both in Killing and in Eating Them' (translation cited from de Léry, *History of a Voyage*).
  25. For example, Hulton and Quinn, *The American Drawings of John White*, p. 10, describe the 'revolutionary naturalism' of White's figure style in terms of the artist's 'unusual ability to free himself from European artistic conventions.' The authors note the emergence of renderings made with 'scientific detachment,' but they do not provide a cultural critique of the historical notion of 'scientific detachment' or touch upon the political implications of treating human subjects as depersonalized



objects for scientific analysis. It would be a distorted representation of the authors' argument to suggest that they were insensitive to White's pictorial conventions, however. Hulton and Quinn note that White's watercolors are not drawn from life (see p. 9), and the following discussion in the present chapter is fundamentally indebted to their investigation of White's dependence on costume book illustrations and on the drawings of Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues.

26. A rich and varied commentary tradition is based on Aristotle, *Physics*, Book II (192b8–200b10). I have discussed the Renaissance artistic heritage of these neo-Aristotelian ideas in C. Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's 'Paragone': A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1992, especially pp. 137–53.

27. Translation cited from de Léry, *History of a Voyage*, p. 128. The immediately preceding paragraphs, not illustrated, describe (in terms that de Léry states are partly drawn from Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia general de las Indias* ... [Sarangossa, 1552]) how the Tupinamba practice cannibalism.

28. Hulton and Quinn, *The American Drawings of John White* (as in note 10), includes an illustrated catalogue of White's drawings. To complicate matters further, some of White's drawings are known only in copies, made by members of his family between 1593 and 1614: on the 'Sloane copies' and the British Museum copies, see pp. 24–30, pp. 145–7. The authors note that small differences between these and reproductions in de Léry's book show that the copies were not made directly from the woodcuts. It will be argued here that these differences indicate that White depended on preliminary drawings prepared for de Léry's book. On Le Moyne's tenure in England, see Hulton and Quinn, p. 8, where it is noted that White used Le Moyne's studies of Indian subjects to make his own general map of eastern North America, and further, on p. 23, that Theodor de Bry supplied White with drawings by Le Moyne of Florida.

29. T. de Bry, *Americae, tertia pars: Memorabile provinciae Brasiliae historiam* ..., Frankfurt, T. de Bry, 1592; and *Dritte Buch, Americae darinn Brasilia durch Johann Staden* ..., Frankfurt, T. de Bry, 1593.

30. Even the current editors of White's drawing corpus, Hulton and Quinn, *The American Drawings of John White*, are reticent to set out the lines of transmission among these sources, arguing that White's drawings are 'after' de Léry, that White is 'likely to have been influenced' by Le Moyne (pp. 7–10), that an intermediary source ('a lost original,' p. 32) existed between de Léry's woodcuts and White's drawings. They accept at face value (p. 31) de Léry's account that his designs are truthful because they originated in drawings made in Brazil around 1555. For a longer discussion of problems of attribution, see my 'Jean de Léry's Anatomy Lesson,' as cited in the acknowledgments above.

31. G. Braun, S. Novella, and F. Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 6 vols, Cologne, 1572–1618. The first important example of this illustrated literature on manners and customs is J. Boemus, *Omnium Gentium: mores, leges, and ritus* ... (1520).

32. See Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 20 ff., as cited in note 19.

33. On de Léry's repudiation of Mandevillian lies, which have been extensively studied with relation to his arch rival André Thevet, see Whatley's introduction to de Léry, *History of a Voyage*, pp. xxii ff. and following discussion in the present chapter. On the legitimacy of Mandeville, see further M. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988. I thank Eloise Quiñones Keber for calling this excellent study to my attention.

34. For an introduction to this history and the extensive scholarship, see the fundamental studies by O. Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1973; N. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1960; W. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1958. A considerable part of these debates was addressed to the applied or productive sciences—a category in which painting was often included—that occupied a (disputed) place between routine skills and demonstrated knowledge. On debates concerning

painting, see further Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's 'Paragone'*.

35. See Gilbert, *Concepts of Method*, p. 39, on Aristotle, *Topics*, p. 100a18; and Gilbert, pp. 100–25, on methodological controversies from Padua and Bologna to Melanchthon's *Loci communes theologici*, which includes remarks on method in the preface by the Lutheran theologian Victorinus Strigelius (d. 1569).

36. A. Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, Basel, J. Oporinus, 1543 [facs. ed. Brussels, Culture et Civilisation, 1964; 2nd ed., 1555]; and *De humanis corporis fabrica librorum Epitome*, Basel, J. Oporinus, 1543; and *Icones anatomicae*, Munich, Bremer Press, 1934, printed from the original woodblocks used in the 1555 edition. The plates and generally reliable publication history of Vesalius's writings are conveniently available in J. B. Saunders and C. O'Malley, *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*, New York, World Publishing Company, 1950. The scholarship is too extensive to cite here, but recently see K. B. Roberts and J. D. W. Tomlinson, *The Fabric of the Body: European Traditions of Anatomical Illustration*, Oxford and New York, Clarendon Press, 1992, pp. 125–206, and specialized studies cited in the following notes.

37. Vesalius's debt to ancient sculpture has been treated most cogently by G. Harcourt, 'Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture,' *Representations*, Winter 1987, vol. 17, pp. 28–61, who argues that the illustrations are the visual equivalent of Vesalius's rhetorical attempt to establish the *opera manus* as the positive philosophical ground for the united science of medicine combining both theory and practice.

38. As stated by M. Kemp, 'A Drawing for the *Fabrica*; and Some Thoughts upon the Vesalius Muscle-Men,' *Medical History*, 1970, vol. 14, pp. 277–88. This essay is particularly valuable for the simultaneously sober and extensive deductions it draws about the widely discussed topic of Vesalius's interaction with the artists who helped him design the plates, based on the fragmentary visual evidence that is available. A similarly systematic routine must have existed between de Léry and his assistants, though on a much more modest scale.

39. See note 38.

40. See notes 13–16.

41. J. de Léry, *Histoire d'un Voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, 3rd ed., Geneva, 1585, p. 6 recto. In a different context, the importance of these passages has also been recognized by Frank Lestringant, 'L'excursion brésilienne: Notes sur les trois premières éditions de l'*Histoire d'un Voyage* de Jean de Léry (1578–1585),' in P.-G. Castex, ed., *Mélanges sur la littérature de la Renaissance à la mémoire de V.-L. Saulnier*, Geneva, Droz, 1984, pp. 53–72.

42. Whatley, Introduction, de Léry, *History of a Voyage*, p. xxix.

43. For an introduction to the issues, see K. Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1989, who argues that some of the broadsheets are political satires of the subjects they depict, produced by artisans with a vested interest in keeping civil order (see p. 140, note 1, for further references); and M. Carroll, 'Peasant Festivity and Political Identity in the Sixteenth Century,' *Art History*, 1987, vol. 10, pp. 289–314, who takes the position that the same images construed peasant festivity in positive terms. In a future article, I will extend the analysis of de Léry's images to consider their relation to these Reformation broadsheets, which

I can only mention here in passing.

44. G. Nakam, *Au lendemain de la Saint-Barthélemy: Guerre civile et famine*, with Jean de Léry, *Histoire mémorable du Siège de Sancerre (1573)*, Paris, Éditions anthropos, 1975. For the complicated publication history of *History of a Voyage*, see the clear synopsis in Whatley's introduction.

45. De Léry in Nakam, *Au lendemain de la Saint-Barthélemy*, pp. 290–3.

## Chapter 5. Mechanisms of Meaning

1. On which, see D. Preziosi and C. Farago (eds. and contributors), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (London, 2004).

2. On Benjamin and Riegl, see the interesting essay by Thomas Y. Levin, 'Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History: An Introduction to [Benjamin's] "Rigorous Study of Art"', October, 47 (1988), 77–83, with its attack on Wölfflin's formalism, following on pp. 84–90.

3. See in this regard the introduction to John Roberts (ed.), *Art Has No History! The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art* (London, 1994), 1–36.

4. An extended discussion of the historiography of 'social history' in academic art history during its most fruitful period, the early fourth quarter of the twentieth century, may be found in D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, ch. 6.

5. The literature on the subject is enormous. A few of those relevant to visual culture studies and art history include the following. The best compendium of information about all aspects of semiotics is Winifried Noeth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990), in which all aspects of visual semiotics are discussed (pp. 481–550). A good survey of visual semiotics is Goeran Harry Sonesson, *Pictorial Concepts: Inquiries into the Semiotic Heritage and its Relevance for the Analysis of the Visual World* in the series *Ars Nova* published by the Institute of Art History, University of Lund, Sweden (Lund, 1989). Other useful texts are Fernande Martin, *Semiotics of Visual Language* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990); Meyer Shapiro, 'On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs', *Semiotica*, 1 (1969), 223–42; id., *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (The Hague, 1973). A good overview of the philosophical interest in systems of signification from the 17th to the early 20th centuries is Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis, 1982), in which two essays are of interest here: 'Taine and Saussure', pp. 356–71, illustrating the ways in which key notions of Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist credited (along with the 19th-century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce) with being the progenitor of modern semiology, were derived from Hippolyte Taine's lectures on art in Paris when Saussure was a student there (summarized in Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, ch. 4., pp. 80–121, and 'Condillac's Speechless Statue', pp. 210–24).

6. Among many useful writings on the subject of relations between iconology and semiology is Christine Hasenmueller, 'Panofsky, Iconography, and Semiotics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36 (1978), 289–301. Related book-length studies include Michael A. Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986), the former an attempt at understanding Panofsky as a

proto-semiotician, the latter a general overview of visual-verbal relations from the perspective of traditional literary criticism.

7. It does not mention the work of Jan Mukarovsky (1891–1975), an eminent Czech aesthetic philosopher and a semiotician of art and architecture who was a member of the 'Prague School' group of the 1930s. Several of his essays became more widely known in Western Europe and America only after the Second World War. One of the most important of his books (*Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (1936)) was republished in 1979 in English by the University of Michigan Press; his 1934 essay 'Art as Semiological Fact' was republished in English in 1976 in L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik (eds.), *The Semiotics of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.).

8. According to the authors, one entire section of the originally submitted essay, dealing with what they had argued was an essential component of semiotic study, namely gender, had to be removed if the essay was to be accepted for publication; 'feminism' was deemed separate from studies of social systems of signs, despite its essential connection to semiology in literature in art history and literary and other studies elsewhere.

**Erwin Panofsky:** Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the study of Renaissance Art

1. Images conveying the idea, not of concrete and individual persons or objects (such as St. Bartholomew, Venus, Mrs. Jones, or Windsor Castle), but of abstract and general notions such as Faith, Luxury, Wisdom, etc., are called either personifications or symbols (not in the Cassirerian, but in the ordinary sense, e.g., the Cross, or the Tower of Chastity). Thus allegories, as opposed to stories, may be defined as combinations of personifications and/or symbols. There are, of course, many intermediary possibilities. A person A. may be portrayed in the guise of the person B. (Bronzino's Andrea Doria as Neptune; Dürer's Lucas Paumgärtner as St. George), or in the customary array of a personification (Joshua Reynolds' Mrs. Stanhope as 'Contemplation'); portrayals of concrete and individual persons, both human or mythological, may be combined with personifications, as is the case in countless representations of a eulogistic

character. A story may convey, in addition, an allegorical idea, as is the case with the illustrations of the *Ovide Moralisé*, or may be conceived as the 'prefiguration' of another story, as in the *Biblia Pauperum* or in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*. Such superimposed meanings either do not enter into the content of the work at all, as is the case with the *Ovide Moralisé* illustrations, which are visually indistinguishable from non-allegorical miniatures illustrating the same Ovidian subjects; or they cause an ambiguity of content, which can, however, be overcome or even turned into an added value if

the conflicting ingredients are molten in the heat of a fervent artistic temperament as in Rubens' 'Galerie de Médicis.'

2. G. Leidinger, *Das sogenannte Evangeliar Ottos III*, Munich, 1912, Pl. 36.

3. To correct the interpretation of an individual work of art by a 'history of style,' which in turn can only be built up by interpreting individual works, may look like a vicious circle. It is, indeed, a circle, though not a vicious, but a methodical one (cf. E. Wind, *Das Experiment und die Metaphysik*, cited above, p. 6; *idem*, 'Some Points of Contact between History and Science,' cited *ibidem*). Whether we deal with historical or natural phenomena, the individual observation assumes the character of a 'fact' only when it can be related to other, analogous observations in such a way that the whole series 'makes sense.' This 'sense' is, therefore, fully capable of being applied, as a control, to the interpretation of a new individual observation within the same range of phenomena. If, however, this new individual observation definitely refuses to be interpreted according to the 'sense' of the series, and if an error proves to be impossible, the 'sense' of the series will have to be reformulated to include the new individual observation. This *circulus methodicus* applies, of course, not only to the relationship between the interpretation of motifs and the history of style, but also to the relationship between the interpretation of images, stories and allegories and the history of types, and to the relationship between the interpretation of intrinsic meanings and the history of cultural symptoms in general.

4. G. Fiocco, *Venetian Painting of the Seicento and the Settecento*, Florence and New York, 1929, Pl. 29.

5. One of the North Italian pictures is ascribed to Romanino and is preserved in the Berlin Museum, where it was formerly listed as 'Salome' in spite of the maid, a sleeping soldier, and the city of Jerusalem in the background (No. 155); another is ascribed to Romanino's pupil Francesco Prato da Caravaggio (listed in the Berlin Catalogue), and a third is by Bernardo Strozzi, who was a native of Genoa but active at Venice about the same time as Francesco Maffei. It is very possible that the type of 'Judith with a Charger' originated in Germany. One of the earliest known instances (by an anonymous master of around 1530 related to Hans Baldung Grien) has been published by G. Poensgen, 'Beiträge zu Baldung und seinem Kreis,' *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, VI, 1937, p. 36 ff.

6. Illustrated in E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, 'Classical Mythology in Mediaeval Art,' *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, IV, 2, 1933, p. 228 ff., p. 231.

7. See K. Weitzmann, 'Das Evangelion im Skevophylakion zu Lawra,' *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, VIII, 1936, p. 83 ff.

8. Cod. Vat. lat. 2761, illustrated in Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

9. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. lat. 15158, dated 1289, illustrated in Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

10. C. Tolnay, 'The Visionary Evangelists of the Reichenau School,' *Burlington Magazine*, LXIX, 1936, p. 257 ff., has made the important discovery that the impressive images of the Evangelists seated on a globe and supporting a heavenly glory (occurring for the first time in Cod. Vat. Barb. lat. 711), combine the features of Christ in Majesty with those of a Graeco-Roman celestial divinity. However, as Tolnay himself points out, the Evangelists in Cod. Barb. 711 'support with obvious effort a mass of clouds which does not in the least look like a spiritual aura but like a material weight consisting of several segments of circles, alternately blue and green, the outline of the whole forming a circle ... It is a misunderstood representation of *heaven in the form of spheres*' (italics mine). From this we can infer that the classical prototype of these images was not Coelus who holds without effort a billowing drapery (the *Weltmantel*) but Atlas who labors under the weight of the heavens (cf. G. Thiele, *Antike Himmelsbilder*, Berlin, 1898, p. 19 ff.). The St. Matthew in Cod. Barb. 711 (Tolnay, Pl. I, a), with his head bowed down under the weight of the sphere and

his left hand still placed near his left hip, is particularly reminiscent of the classical type of Atlas, and another striking example of the characteristic Atlas pose applied to an Evangelist is found in Clm. 4454, fol. 86, v. (illustrated in A. Goldschmidt, *German Illumination*, Florence and New York, 1928, Vol. II, Pl. 40). Tolnay (Notes 13 and 14) has not failed to notice this similarity and cites the representations of Atlas and Nimrod in Cod. Vat. Pal. lat. 1417, fol. 1 (illustrated in F. Saxl, *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalters in römischen Bibliotheken* [Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, VI, 1915, Pl. XX, Fig. 42]); but he seems to consider the Atlas type as a mere derivative of the Coelus type. Yet even in ancient art the representations of Coelus seem to have developed from those of Atlas, and in Carolingian, Ottonian and Byzantine art (particularly in the Reichenau school) the figure of Atlas, in its genuine classical form, is infinitely more frequent than that of Coelus, both as a personification of cosmological character and as a kind of caryatid. From an iconographical point of view, too, the Evangelists are comparable to Atlas, rather than to Coelus. Coelus was believed to rule the heavens. Atlas was believed to support them and, in an allegorical sense, to 'know' them; he was held to have been a great astronomer who transmitted the *scientia coeli* to Hercules (Servius, *Comm. in Aen.*, VI, 395; later on, e.g., Isidorus, *Etymologiae*, III, 24, 1; Mythographus III, 13, 4, in G. H. Bode, *Scriptorum rerum mythicarum tres Romae nuper reperti*, Celle, 1834, p. 248). It was therefore consistent to use the type of Coelus for the representation of God (see Tolnay, Pl. I, c), and it was equally consistent to use the type of Atlas for the Evangelists who, like him, 'knew' the heavens but did not rule them. While Hibernus Exul says of Atlas *Sidera quem coeli cuncta notasse volunt* (*Monumenta Germaniae, Poetarum latinorum medii aevi*, Berlin, 1881–1923, Vol. I, p. 410), Alcuin thus apostrophizes St. John the Evangelist: *Scribendo penetras caelum tu, mente, Johannes* (*ibidem*, p. 293).

11. See H. Liebeschütz, *Fulgentius Metaphoralis ...* (Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, IV), Leipzig, 1926, p. 15 and p. 44 ff.; cf. also Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, especially p. 253 ff.

12. Bode, *op. cit.*, p. 1 ff.

13. Bode, *ibidem*, p. 152 ff. As to the question of authorship, see H. Liebeschütz, *op. cit.*, p. 16 f. and *passim*.
14. Ed. by C. de Boer, 'Ovide Moralisé,' *Verhandelingen der kon. Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde*, new ser., XV, 1915; XXI, 1920; XXX, 1931–32.
15. Ed. H. Liebeschütz, *op. cit.*
16. 'Thomas Walleys' (or Valeys), *Metamorphosis Ovidiana moraliter explanata*, here used in the Paris edition of 1515.
17. Cod. Vat. Reg. 1290, ed. H. Liebeschütz, *op. cit.*, p. 117 ff. with the complete set of illustrations.
18. Here used in the Venice edition of 1511.
19. L. G. Gyraldus, *Opera Omnia*, Leyden, 1696, Vol. I, col. 153: 'Ut scribit Albricus, qui auctor mihi proletarius est, nec fidus satis.'
20. The same applies to Ovid: there are hardly any illustrated Latin Ovid manuscripts in the Middle Ages. As to Virgil's *Aeneid*, I know only two really 'illustrated' Latin manuscripts between the sixth-century codex in the Vatican Library and the fifteenth-century Riccardianus: Naples, Bibl. Nazionale, Cod. olim Vienna 58 (brought to my attention by Professor Kurt Weitzmann) of the tenth century; and Cod. Vat. lat. 2761 (cf. R. Förster, 'Laocoön im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance,' *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, XXVII, 1906, p. 149 ff.) of the fourteenth. [Another fourteenth-century manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Can. Class. lat. 52, described in F. Saxl and H. Meier, *Catalogue of Astrological and Mythological Manuscripts of the Latin Middle Ages, III, Manuscripts in English Libraries*, London, 1953, p. 320 ff.) has only some historiated initials.]
21. Clm. 14271, illustrated in Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, p. 260.
22. A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser*, Berlin, 1914–26, Vol. I, Pl. XX, No. 40, illustrated in Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
23. Cf. A. M. Amelli, *Miniature sacre e profane dell'anno 1023, illustranti l'enciclopedia medioevale di Rabano Mauro*, Montecassino, 1896.
24. Clm. 10268 (fourteenth century), illustrated in Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, p. 251, and the whole group of other illustrations based on the text by Michael Scotus. For the oriental sources of these new types, see *ibidem*, p. 239 ff., and F. Saxl, 'Beiträge zu einer Geschichte

der Planetendarstellungen in Orient und Occident,' *Der Islam*, III, 1912, p. 151 ff.

25. For an interesting prelude of this reinstatement (resumption of Carolingian and archaic Greek models), see Panofsky and Saxl, *op. cit.*, pp. 247 and 258.

26. A similar dualism is characteristic of the mediaeval attitude towards the *aera sub lege*: on the one hand the Synagogue was represented as blind and associated with Night, Death, the devil and impure animals; and on the other hand the Jewish prophets were considered as inspired by the Holy Ghost, and the personages of the Old Testament were venerated as the ancestors of Christ.

27. Lyons, Bibl. de la Ville, MS. 742, fol. 40; illustrated in Saxl and Panofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

28. L.456, also illustrated in Saxl and Panofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 275. Angelo Poliziano's stanzas (*Giostra* I, 105, 106) read as follows: 'Nell'altra in un formoso e bianco tauro Si vede Giove per amor converso Portarne il dolce suo ricco tesoro, E lei volgere il viso al lito perso In atto paventoso: e i be' crin d'auoro Scherzon nel petto per lo vento avverso: La veste ondeggia e in dietro fa ritorno: L'una man tien al dorso, e l'altra al corno. 'Le ignude piante a se ristrette accoglie Quasi temendo il mar che lei non bagne: Tale atteggiata di paura e doglie Par chiami in van le sue dolci compagne; Le qual rimase tra fioretti e foglie Dolenti "Europa," ciascheduna piagne. "Europa," sona il lito, "Europa, riedi"— E'l tor nota, e talor gli bacia i piedi.'

**Hubert Damisch:** Semiotics and Iconography

1. 'On some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image Signs', *Semiotica*, 1/3, 1969.

**Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson:** Semiotics and Art History

1. We would like to thank Michael Ann Holly for her very pertinent comments on this paper.

2. See C. Hasenmueller, 'Panofsky, Iconography, and Semiotics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36, (1978), 289–301; M. Iversen, 'Style as Structure: Alois Riegl's Historiography', *Art History*, 2(1979), 66–7; and M. A. Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 42–5. The semiotic nature of

an apparently 'natural' device like linear perspective is masterfully demonstrated in Hubert Damisch's seminal study, *L'Origine de la perspective*, (Paris, 1988).

3. See e.g. M. Schapiro, 'On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs', *Semiotica*, 1, (1969), 223–42.

4. The clearest and most convincing overview of epistemological currents in the 19th and 20th centuries is Habermas's *Erkenntnis und Interesse* of 1968 (*Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro, (London, 1972). Habermas's work has been challenged by psychoanalysts who believe that his idealized view of psychoanalytic practice as a constraint-free communication misunderstands their discipline. See e.g. J. Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, (London, 1986). Habermas's oeuvre is also under pressure from the side of postmodern philosophy, most pertinently by J.-F. Lyotard, in e.g. *The Postmodern Condition*, (New York, 1980). These challenges do not, however, address Habermas's argument against positive knowledge, but his hope for a rational society. If anything, the authors are more skeptical than Habermas.

5. For the 'linguistic' or, rather, rhetorical turn in history, see H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), and especially, for a brief and convincing account of the fundamental rhetorical and semiotic nature of historiography, id., 'Interpretation in History', in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978). The most detailed and incisive analysis of the rhetoric of historiography remains S. Bann's remarkable *The Clothing of Clio*, (Cambridge and New York, 1984).

6. See e.g. the Rembrandt Research Project, in J. Bruyn, B. Haak, S. H. Levie *et al.*, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, (The Hague, Boston, London, 1982, 1987, 1989), review by L. J. Slatkes in the *Art Bulletin*, 71 (1989), 139–44.

7. Culler, xiv.

8. Similar arguments within the social history of art, explicitly articulating art history with semiotics, have been put forward in a number of places by Keith Moxey. See 'Interpreting Pieter Aertsen: The Problem of Hidden Symbolism', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, (1989), 42 ff.; 'Pieter Bruegel and Popular Culture', *The Complete Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, ed. D. Freedberg, (Tokyo, 1989), 42 ff.; 'Semiotics and the Social History of Art',



*Acts of the 27th International Congress of the History of Art*, (Strasbourg, 1990).

9. Culler, xiv.

10. F. Saint-Martin, *Semiotics of Visual Language* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

11. See the important article by T. G. Peterson and P. Mathews, 'The Feminist Critique of Art History', *Art Bulletin*, 69 (1987), 326 ff.

12. For the distinction between discrete and dense sign-systems, see N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, 1976). This theory is much indebted to Wittgenstein. See A. Thiher, *Words in Reflection: Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction*, (Chicago, 1984).

13. The intimate connection between semiotics and linguistics is a problem in Saussurean semiotics, which developed out of linguistics rather than the other way around, and not so much in Peircean semiotics, which came out of logic.

14. Examples of analyses of word and image interaction or comparison can be found in W. Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Art* (Chicago, 1982), and *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature*, (Chicago, 1988). See also the special issues of *Poetics Today*, 10, 1 and 2 (1989), edited by Steiner. Also A. Kibédi Varga, 'Stories Told by Pictures', in *Style*, 22 (1980), 194–208, and 'Criteria for Describing Word and Image Relations', in *Poetics Today*, 10 (1989), 31 ff. For a critical examination of the hierarchies implied in many of these attempts, see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1985), and M. Bal, 'On Reading and Looking', in *Semiotica*, 76 (1989), 283–320.

15. The quotation marks around 'context' ('text,' 'artwork,' etc.) are meant to designate that at this place in our essay the word appears as an object of methodological reflection.

16. The points in this section are worked out in more detail in N. Bryson, 'Art in Context', in *Studies in Historical Change*, ed. R. Cohen (Charlottesville, Va., forthcoming).

17. J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. with introd. and additional notes by B. Johnson (Chicago, 1982). For a discussion of Derrida's theory of signification, see S. Melville, *Philosophy beside Itself: On Deconstruction and Modernism* (Minneapolis, 1986). Umberto Eco, an important semiotician who draws upon Peirce but

is also well versed in the Saussurean tradition, warns against a confusion between theoretical polysemy and actual interpretation, where limits are obviously in place. See his *Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (1979); *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984); and, more directly confronting deconstruction, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 1990 (all three Bloomington, Ind.). But the point is that these limits are socially and politically motivated, putting a practical stop to a theoretical polysemy. Thus the very thesis of polysemy provides clearer insight into the limits of interpretation and their motivations.

18. Culler, 139–52.

19. J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, 1975), 148 (emphasis in the original). See also J. Searle, 'Reiterating the Differences', *Glyph*, 1, (1977), 198–208; and Derrida, *passim*.

20. J. Derrida, 'Living On: Border Lines', in H. Bloom *et al.*, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, (New York, 1979), 81.

21. 'The fragment of the outside world of which we become conscious comes after the effect that has been produced on us and is projected *a posteriori* as its 'cause.' In the phenomenalism of the 'inner world' we invert the chronology of cause and effect. The basic fact of 'inner experience' is that the cause gets imagined after the effect has occurred.' F. Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed.

K. Schlechta (Munich, 1986), iii. 804; cited by J. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London, 1983), 86.

22. *Ibid.* 86.

23. On synecdoche in historiography, see White, *Tropics of Discourse*, on synecdoche as it functions within the rhetoric of art history, see Roskill, *The Interpretation of Pictures* (Amherst, 1989), 3–35. See also D. Carrier's pertinent study of the rhetoric of art history and art criticism, *Artwriting* (Amherst), 1987.

24. M. A. Holly, 'Past Looking', *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 373. Holly's essay examines the general problem of 'chronological reversal' in relation to the historiography of Burckhardt.

25. The stroke is what Derrida critically describes as 'the *sans* of the pure cut', a cutting of the field that will be so sharp as to leave no traces of its own incision; a conceptual blade so acute that when the two sides of the cleavage are brought together the edges will perfectly rejoin; J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans.

G. Bennington and I. McLeod, (Chicago, 1987), 83–118.

26. On 'iteration', see Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc.*, 1–23.

27. See P. de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd edn., ed. W. Godzich (Minneapolis, 1983).

28. Though the term 'author' has some advantages over the term 'artist' in this discussion, 'author' has its own baggage of connotations. In some kinds of literary criticism, 'author' is no less hagiographic than is 'artist' in some kinds of art history; but we hope that the change of context here, from literary criticism to art history, will enable this range of meanings to be discarded. 'Author' has the further disadvantage that, as a term brought into art-historical discussion from literary theory, it carries with it a connotation of 'linguistic imperialism'—a name for the *verbal* artist being used for the *visual* artist. We are aware of this coloration, and we wish to state expressly that in our discussion the term 'author' is meant to designate a function, or set of functions, not particularized by medium.

29. For this influential concept, see L. Dällenbach, *Le Récit spéculaire. Essai sur la mise en abyme* (Paris, 1977) (*The Mirror in the Text*, trans. J. Whiteley and E. Hughes, (Chicago, 1989)).

30. M. Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in D. F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY, 1977), 113–38.

31. In fact, what they say in Britain is likelier to be 'Joe Bloggs'; for us, though, Bloggs can be a woman.

32. Our description of attribution is not, of course, meant to be exhaustive.

33. On the relation between detectives and art historians (and psychoanalysts), see C. Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method', *History Workshop*, 9 (1980), 5–36.

34. On 'emplotment', see White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 66–7; and Roskill, 7–10.

35. See Culler, xiv.

36. R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image—Music—Text*, ed. and trans. S. Heath (New York, 1977), 145–6.

37. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, 31.

38. G. Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London, 1988), 2.

## Chapter 6

1. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist*

*Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985). Other early discussions of the application of structuralist and/or semiological principles to art historical analysis include Annette Michelson, 'Art and the Structuralist Perspective', in the anthology *On the Future of Art*, introduction by Edward Fry (New York, 1970), 37–59; Sheldon Nodelman, 'Structural Analysis in Art and Anthropology', *Yale French Studies*, 36/7 (1966), 89–103.

2. See also Krauss' more recent *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

3. For a critique of which see D. Preziosi, 'La Vi(II)e en Rose: Reading Jameson Mapping Space', in *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture and Politics*, 1 (1988), 82–99.

## Stephen Melville: The Temptation of New Perspectives

1. Heidegger's essay is available in the essay collection *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, 1971). The Schapiro essay is in the Kurt Godstein Festschrift, *The Reach of Mind: Essays in Memory of Kurt Godstein* (New York 1968); and Derrida's 'Restitutions of the Truth in pointing' is included in his *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago, 1987).

2. Michael Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven, 1985) is particularly interesting here; to a high degree it seems to reinvent the terms of New Criticism within a project that is historical in a way quite alien to the New Critics.

3. 'The explanation of this historiographical muddle—which points to the core of Wölfflin's achievement—is both unmistakably implicit and, at one key point, inescapably explicit. Classic art is absent, silent, static, or even dead; baroque art is present, vocal, and alive. The difference between classic and baroque that rationalizes Wölfflin's system and that establishes at once their radical opposition and their total identity is quite simply this: that *the classic does not exist*. It never existed and can never have existed, for when the classic comes into existence or manifests itself, it does so in the form of existence, which is the baroque. The classic is the baroque. This is not a speculative judgment about Wölfflin. It is precisely what he says.' Marshall Brown, 'The Classic Is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History', *Critical Inquiry*, 9:2 (December 1982), 397.

4. I seem to recall Michael Podro speaking aptly in this respect of Panofsky's 'defet dreamwork'.
5. In terms of present discussion within literary theory, Panofsky ends up holding a position much like that of E. D. Hirsch rather than that of Hans Georg Gadamer or other still more radical receivers of Heidegger.
6. That this is indeed a 'return' points toward a nest of questions about the 'prehistory' of academic art history—questions that will remain unposed and unaddressed here but which would certainly belong to any fuller and more formal treatment of the issues. Addressing these further questions will, it seems to me, not affect the analysis offered here as much as it will complicate one's understanding of the critical terms in play and render more difficult the idea of any simple escape from the norms of traditional art history.
7. One does well to note here the radically different direction in which Heidegger extends the notion of the schematism in his writings on Kant.
8. I am here abstracting and drawing implications from some of the recent writings of Rosalind Krauss, writings which in their turn rely heavily on the work of Jacques Lacan and Georges Bataille.
9. I think particularly of the recent work of Hubert Damisch.
10. See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, esp. 'The Age of the World Picture', trans. William Lovitt (New York, 1977).

**Meyer Schapiro:** The Still Life as a Personal Object

1. M. Heidegger, 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes', in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt, 1950; repr. as a book, with introd. by H.-G. Gadamer, Stuttgart, 1962); trans. by A. Hofstadter as 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty* (New York, 1964), 649–710. It was Kurt Goldstein who first called my attention to this essay, presented originally as a lecture in 1935 and 1936.
2. Ibid. 662–3. Heidegger refers again to van Gogh's picture in a revised lecture of 1935, trans. and repr. in his *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York, 1961). Speaking of *Dasein* (being-there, or 'essent') he points to a painting by van Gogh. 'A pair of rough peasant shoes, nothing else.

- Actually the painting represents nothing. But as to what is in that picture, you are immediately alone with it as though you yourself were making your way wearily homeward with your hoe on an evening in late fall after the last potato fires have died down. What is here? The canvas/ The brush strokes? The spots of color?' (p. 29).
3. J. B. de la Faille, *Vincent van Gogh* (Paris, 1939). no. 54, fig. 60; no. 63, fig. 64; no. 255, fig. 248; no. 331, fig. 249; no. 332, fig. 250; no. 333, fig. 251; no. 461, fig. 488; no. 607, fig. 597.
  4. Ibid. nos. 255, 332, 333.
  5. Ibid. no. 333. It is signed 'Vincent 87'.
  6. Ibid. nos. 54 and 63.
  7. Ibid. no. 461. Vincent van Gogh, *Verzamelde brieven van Vincent van Gogh*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1952–4), iii. 291, Letter no. 529.
  8. De la Faille, *Vincent van Gogh*, no. 607; van Gogh, *Verzamelde brieven*, iv. 227.
  9. Personal communication, letter of 6 May 1965.
  10. De la Faille, *Vincent van Gogh*, no. 250.
  11. Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', 664.
  12. Ibid. 665. 'Truth happens in van Gogh's painting. This does not mean that something is rightly portrayed, but rather that in the revelation of the equipmental being of the shoes that which *is* as a whole—world and earth in their counterplay—attains to unconcealment.... The more simply and essentially the shoes appear in their essence... the more directly and fascinatingly does all that *is* attain to a greater degree of being along with them' (p. 680).
  13. De la Faille, *Vincent van Gogh*, no. 607, fig. 597.
  14. K. Hamsun, *Hunger*, trans. G. Egerton (New York, 1941), 27.
  15. J. de Rotonchamp, *Paul Gauguin 1848–1903* (2nd edn., Paris, 1925), 53. There is an earlier version of the story in P. Gauguin, 'Natures Mortes', in id., *Essais d'art libre* (1894), 273–5. These two texts were kindly brought to my attention by Prof. Mark Roskill.

**Jacques Derrida:** Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*Pointure*]

1. See *Mimesis des articulations*, collective work (Paris, 1975), 165–270.
2. In English in original.
3. *Voilà de qui se passe ici*: this plays on the three senses of *se passer*: to happen, to put on (a garment), to do without (something).

## Chapter 7. Authorship and Identity

1. These and related issues are taken up in some detail in the Coda to this volume.

2. Given that the canonical religious texts were *translations* compiled from languages other than that actively spoken by many current sectarian believers in the early years of the Christian era, issues of the correctness of translation, and of the secure *attribution of authorial identity* to texts claimed as genuine records of earlier historical events, were essential to the institutionalization of the new religion which, by decree of the Roman Emperor Constantine (274–337) in Milan in 313, became the de facto official imperial state religion.

3. A point which parallels that made by Derrida (cited above in Chapter 1), where it was argued that ‘a divine teleology secures the political economy of the fine arts’. See also the Coda to this volume, below.

4. And which by extension, as discussed in several places in the present volume, the conflation of ‘the man and his work’ with the implied expansion of ‘the man *and/as* his work’ has played a pivotal role in cultural politics with the overt or implicit postulation of indissoluble links between individual or collective identity and cultural heritage or patrimony, as embodied in their object-worlds. See also D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth’s Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis, 2003), esp. chapter 2, ‘Practicing the Self’, 15–28, and discussions below here in Chapter 8.

5. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin of *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (volume v of Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, prepared by Theodor W. Adorno and Gerschom Scholem, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser, Frankfurt, 1982). See also Chapter 8, below, with excerpts of Benjamin’s 1930s essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility’, as well as the discussion above of Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne* project in the introduction to Chapter 4.

**Michel Foucault:** What is an Author?

1. See ‘Entretiens sur Michel Foucault’ (directed by J. Proust), *La Pensée*, 137 (1968), 6–7 and 11; and also Sylvie le Bon, ‘Un Positivisme désespérée’, *Esprit*, 5 (1967), 1317–19.

2. Foucault’s purpose, concerned with determining the ‘codes’ of discourse, is explicitly stated in the preface to *The Order of Things*, p. xx. These objections—see ‘Entretiens sur Michel Foucault’—are obviously those of specialists who fault Foucault for his apparent failure to appreciate the facts and complexities of their theoretical field.

3. For an appreciation of Foucault’s technique, see Jonathan Culler, ‘The Linguistic Basis of Structuralism’, David Robey (ed.), *Structuralism: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1973), 27–8.

4. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1972) was published in France in 1969; for discussion of the author, see esp. pp. 92–6, 122.

5. Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, trans. Beckett, (London, 1974), 16.

6. Cf. Edward Said, ‘The Ethics of Language’, *Diacritics*, 4 (1974), 32.

7. On ‘expression’ and writing as self-referential, see Jean-Marie Benoist, ‘The End of Structuralism’, *Twentieth Century Studies*, 3 (1970), 39; and Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris, 1966). As the following sentence implies, the ‘exterior deployment’ of writing relates to Ferdinand de Saussure’s emphasis of the acoustic quality of the signifier, an external phenomena of speech which, nevertheless, responds to its own internal and differential articulation.

8. On ‘transgression’, see above, ‘A Preface to Transgression’, p. 42; and ‘Language to Infinity’, p. 56. Cf. Blanchot, *LEspace littéraire* (Paris, 1955), 58; and David P. Funt, ‘Newer Criticism and Revolution’, *Hudson Review*, 22 (1969), 87–96.

9. See above, ‘Language to Infinity’, p. 58.

10. The recent stories of John Barth, collected in *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Chimera*, supply interesting examples of Foucault’s thesis. The latter work includes, in fact, a novelistic reworking of *Arabian Nights*.

11. Plainly a prescription for criticism as diverse as G. Wilson Knight’s *The Wheel of Fire* (London, 1930) and Roland Barthes’ *On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1964).

12. We have kept the French, *écriture*, with its double reference to the act of writing and to the primordial (and metaphysical) nature of writing as an entity in itself, since it is the term that best identifies the program of Jacques Derrida. Like the

theme of a self-referential writing, it too builds on a theory of the sign and denotes writing as the interplay of presence and absence in that 'signs represent the present in its absence' ('Differance', in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison, (Evanston, Ill., 1973), 138). See J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967), 13. On 'supplement', see *Speech and Phenomena*, 88–104.

14. This statement is perhaps the polemical ground of Foucault's dissociation from phenomenology (and its evolution through Sartre into a Marxist discipline) on one side and structuralism on the other. It also marks his concern that his work be judged on its own merits and not on its reputed relationship to other movements. This insistence informs his appreciation of Nietzsche in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' as well as his sense of his own position in the Conclusion of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

15. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, iii, 108.

16. John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, 1969), 162–74.

17. *Ibid.* 169.

18. *Ibid.* 172.

19. This is a particularly important point and brings together a great many of Foucault's insights concerning the relationship of an author (subject) to discourse. It reflects his understanding of the traditional and often unexamined unities of discourse whose actual discontinuities are resolved in either of two ways: by reference to an originating subject or to a language, conceived as plenitude, which supports the activities of commentary or interpretation. But since Foucault rejects the belief in the presumed fullness of language that underlies discourse, the author is subjected to the same fragmentation which characterizes discourse and he is delineated as a discontinuous series; for example, see *L'Ordre du discours*, 54–5 and 61–2.

20. In a seminar entitled 'L'Épreuve et l'enquête', which Foucault conducted at the University of Montreal in the spring of 1974, he centered the debate around the following question: is the general conviction that truth derives from and is sustained by knowledge not simply a recent phenomenon, a limited case of the ancient and widespread belief that truth is a function of events? In an older time

and in other cultures, the search for truth was hazardous in the extreme and truth resided in a danger zone, but if this was so and if truth could only be approached after a long preparation or through the details of a ritualized procedure, it was because it represented power. Discourse, for these cultures, was an active appropriation of power and to the extent that it was successful, it contained the power of truth itself, charged with all its risks and benefits.

21. Cf. *The Order of Things*, p. 300; and above, 'A Preface to Transgression', 30–33.

22. Foucault's phrasing of the 'author-function' has been retained. This concept should not be confused (as it was by Goldmann in the discussion that followed Foucault's presentation) with the celebrated theme of the 'death of man' in *The Order of Things* (342 and 386). On the contrary, Foucault's purpose is to revitalize the debate surrounding the subject by situating the subject, as a fluid function, within the space cleared by archaeology.

23. See Evaristo Arns, *La Technique du livre d'après Saint Jerome* (Paris, 1953).

24. On personal pronouns ('shifters'), see R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings* (Paris, 1971), ii, 130–2; and *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1966), 252. For its general implications, see Eugenio Donato, 'Of Structuralism and Literature', *MLN*82 (1967), 556–8. On adverbs of time and place, see Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de la linguistique générale* (Paris, 1966), 237–50.

25. Cf. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), 67–77.

26. This conclusion relates to Foucault's concern in developing a 'philosophy of events' as described in *L'Ordre du discours*, 60–1: 'I trust that we can agree that I do not refer to a succession of moments in time, nor to a diverse plurality of thinking subjects; I refer to a caesura which fragments the moment and disperses the subject into a plurality of possible positions and functions.'

27. Cf. the discussion of disciplines in *L'Ordre du discours*, 31–8.

28. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics* (New York, 1966).

29. *La Communication: Hermès I* (Paris, 1968), 78–112.

30. For a discussion of the recent reorientation of the sign, see Foucault's 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx'. On the role of

repetition, Foucault writes in *L'Ordre du discours*: 'The new is not found in what is said, but in the event of its return' (p. 28).

**Craig Owens:** The Discourse of Others

1. Paul Ricœur, 'Civilization and National Cultures,' *History and Truth*, trans. Chas. A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 278.
2. Hayden White, 'Getting Out of History,' *diacritics*, 12, 3 (Fall 1982), p. 3. Nowhere does White acknowledge that it is precisely this universality that is in question today.
3. See, for example, Louis Marin, 'Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's *The Arcadian Shepherds*,' in S. Suleiman and I. Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 293-324. This essay reiterates the main points of the first section of Marin's *Détruire le peinture* (Paris: Galilée, 1977). See also Christian Metz's discussion of the enunciative apparatus of cinematic representation in his 'History/Discourse: A Note on Two Voyeurisms' in *The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Britton, Williams, Brewster and Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). And for a general survey of these analyses, see my 'Representation, Appropriation & Power,' *Art in America*, 70, 5 (May 1982), pp. 9-21.
4. Hence Kristeva's problematic identification of avant-garde practice as feminine—problematic because it appears to act in complicity with all those discourses which exclude women from the order of representation, associating them instead with the presymbolic (Nature, the Unconscious, the body, etc.).
5. Jacques Derrida, 'Sending: On Representation,' trans. P. and M. A. Caws, *Social Research*, 49, 2 (Summer 1982), pp. 325, 326, italics added. (In this essay Derrida is discussing Heidegger's 'The Age of the World Picture,' a text to which I will return.) 'Today there is a great deal of thought against representation,' Derrida writes. 'In a more or less articulated or rigorous way, this judgment is easily arrived at: representation is bad. . . . And yet, whatever the strength and the obscurity of this dominant current, the authority of representation constrains us, imposing itself on our thought through a whole dense, enigmatic, and heavily stratified history. It programs us and precedes us and warns us too severely for us to make

- a mere object of it, a representation, an object of representation confronting us, before us like a theme' (p. 304). Thus, Derrida concludes that 'the essence of representation is not a representation, it is not representable, *there is no representation of representation*' (p. 314, italics added).
6. Michèle Montrelay, 'Recherches sur la féminité,' *Critique*, 278 (July 1870): translated by Parveen Adams as 'Inquiry into Femininity,' *mlf*, 1 (1978); repr. in *Semiotext(e)*, 10 (1981), p. 232.
  7. Many of the issues treated in the following pages—the critique of binary thought, for example, or the privileging of vision over the other senses—have had long careers in the history of philosophy. I am interested, however, in the ways in which feminist theory articulates them onto the issue of sexual privilege. Thus, issues frequently condemned as merely epistemological turn out to be political as well. (For an example of this kind of condemnation, see Andreas Huyssens, 'Critical Theory and Modernity,' *New German Critique*, 26 [Spring/Summer 1982]: pp. 3-11.) In fact, feminism demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining the split between the two.
  8. 'What is unquestionably involved here is a conceptual foregrounding of the sexuality of the woman, which brings to our attention a remarkable oversight.' Jacques Lacan, 'Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality,' in J. Mitchell and J. Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality* (New York: Norton and Pantheon, 1982), p. 87.
  9. See my 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism' (part 2), *October*, 13 (Summer 1980), pp. 59-80. *Americans on the Move* was first performed at The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, and Dance in New York City in April 1979; it has since been revised and incorporated into Anderson's two-evening work *United States, Parts I-IV*, first seen in its entirety in February 1983 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.
  10. This project was brought to my attention by Rosalyn Deutsche.
  11. As Stephen Heath writes, 'Any discourse which fails to take account of the problem of sexual difference in its own enunciation and address will be, within a patriarchal order, precisely indifferent, a reflection of male domination.' 'Difference,' *Screen*, 19, 4 (Winter 1978-79), p. 53.



12. Martha Rosler, 'Notes on Quotes,' *Wedge*, 2 (Fall 1982), p. 69.
13. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 29.
14. See Sarah Kofman, *Le Respect des femmes* (Paris: Galilée, 1982). A partial English translation appears as 'The Economy of Respect: Kant and Respect for Women,' trans. N. Fisher, *Social Research*, 49, 2 (Summer 1982), pp. 383-404.
15. Why is it always a question of *distance*? For example, Edward Said writes, 'Nearly everyone producing literary or cultural studies makes no allowance for the truth that all intellectual or cultural work occurs somewhere, at some times, on some very precisely mapped-out and permissible terrain, which is ultimately contained by the State. Feminist critics have opened this question part of the way, but *they have not gone the whole distance*.' 'American "Left" Literary Criticism,' *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 169. Italics added.
16. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 84.
17. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 42. One of the things that feminism has exposed is Marxism's scandalous blindness to sexual inequality. Both Marx and Engels viewed patriarchy as part of a precapitalist mode of production, claiming that the transition from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production was a transition from male domination to domination by capital. Thus, in the *Communist Manifesto* they write, 'The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal . . . relations.' The revisionist attempt (such as Jameson proposes in *The Political Unconscious*) to explain the persistence of patriarchy as a survival of a previous mode of production is an inadequate response to the challenge posed by feminism to Marxism. Marxism's difficulty with feminism is not part of an ideological bias inherited from outside; rather, it is a structural effect of its privileging of production as the definitively human activity. On these problems, see Isaac D. Balbus, *Marxism and Domination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), especially chapter 2, 'Marxist Theories of Patriarchy,' and chapter 5, 'Neo-Marxist Theories of Patriarchy.' See also Stanley Aronowitz, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism* (Brooklyn: J. F. Bergin, 1981), especially chapter 4, 'The Question of Class.'
18. Lyotard, 'One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles,' *Substance*, 20 (1978), p. 15.
19. Perhaps the most vociferous feminist antitheoretical statement is Marguerite Duras's 'The criterion on which men judge intelligence is still the capacity to theorize and in all the movements that one sees now, in whatever area it may be, cinema, theater . . . literature, the theoretical sphere is losing influence. It has been under attack for centuries. It ought to be crushed by now, it should lose itself in a reawakening of the senses, blind itself, and be still.' In E. Marks and I. de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms* (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. 111. The implicit connection here between the privilege men grant to theory and that which they grant to vision over the other senses recalls the etymology of *theoria*; see below.
- Perhaps it is more accurate to say that most feminists are ambivalent about theory. For example, in Sally Potter's film *Thriller* (1979)—which addresses the question 'Who is responsible for Mimi's death?' in *La Bohème*—the heroine breaks out laughing while reading aloud from Kristeva's introduction to *Théorie d'ensemble*. As a result, Potter's film has been interpreted as an antitheoretical statement. What seems to be at issue, however, is the inadequacy of currently existing theoretical constructs to account for the specificity of a woman's experience. For as we are told, the heroine of the film is 'searching for a theory that would explain her life and her death.' On *Thriller*, see Jane Weinstock, 'She Who Laughs First Laughs Last,' *Camera Obscura*, 5 (1980).
20. Published in *Screen*, 16, 3 (Autumn 1975).
21. See my 'Earthwords,' *October*, 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 120-132.
22. 'No Essential Femininity: A Conversation between Mary Kelly and Paul Smith,' *Parachute*, 26 (Spring 1982), p. 33.
23. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, p. 8.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
25. Jameson. '<sp>"In the Destructive Element Immerse": Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Cultural Revolution,' *October*, 17 (Summer 1981), p. 113.
26. See, for example, 'Fantasia of the Library,' in D. F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, counter-memory, practice* (Ithaca: Cornell

- University Press, 1977), pp. 87-109. See also Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins,' in [Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983)].
27. See Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society,' in [Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*].
28. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 19.
29. White, p. 3.
30. Thus, the antithesis to narrative may well be allegory, which Angus Fletcher identifies as the 'epitome of counter-narrative.' Condemned by modern aesthetics because it speaks of the inevitable reclamation of the works of man by nature, allegory is also the epitome of the antimodern, for it views history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay. The melancholic, contemplative gaze of the allegorist need not, however, be a sign of defeat; it may represent the superior wisdom of one who has relinquished all claims to mastery.
31. Translated by William Lovitt and published in *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 115-54. I have, of course, oversimplified Heidegger's complex and, I believe, extremely important argument.
32. Ibid. p. 149, 50. Heidegger's definition of the modern age—as the age of representation for the purpose of mastery—coincides with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's treatment of modernity in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written in exile in 1944, but without real impact until its republication in 1969). 'What men want to learn from nature,' Adorno and Horkheimer write, 'is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men.' And the primary means of realizing this desire is (what Heidegger, at least, would recognize as) representation—the suppression of 'the multitudinous affinities between existents' in favor of 'the single relation between the subject who bestows meaning and the meaningless object.' What seems even more significant, in the context of this essay, is that Adorno and Horkheimer repeatedly identify this operation as 'patriarchal.'
33. Jameson, 'Interview,' *diacritics*, 12, 3 (Fall 1982), p. 87.
34. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, p. 63. Here, Lyotard argues that the *grands récits* of modernity contain the seeds of their own delegitimation.
35. For more on this group of painters, see my 'Honor, Power and the Love of Women,' *Art in America*, 71, 1 (January 1983), pp. 7-13.
36. Martha Rosler interviewed by Martha Gever in *Afterimage* (October 1981), p. 15. *The Boverly in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* has been published in Rosler's book *3 Works* (Halifax: The Press of The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981).
37. 'Intellectuals and Power: A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze,' *Language, counter-memory, practice*, p. 209. Deleuze to Foucault: 'In my opinion, you were the first—in your books and in the practical sphere—to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others.' The idea of a counter-discourse also derives from this conversation, specifically from Foucault's work with the 'Groupe d'information de prisons.' Thus, Foucault: 'When the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice. It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents—and not a theory about delinquency.'
38. Martha Rosler, 'in, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography),' *3 Works*, p. 79.
39. Quoted in Heath, p. 84.
40. Interview with Luce Irigaray in M.-F. Hans and G. Lapouge, eds., *Les femmes, la pornographie, l'érotisme* (Paris, 1978), p. 50.
41. *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey (New York: Norton, 1962), pp. 46-7.
42. Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 27.
43. 'On Fetishism,' repr. in Philip Rieff, ed., *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Collier, 1963), p. 217.
44. Lacan, p. 90.
45. On Barthes's refusal of mastery, see Paul Smith, 'We Always Fail—Barthes' Last Writings,' *SubStance*, 36 (1982), pp. 34-39. Smith is one of the few male critics to have directly engaged the feminist critique of patriarchy without attempting to rewrite it.
46. Benjamin Buchloh, 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,' *Artforum*, XXI, 1 (September 1982), pp. 43-56.
47. Lacan's suggestion that 'the phallus can play its role only when veiled' suggests a

different inflection of the term 'unveil'—one that is not, however, Buchloh's.

48. On Birnbaum's work, see my 'Phantasmagoria of the Media,' *Art in America*, 70, 5 (May 1982), pp. 98-100.

49. See Alice A. Jardine, 'Theories of the Feminine: Kristeva,' *enclitic*, 4, 2. (Fall 1980), pp. 5-15.

50. 'The author is reputed the father and owner of his work: literary science therefore teaches *respect* for the manuscript and the author's declared intentions, while society asserts the legality of the relation of author to work (the "*droit d'auteur*" or "copyright," in fact of recent date since it was only really legalized at the time of the French Revolution). As for the Text, it reads without the inscription of the father.' Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text,' *Image/Music/Text*, trans. S. Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 160-61.

51. Levine's first appropriations were images of maternity (women in their natural role) from ladies' magazines. She then took landscape photographs by Eliot Porter and Andreas Feininger, then Weston's portraits of Neil, then Walker Evans's FSA photographs. Her recent work is concerned with Expressionist painting, but the involvement with images of alterity remains: she has exhibited reproductions of Franz Marc's pastoral depictions of animals, and Egon Schiele's self-portraits (madness). On the thematic consistency of Levine's 'work,' see my review, 'Sherrie Levine at A & M Artworks,' *Art in America*, 70, 6 (Summer 1982), p. 148.

52. See Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier.'

53. Douglas Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation,' in Paula Marincola, ed., *Image Scavengers: Photography* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1982), p. 34.

54. Hélène Cixous, 'Entretien avec Françoise van Rossum-Guyon,' quoted in Heath, p. 96.

55. Sherman's shifting identity is reminiscent of the authorial strategies of Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni as discussed by Jane Gallop; see *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 105: 'Like children, the various productions of an author date from different moments, and cannot strictly be considered to have the same origin, the same author. At least we must avoid the fiction that a person is the same, unchanging throughout time. Lemoine-Luccioni makes the difficulty patent by signing each text with a different name, all of which are "hers).'

56. See, for example, Martha Rosler's criticisms in 'Notes on Quotes,' p. 73: 'Repeating the images of woman bound in the frame will, like Pop, soon be seen as a *confirmation* by the "post-feminist" society.'

57. Hal Foster, 'Subversive Signs,' *Art in America*, 70, 10 (November 1982), p. 88.

58. For a statement of this position in relation to contemporary artistic production, see Mario Perniola, 'Time and Time Again,' *Artforum*, XXI, 8 (April 1983), pp. 54-55. Perniola is indebted to Baudrillard; but are we not back with Ricœur in 1962—that is, at precisely the point at which we started?

#### **Mary Kelly:** Re-viewing Modernist Criticism

1. See Hubert Damisch, 'Eight Theses For (or Against?) a Semiology of Painting,' *enclitic* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 1-15.
2. See Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image,' in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).
3. Raymond Bellour, 'The Unattainable Text,' *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 21-22.
4. Damisch, 'Eight Theses,' pp. 14-15.
5. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 100.

#### **Judith Butler:** Performative Acts and Gender Constitution

1. For a further discussion of Beauvoir's feminist contribution to phenomenological theory, see my 'Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*,' *Yale French Studies* 172 (1986).
2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Body is its Sexual Being,' in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).
3. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1974), 38.
4. Julia Kristeva, *Histoire d'amour* (Paris: Editions Denoel, 1983), 242.
5. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1980), 154: 'the notion of "sex" made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle.'

6. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).
7. Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex,' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 178–85.
8. See my 'Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault,' in *Feminism as Critique*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucila Cornell (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987 [distributed by University of Minnesota Press]).
9. See Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). Clifford Geertz suggests in 'Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Thought,' in *Local Knowledge, Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), that the theatrical metaphor is used by recent social theory in two, often opposing, ways. Ritual theorists like Victor Turner focus on a notion of social drama of various kinds as a means for settling internal conflict within a culture and regenerating social cohesion. On the other hand, symbolic action approaches, influenced by figures as diverse as Emile Durkheim, Kenneth Burke, and Michel Foucault, focus on the way in which political authority and questions of legitimation are thematized and settled within the terms of performed meaning. Geertz himself suggests that the tension might be viewed dialectically; his study of political organization in Bali as a 'theatre-state' is a case in point. In terms of an explicitly feminist account of gender as performative, it seems clear to me that an account of gender as ritualized, public performance must be combined with an analysis of the political sanctions and taboos under which that performance may and may not occur within the public sphere free of punitive consequence.
10. Bruce Wilshire, *Role-Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).
11. Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). See especially, 'News, Sex, and Performance,' 295–324.
12. In *Mother Camp* (Prentice Hall, 1974), anthropologist Esther Newton gives an urban ethnography of drag queens in which she suggests that all gender might be understood on the model of drag. In *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna argue that gender is an 'accomplishment' which requires the skills of constructing the body into a socially legitimate artifice.
13. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959).
14. See Michel Foucault's edition of *Herculine Barbin: The Journals of a Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), for an interesting display of the horror evoked by intersexed bodies. Foucault's introduction makes clear that the medical delimitation of univocal sex is yet another wayward application of the discourse on truth-as-identity. See also the work of Robert Edgerton in *American Anthropologist* on the cross-cultural variations of response to hermaphroditic bodies.
15. Remarks at the Center for Humanities, Wesleyan University, Spring 1985.
16. Julia Kristeva, 'Woman Can Never Be Defined,' trans. Marilyn A. August, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981).
17. Mary Anne Warren, *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection* (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985).
18. *Ibid.*; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

**Rey Chow:** Postmodern Automatas  
 This paper was originally written for the International Symposium on 'Feminism and Theory of Discourse' in Valencia, Spain, January 1990. It has appeared as 'Autómatas postmodernos,' in the symposium volume, *Feminismo y teoría del discurso*, edited by Giulia Colaizzi (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, Colección Teorema, 1990), pp. 67–85. I am grateful to Amitava Kumar and Peter Canning for their comments on an early version of this paper.

1. Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society,' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited and with an introduction by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 112.
2. Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
3. Introduction to *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Special Issue on Postmodernism and Japan, 87, 3 (Summer 1988), p. 388.

4. I argue this in the context of modern Chinese literature in 'Rereading Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: A Response to the "Postmodern" Condition,' *Cultural Critique*, 5 (Winter 1986–87), pp. 69–93.
5. See, for instance, Daryl McGowan Tress's response (*Signs*, 14, 1, p. 200) to Jane Flax's 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory' (*Signs*, 12, 4, pp. 621–43): 'Postmodernism, with its "deep skepticism" and "radical doubts" is not the medicine required to cure intellectual and social life of the afflictions of various orthodoxies (e.g., Marxist, Enlightenment, Freudian). What is sorely needed instead of theory that denies the self and integrity or reason is theory that permits us to achieve appropriate and intelligent trust in the self and in its various abilities to come to know what is real.'
6. See Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,' in Hal Foster, pp. 16–30.
7. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,' in Andrew Ross, pp. 88, 90.
8. Hayden White's argument about history in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) remains exemplary in this regard.
9. Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,' in Hal Foster, p. 58.
10. George Yúdice, 'Marginality and the Ethics of Survival,' in Andrew Ross, p. 215.
11. See Naomi Schor's argument in 'Dreaming Dissymmetry: Barthes, Foucault, and Sexual Difference,' in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 98–110.
12. In Andrew Ross, pp. 91, 102. The phrase 'endless variety and monotonous similarity' is from Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women,' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 160.
13. This notion is Walter Benjamin's.
14. A similar point can be made about pornography. Attacks on pornography that focus only on its abuse of women cannot deal with the question of why pornography always exists.
15. Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "uncanny"),' *New Literary History*, VII, 3, p. 538; emphasis in the original.
16. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,' *Socialist Review*, 80 (March–April 1985); rpt. in Elizabeth Weed, ed., *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 173–204.
17. De Lauretis deals with this problem by reintroducing narrative. See especially her chapter on 'Imaging' in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984). Neil Hertz makes a similar argument about Freud's reading of Hoffmann by showing the necessity of 'literature' for 'psychoanalysis': 'we know that the relation between figurative language and what it figures cannot be adequately grasped in metaphors of vision. ...' See 'Freud and the Sandman,' in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, edited and with an introduction by Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 320.
18. Freud, *Jokes*, p. 194.
19. Gayatri Spivak, 'The Political Economy of Women As Seen by a Literary Critic,' in Elizabeth Weed, p. 220.
20. Gayatri Spivak, p. 221; emphases in the original.
21. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 97.
22. Elizabeth Weed, 'Introduction: Terms of Reference,' in Weed, ed. *Coming to Terms*, pp. xvii–xviii.
23. Jean-François Lyotard, 'Presentations,' in *Philosophy in France Today*, edited by Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 133; quoted by Warren Montag, 'What is at Stake in the Debate on Postmodernism?,' in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), p. 91.
24. See Donna Haraway, 'Cyborgs,' and Teresa Ebert, 'The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory,' *Cultural Critique*, 10 (Fall 1988), pp. 19–57.
25. '... women's insistence on difference and incommensurability may not only be compatible with, but also an instance of postmodern thought,' in Hal Foster, pp. 61–62.
26. See Jane Flax, p. 638.

**Amelia Jones:** 'Every man knows where and how beauty gives him pleasure'

This essay was originally written as a talk and given at the Society for Photographic Education's regional conference entitled *Skin Deep: Beauty, Displeasure, Agency*, in Los Angeles, in 1997; a shorter version was given at the Center for Ideas and Society, University of California, Riverside conference *Aesthetics and Difference: Cultural Diversity, Literature, and the Arts* in 1998. An earlier version of this published text was published in *X-Tra* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1999), 7–13. I am very grateful to Ken Gonzales-Day of the SPE, Emory Elliott of the Center for Ideas, and to the editors of *X-Tra* for the opportunity to develop this material.

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1986), 59; Johann Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art* (1764), reprinted in Eric Fernie, ed., *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 75; and John Ruskin, 'The Lamp of Beauty,' *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), reprinted in *The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art by John Ruskin*, ed. Joan Evens (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; and Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1980), 197.

2. Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art issues Press, 1993). Hickey's book precipitated his being awarded the 1994 Frank Jewett Mather Award, the most prestigious national recognition for art criticism, given out by the College Art Association (the major professional institution for artists, art historians, and other arts professionals). For those readers outside the discipline, it is important to note the pervasive power held by Hickey and his colleagues and followers. For example, the interwoven power effects of the *Los Angeles Times/Art issues* crowd have been played out in the Mather committee itself: in 1997, the committee (consisting of Suzanne Muchnic, Dave Hickey, and Lowery Stokes Sims) granted Christopher Knight, chief critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, the award; Muchnic is Knight's colleague at the *Times* and Hickey, like Knight, publishes with Art issues Press and in the journal.

3. Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, on John Ruskin, in the unpaginated 'Acknowledgments'; on 'art professionals,' 13.

4. Among many inspirational critiques of the authoritarianism embedded in this kind of aesthetic judgment, three have been particularly important for my understanding: Donald Preziosi's *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Jo Anna Isaak's feminist analysis, 'Seduction without Desire', *Vanguard* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1987), 11–14.

5. It has been suggested to me by Natasha Boas that Hickey is reacting specifically against the dominance of the writers associated with the journal *October* in New York City, scholars and art critics who developed a highly theoretical avant-gardist model of analyzing postmodern art in the 1980s. Indeed, during this period, British and U.S. art discourse (particularly that generated from New York and associated with *October* and local art magazines and institutions such as the New Museum of Contemporary Art) promoted ideas drawn—often secondhand—from Brecht (such as distanciation as a mode of politicizing the spectator of the work of art) and French poststructuralism (the split subject of Lacan, Derridean deconstruction, etc.). Art work that seemed to follow through these values was generally privileged as 'radical' in that it followed avant-gardist strategies, overtly politicizing the visual. Needless to say, while there is a point to be made about this rather reified discourse, Hickey caricatures it unfairly, collapsing what has been a contested arena of discussions into a singular 'PC' line. At the same time, I am willing to admit that

I am conflating Hickey's arguments (from his early 1990s *Invisible Dragon*) with those of other *Los Angeles Times* and *Art issues* writers such as Christopher Knight and Libby Lumpkin.

6. See note 2.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, trans. Ian McLeod and Geoff Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

8. Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, 20.

9. In commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter, Colin Gardner made the excellent point that, not only does Hickey naturalize beauty, but he also conflates it with both the Burkeian and the Kantian sublime. The



latter, Gardner points out, is actually clearly differentiated from Kant's notion of beauty; far from 'reinforcing human subjectivity's complicit harmony with bounteous nature (the innate role of beauty-as-idea [in Kant]), ... [the sublime] makes us aware of our disjuncture from it. The sublime underlines the fact that we are split subjects, divorced from an Other that partially constructs us.' Gardner stresses the link between this disjunction and the 'wondering self-estrangement [that] lies at the core of what Russian Formalism will later dub "defamiliarization," and what Brecht will eventually systematize as the [alienation effect]' or distanciation. Hickey cannot acknowledge this aspect of the sublime because it would align him with the *Octoberists* (see note 5), and it interferes with his desire to reinforce the power of the viewer and thereby 'reinforce the validity of his own subjective role as connoisseur,' à la Ruskin, I might add. Hickey's vaunted populism is thus inherently corrupted by the desire to promote himself as the arbiter of beauty and its, in his terms, sublime effects. I am very appreciative of Gardner's close reading and these excellent comments, transmitted by e-mail

February 27, 1999.

10. Roland Barthes, preface to *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), II.

11. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756), cited by Peggy Zeglin Brand, 'Disinterestedness and Political Art,' *n. paradoxa*, issue 8 (Nov. 1998), published on-line at <<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/brand.htm>>, this quote p. 1 of the web text.

12. Kenneth Clark's book was originally published in 1956 (*The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* [London: John Murray, 1956]) and has since been reprinted in numerous subsequent editions. See Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12–14.

13. Nead states, categorically, 'one of the principal goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body,' *The Female Nude*, 6.

14. I am leaving the castration complex (the unconscious level of this dynamic) aside for this analysis, but one could easily analyze this problematic from the point of view of castration anxiety. I am grateful

to Thomas McCullough for sharing his excellent paper on the hidden role of castration anxiety in masculine judgments of women's naked bodies as signs of beauty or the sublime; 'The Soulless "Sublime,"' unpublished paper, 1998.

15. D. N. Rodowick, expanding on Derrida's ideas in 'Impure Mimesis, or the Ends of the Aesthetic,' *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), III.

16. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 54; my emphases.

17. For an interesting feminist read on disinterestedness, see Peggy Zeglin Brand, 'Disinterestedness and Political Art.'

18. Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 47.

19. *Ibid.*, 13.

20. Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, II.

21. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 42. This translation is modified according to the 1978 edition, translation by James Creed Meredith (Oxford University Press).

22. See Mercer's 'Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary,' *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), wherein he effectively discusses the way in which Mapplethorpe's aestheticizing strategy operates to make the 'glossy allure of the photographic print ... consubstantial with the shiny texture of black skin,' fetishizing black men and thus 'lubricat[ing] the ideological reproduction of racial otherness as the fascination of the image [which thus] articulates a fantasy of power and mastery over the other' (174). He goes on to note the 'important question of the role of the reader and how he or she attributes intentionality to the author' (179), a key issue in relation to Hickey's authoritative pronouncements of the meaning and value supposedly inherent in this work (the implication being, as placed there or intended by Mapplethorpe).

23. Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, 21, 22.

24. *Ibid.*, 24.

25. It is up for debate whether the numerous nudes Pompadour commissioned from Boucher are actually portraits of her. The faces of the nudes are typically abstracted and idealized (as are, in fact, the faces in the official portraits of Pompadour); furthermore, Boucher had a favorite model, 'Mlle. O'Murphy,' for some of his erotic nude portraits (such as *Odalisque*, also titled *Mlle. O'Murphy*, 1743,

at the Musée du Louvre). However, it is justifiable to analyze them as portraits to the extent that they were clearly used as points of self-reference for their patroness, who had them hung throughout the palace where she held her romantic trysts with the king. This is especially justifiable in the case of the *Toilet of Venus*, since Pompadour had just played the role of Venus in a play by the same name, making the element of self-identification strong. See the exhibition catalog *François Boucher 1703–1770* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986). Albert Boime identifies this painting as a portrait of Pompadour in *Art in an Age of Revolution 1750–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 18.

26. With the incongruous addition of a Grecian urn, marking the beginning of the rage for all things Greek among European cultures at this time. I am very grateful to Stephen Ostrow for this and other insights into these portraits.

27. The painting hung as a pendant with the *Bath of Venus*. See *François Boucher 1703–1770*, 256.

28. ‘Taste,’ Kant writes, ‘is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest. The object of such liking is called beautiful.’ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 53. Edmund Burke also noted this necessity. As Peggy Zeglin Brand points out, he cites (but also rhapsodizes over, as in the quotation at the beginning of the last section of this essay) the ‘female body as a beautiful object which can be perceived as beautiful only if the sole interest of the perceiver is in perceiving for its own sake and not in the desire for possession’; Brand, ‘Disinterestedness and Political Art,’ 1.

29. Nead explores a similar dynamic in *The Female Nude* but analyzes the framing apparatus of the aesthetic in terms of the opposition of ‘art’ and ‘obscenity.’ My analysis sees a more subtle and mutually sustaining series of terms at work as exemplified in the conflicted reception of Boucher’s work—as both high art, paradigmatic of beauty, and as debased, frivolous, kitsch—that against which Enlightenment philosophers such as Diderot and Kant reacted.

30. Derrida, ‘Economimesis,’ trans. R. Klein, *Diacritics* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 9, 5; my emphasis on ‘erect.’

31. Thomas Crow notes that Pompadour’s name ‘is one of the most familiar in the

cultural history of the period, standing itself for Rococo elaboration and excess.’ Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 110. This links up to the way in which images of Marie Antoinette were, thirty years later, also highly coded to align her with the corruption of Rococo culture and the depravity of the aristocracy, as viewed by revolutionary culture. See Boime, *Art in an Age of Revolution*, 45, 467.

32. Kant, cited by Rodowick, ‘Impure Mimesis,’ 105.

33. See Eunice Lipton’s essay ‘Women, Pleasure and Painting (e.g., Boucher),’ *Genders* 7 (Spring 1990), 69–86.

34. Cited by Michael Fried in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 41. Fried discusses Boucher’s reputation at some length and this discussion is indebted to his research. That Fried uses Boucher’s reception to confirm the antithesis between absorptive painting (which he, along with Diderot, privileges) and a debased theatricality cannot be a matter of critique here, though I have elsewhere critically examined these terms as Fried plays them out in relation to contemporary art. See my essay ‘Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning,’ *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), 39–55.

35. See Donald Preziosi’s deep analysis of this dynamic in *Rethinking Art History*.

36. John Ruskin, ‘The Lamp of Beauty,’ 196.

37. It was Hegel, following the ideas of Winckelmann, who changed the emphasis of the aesthetic by arguing that the Ideal could be found not in nature, with its vastness and imperfections, but in the creations of humankind. The Ideal is precisely that which bridges nature and ‘man’ by taking that which is the most superior in nature but combining these elements to create a greater beauty. See Hegel’s *Philosophy of Fine Art* (1835), trans. F. P. B. Osmaston (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), especially ‘The Ideal as Such.’

38. See Rodowick’s thorough discussion of this aspect of Derrida’s argument in ‘Impure Mimesis,’ 105.

39. Pompadour came from a thoroughly bourgeois family with aristocratic

pretensions. As Crow has suggested, her support of the arts was useful in raising her family's social position: 'lavish support for the arts' was a means of 'legitimizing *arrieviste* pretensions to aristocratic status'; see Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 110–113. The power of Pompadour was thus itself secured by the aesthetic in a perversion of the masculinist divine teleology of which Derrida writes.

40. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

41. Poem by Zacharie Astruc. Manet placed Astruc's poem under *Olympia* in the salon catalogue. See T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 83. Clark's research into the criticism published in relation to *Olympia* is an invaluable resource.

42. From Gautier's review of the salon of 1865 in *Le Moniteur universel*, cited in *Art in Theory 1815–1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood with Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), 516–17.

43. Amédée Cantaloube, writing in *Le Grand Journal* in 1865; cited by T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 94.

44. All cited by Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 96–98.

45. Sander Gilman has noted that '[b]y the eighteenth century, the sexuality of the black, both male and female, becomes an icon for deviant sexuality in general. ... By the nineteenth century, as in [Manet's] *Olympia* ... , the central female figure is associated with a black female in such a way as to imply their sexual similarity.' Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,' in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 228. Ultimately, he argues, the black body during this period, through insidious medical ('scientific') discourse as well as in visual imagery, acts as an antithesis to highlight not only the 'purity' of white female sexuality but the 'superiority' of white subjectivity in general.

46. Lorraine O'Grady, 'Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity,' in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and

Arlene Raven (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 153.

47. Thus, Théophile Thoré, in a contemporaneous review of the 1865 salon in *L'Indépendance Belge*, noted that 'Manet's *Olympia* has caused all Paris to run to see this curious woman with her magnificent bouquet, her *Negress*, and her black cat,' typically placing the maid on the level of the pet cat; my emphasis. Cited in *Art in Theory 1815–1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 517.

48. Jennifer Brody, 'Shading Meaning,' in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, 103. Another interesting discussion of race and gender in *Olympia* can be found in Rebecca Schneider's *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 27–28.

Ultimately, she is rather harder on Manet than I would be, since I read his painting as (whether consciously or not) enacting sexist, classist, and racist relations that had until that point been aestheticized (as in the Ingres painting discussed below) or otherwise veiled; by unveiling them, the painting contributes to the beginning of their critique and dissolution. Schneider also stresses the implication of white women in mobilizing black femininity as a way of 'seeking to control their [our?] displacements—to render invisible or to manipulate the signs of their symbolic fallen doubles: persons of color,' 28.

49. Robert Rosenblum and H. W. Janson evasively call the scene 'Islamic' in *19th-Century Art* (New York: Abrams, 1984), 149.

50. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, 'Primitive,' in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 176.

51. And yet, per Brody's argument vis-à-vis *Olympia*, this structure is never complete or fully successful—the 'slave(s)' stain(s) the female odalisque.

52. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 49.

53. In Rosenblum and Janson, *19th-Century Art*, 150.

54. Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,' *October* 62 (Fall 1992), 9; she is citing Kant with 'Oriental voluptuaries.'

55. Even the most seemingly sophisticated scholars and theorists are often tempted to revert to a kind of base-line subjectivism, posed as fact, when discussing the issue of whether or not something is 'beautiful' (in this sense Hickey's claims can be viewed as at least consistent with his overt project of rehabilitating premodern aesthetics). Hence, in a recent interview, Buck-Morss herself contradicts her own earlier insights by arguing that 'beauty is the experience of material reality as something that resists instrumentalization,' and, by definition, is not 'culturally mediated'; in 'Aesthetics after the End of Art,' an interview with Susan Buck-Morss by Grant H. Kester, in *Art Journal* 56, no. 1, 'Aesthetics and the Body Politic' special issue (Spring 1997), 39. Such claims fly in the face of her own recognition of the interpreter's fear of being rendered passive and the role of this fear in conditioning his or her relationship to images and objects. Since when are the bodily sensations she ascribes to her experience of aesthetic objects unmediated by our thoroughly socialized experience of the world? Even most doctors and cognitive psychologists today would stress the role of social conditioning in our physiological responses to the world and even our neurological make-up (the way in which we are 'wired' to respond to things). The two special issues of *X-TRA* on beauty discourse and art criticism (2, no. 3 [Spring 1999], and 2, no. 4 [Summer 1999]) cover the 'beauty' debates from multiple points of view (including my own, in an earlier version of this essay; see the unnumbered note that begins these 'Notes'), and Margaret Morgan's review of the Spring 1999 Los Angeles conference 'Practical Criticism, Art and Theory in the Nineties' addresses the tendency of participants to fall back on clichéd notions of beauty and personal taste (Summer issue, 20–21). She calls eminent art historian Thierry de Duve to task for making 'bland pronouncements about merely loving or hating certain works of art' and notes how disappointing it was to see 'the distinguished scholar ... taking his own tastes so seriously,' 21.

56. Jennifer Faist, 'Wrapping for the Rhetoric: Dave Hickey and Beauty in Art,' *Coagula* 26 (March 1997), 36.

57. Joseph Leo Koerner and Lisbet Koerner note that 'to speak of value today is rarely to reach a judgment on the beauty of an art object. Such evaluations, held

to be mere relative judgments of values that are themselves relative, have been largely purged from academic practice and annexed to the journalistic practices of "art criticism." ... Art, it is discovered [in contemporary art history], is not a quality of the object, but a valuation by the subject; like beauty, art is in the eyes of the beholder.' Koerner and Koerner, 'Value,' in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 293. Hickey and his followers have thus bypassed the insights of the new art history in their return to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views on the aesthetic.

**Jennifer Doyle: Queer Wallpaper**

1. See Doyle et al. (1996).
2. Dyer (1990), 149.
3. Merck (1996), 225.
4. Some of the best examples of gay and lesbian studies in art history and visual studies include: Hammond (2000); Weinberg (1995); Meyer (2002); Butt (2005).
5. Some examples of influential scholarship on sexuality and visual culture produced by scholars trained and/or working outside of art history: Bad Object Choices (1991); Butler (1989); Case (1988–9); Cvetkovich (2003); Doan (1994); Dyer (1990); Foucault (1978); Halberstam (1998); de Lauritis (1994); Mercer (1994); Merck (1993); Muñoz (1999); Newton (1979); Waugh (1996). The disciplinary locations of these works include art criticism, film studies, cultural studies, and performance studies.
6. For more on Stonewall and its relationship to the gay and lesbian rights movement, see McGarry et al. (1998) and Duberman (1993).
7. To name a few: Harmony Hammond's 1978 *A Lesbian Show* at Greene Street Workshop in New York; *The Great American Lesbian Art Show* (at the Women's Building in Los Angeles and cooperating galleries and spaces in the 1980s); 1982s *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* at The New Museum in New York (organized by Dan Cameron); *All But the Obvious: A Program in Lesbian Art* at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Catherine Lord and Harmony Hammond organized *Gender, Fucked* in 1996 for The Center for Contemporary Art in Seattle. Major museum exhibits which are not organized explicitly around gay and lesbian identity, but which are centered on queerness include Jennifer

Blessing's 1997 *'Rose is Rose is Rose': Gender and Performance in Photography* at The Guggenheim Museum; Russell Ferguson's 1999 exhibition for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, *'In Memory of My Feelings': The Art of Frank O'Hara and His Circle*.

8. See Crimp and Rolston (1990) for a history and overview of ACT-UP initiatives and demonstrations; and Berlant and Freeman (1993) for a definitive statement on queer activism and politics in the early 1990s. See also Katz in this volume.
9. See Crimp (2002) or Watney (2000).
10. Berlant and Warner (1995), 345.
11. See, for example, de Lauretis (1991); and Sedgwick (1993).
12. Crimp (1999), 12.
13. Sedgwick (1993), 3.
14. *Ibid.*, 6.
15. Reid-Pharr (1986), 38; cited in Cooper (1996), 26.
16. Franko B (2004), 218.
17. José Muñoz, for example, grounds his work in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Politics of Performance* (1999) in the work of radical women of color such as Moraga and Anzaldúa. See Lorde (1984).
18. de Beauvoir (1949/1952); Wittig (1992); Riviere (1929/1986).
19. See Leffingwell (1997) and Hoberman (2001).
20. Rizk (1998), 58.
21. Freeman (2000), 728.
22. *Ibid.*, 731. For more on camp, drag queens, and performance, see Newton (1979).

## Chapter 8. Globalization and its Discontents

1. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston, Ill., 1973), 104.
2. Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *id.*, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York, 1977), 3.
3. On which see Herman Rapoport, 'Deconstruction's Other: Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Jacques Derrida', *Diacritics*, 25/2 (1995), 98–113.
4. J. Derrida, 'Semiology and Grammatology', in *id.*, *Positions* (Chicago, 1981), 17–36; originally published in *Information sur les sciences sociales*, 7 (June 1968). The subject is discussed in D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, 109–10.

5. 'Art and Art History in the Perspective of Globalization: An International Symposium', Shanghai, 19–21 May 2006. One important aspect of the conference was its attention not only to art and art history in their modern, and largely Western, senses, but also its attention to artistry in non-Western traditions, where distinctions between art practice, art theory, and art history were configured differently (and less oppositionally) in relation to each other.
6. An assertion printed on the back cover of J. Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
7. A detailed consideration of this—and of the implications of the ancient Aristotelian claim that it was above all artistry that distinguished humans from all other species—may be found in Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*.
8. On museums, see C. Farago and D. Preziosi (eds. and contributors), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (London: Ashgate, 2004).
9. On which see D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity*, The 2001 Slade Lectures in the Fine Arts at Oxford (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), esp. chapter 6, 'The Crystalline Veil and the Phallogomorphic Imaginary', pp. 92–115.

## Timothy Mitchell: Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).
2. Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', *New Formations*, 4 (Spring, 1988), 96. Unfortunately, this insightful article came to my attention only as I was completing the revisions to this article.
3. See esp. Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984); see also Bennett, 'Exhibitionary Complex'.
4. Muhammad Amin Fikri, *Irshad al-alibbd ıla mahasin Urubba* (Cairo, 1892), 128.
5. Fikri, *Irshad*, 128–9, 136.
6. R. N. Crust, 'The International Congresses of Orientalists', *Hellas*, 6 (1897), 359.
7. *Ibid.* 351.
8. *Ibid.* 359.
9. Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, *al-A'mal al-kamila* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1973), 2: 76.

10. Ali Mubarak, *Alam al-din* (Alexandria, 1882), 816. The 'curiosity' of the European is something of a theme for Orientalist writers, who contrast it with the 'general lack of curiosity' of non-Europeans. Such curiosity is assumed to be the natural, unfettered relation of a person to the world, emerging in Europe once the loosening of 'theological bonds' had brought about 'the freeing of human minds' (Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (London, 1982), 299). See Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 4–5, for a critique of this sort of argument and its own 'theological' assumptions.
11. Alain Silvera, 'The First Egyptian Student Mission to France under Muhammad Ali', in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim (eds.), *Modern Egypt: Studies in Politics and Society* (London, 1980), 13.
12. Tahtawi, *al-A'mal*, 2: 177, 199–20.
13. Georges Douin, *Histoire du règne du Khédive Ismail* (Rome, 1934), 2: 4–5.
14. Tahtawi, *al-A'mal*, 2: 121.
15. Quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, 165.
16. James Augustus St John, *The Education of the People* (London, 1858), 82–3.
17. 'Les origines et le plan de l'exposition', in *L'Exposition de Paris de 1889*, 3 (15 December 1889), 18.
18. On Egyptian writing about Europe in the 19th c. see Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe* (Princeton, 1963); Anouar Louca, *Voyageurs et écrivains égyptiens en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1970); Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 7–13, 180 n. 14.
19. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* (London, 1978), 116: on the theater, see e.g. Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, *Hadith Isa ibn Hisham, awṣafira min al-zaman*, 2d edn. (Cairo, 1911), 434, and Tahtawi, *al-A'mal*, 2: 119–20; on the public garden and the zoo, Muhammad al-Sanusi al-Tunisi, *al-Istīlā' at al-barisiya fi ma rad sanat 1889* (Tunis, 1891), 37.
20. Mubarak, *Alam al-din*, 817.
21. The model farm outside Paris is described in Mubarak, *Alam al-din*, 1008–42; the visual effect of the street in Mubarak, *Alam al-din*, 964, and Idwar Ilyas, *Mashahid Uruba wa-Amirka* (Cairo, 1900), 268; the new funicular at Lucerne and the European passion for panoramas in Fikri, *Irshad*, 98.
22. Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York, 1977).
23. International Congress of Orientalists, *Transactions of the Ninth Congress*, 1892 (London, 1893), 1: 35.
24. Al-Sanusi, *al-Istīlā'at*, 242.
25. Edmond About, *Le Fellah: souvenirs d'Égypte* (Paris, 1869), 47–8.
26. Charles Edmond, *L'Égypte à l'exposition universelle de 1867* (Paris, 1867).
27. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston, Ill., 1973), 104. All of his subsequent writings, Derrida once remarked, 'are only a commentary on the sentence about a labyrinth' ('Implications: Interview with Henri Ronse', in *Positions* (Chicago, 1981), 5). My article, too, should be read as a commentary on that sentence.
28. Quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York, 1978), 146–7.
29. Mubarak, *Alam al-din*, 818; Ilyas, *Mashahid Uruba*, 268.
30. Mubarak, *Alam al-din*, 829–30.
31. Benjamin, 'Paris', 146, 152; Tahtawi, *al-A'mal*, 2: 76.
32. See André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle* (Damascus, 1973), 1: 173–202; Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800–1914* (London, 1981).
33. By the eve of World War I, cotton accounted for more than 92 per cent of the total value of Egypt's exports (Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy* (Oxford, 1969), 307).
34. See Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.
35. Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (London, 1983), 79.
36. Mubarak, *Alam al-din*, 308.
37. Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt*, 23.
38. Eliot Warburton, author of *The Crescent and the Cross: or Romance and Realities of Eastern Travel* (1845), describing Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen, or Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East* (London, 1844; reprint edn., 1908); cited in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th edn. (Oxford, 1985), s.v. 'Kinglake'.
39. Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, reprint edn. (London, 1908), pp. vii, xvii.
40. Stanley Lane-Poole, 'Memoir', in Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, reprint edn. (Beirut, 1980), vol. V. p. xii.



41. Leila Ahmed, *Edward W. Lane: A Study of His Life and Work* (London, 1978); John D. Wortham, *The Genesis of British Egyptology, 1549–1906* (Norman, Okla., 1971), 65.
42. Quoted in Ahmed, *Edward Lane*, 26.
43. Muwaylihi, *Isa ibn Hisham*, 405–17.
44. Jeremy Bentham, *The Complete Works*, ed. John Bowring (Edinburgh, 1838–43), 4: 65–6.
45. Cf. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis, 1986).
46. *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Lower and Upper Egypt* (London, 1888).
47. Said, *Orientalism*, 160–1, 168, 239. My subsequent analysis is much indebted to Said's work.
48. J. M. Carré, *Voyageurs et écrivains français en Egypte*, 2nd edn. (Cairo, 1956), 2: 191.
49. Quoted in Lane, *Arabic–English Lexicon*, 5: vii.
50. Gérard de Nerval, *Oeuvres*, ed. Albert Béguin and Jean Richer, i: *Voyage en Orient* (1851), ed. Michel Jeanneret (Paris, 1952), 172–4.
51. Cf. Jacques Derrida, 'The Double Session', in *Dissemination* (Chicago, 1981), 191–2, *Speech and Phenomena*, and 'Implications'.

**Carol Duncan:** The Art Museum as Ritual

1. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, Boston, and Henley, 1966), 68. On the subject of ritual in modern life, see Abner Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society* (Berkeley, 1974); Steven Lukes, 'Political Ritual and Social Integration', in *Essays in Social Theory* (New York and London, 1977), 52–73; Sally F. Moore and Barbara Myerhoff, 'Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings', in Moore and Myerhoff (eds.), *Secular Ritual* (Assen and Amsterdam, 1977), 3–24; Victor Turner, 'Frame, Flow, and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', in Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (eds.), *Performance in Postmodern Culture* (Milwaukee, Wisc. 1977), 33–55; and Turner, 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality', in Moore and Myerhoff, 'Secular Ritual', 36–52. See also Masao Yamaguchi, 'The Poetics of Exhibition in Japanese Culture', in I. Karp and S. Levine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London, 1991), 57–67. Yamaguchi discusses secular rituals and ritual sites in both Japanese and western culture, including

- modern exhibition space. The reference to our culture being anti-ritual comes from Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (1973) (New York, 1982), 1–4, in a discussion of modern negative views of ritualism as the performance of empty gestures.
2. This is not to imply the kind of culturally or ideologically unified society that, according to many anthropological accounts, gives rituals a socially integrative function. This integrative function is much disputed, especially in modern society (see e.g. works cited in the preceding notes by Cohen, Lukes, and Moore and Myerhoff, and Edmund Leach, 'Ritual', in David Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, xiii (1968) 521–6.
  3. As Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood have written, 'the more costly the ritual trappings, the stronger we can assume the intention to fix the meanings to be' (*The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (1979) (New York and London, 1982), 65).
  4. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), 118 ff.; Niels von Holst, *Creators, Collectors and Connoisseurs*, trans. B. Battershaw (New York, 1967), 228 ff.; Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age*, trans. J. van Nuis Cahill (New York, 1967), 197–202; and William L. MacDonald, *The Parthenon: Design, Meaning, and Progeny* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 125–32.
  5. The phallic form of the *Balsac* often stands at or near the entrances to American museums, e.g. the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art or the Norton Simon Museum; or it presides over museum sculpture gardens, e.g. the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC.
  6. William Ewart, MP, in *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery*, in House of Commons, *Reports*, vol. xxxv (1853), 505.
  7. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 63.
  8. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1908), trans. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago, 1960).
  9. Turner, 'Frame, Flow, and Reflection', 33. See also Turner's *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca NY and London, 1974), esp. 13–15 and 231–2.
  10. See Mary Jo Deegan, *American Ritual Dramas: Social Rules and Cultural Meanings* (New York, Westport, Conn., and London,

- 1988). 7–12, for a thoughtful discussion of Turner's ideas and the limits of their applicability to modern art. For an opposing view of rituals and of the difference between traditional rituals and the modern experience of art, see Margaret Mead, 'Art and Reality From the Standpoint of Cultural Anthropology', *College Art Journal* 2: 4, (1943), 119–21. Mead argues that modern visitors in an art gallery can never achieve what primitive rituals provide, 'the symbolic expression of the meaning of life'.
11. Bazin, *The Museum Age*, 7.
12. Goran Schildt, 'The Idea of the Museum', in L. Aagaard-Mogensen (ed.), *The Idea of the Museum: Philosophical, Artistic, and Political Questions*, Problems in Contemporary Philosophy, vol. vi (Lewiston, NY, and Quenstron, Ontario, 1988), 89.
13. I would argue that this is the case even when they watch 'performance artists' at work.
14. Philip Rhys Adams, 'Towards a Strategy of Presentation', *Museum* 7: 1 (1954), 4.
15. For an unusual attempt to understand what museum visitors make of their experience, see Mary Beard, 'Souvenirs of Culture: Deciphering (in) the Museum', *Art History* 15 (1992), 505–32. Beard examines the purchase and use of postcards as evidence of how visitors interpret the museum ritual.
16. Kenneth Clark, 'The Ideal Museum', *ArtNews* 52 (January 1954), 29.
17. Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. J. H. Bernard (New York, 1951).
18. Two classics in this area are: M. H. Abrams. *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York, 1958), and Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1946). For a substantive summary of these developments, see Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History*, University, Ala. 1975), chs. 8 and 9.
19. For the Dresden Gallery, see von Holst, *Creators, Collectors and Connoisseurs*, 121–3.
20. From Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, quoted in Bazin, *The Museum Age*, 160.
21. Von Holst, *Creators, Collectors and Connoisseurs*, 216.
22. William Hazlitt, 'The Elgin Marbles' (1816), in P. P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works* (New York, 1967), xviii. 10r. Thanks to Andrew Hemingway for the reference.
23. William Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (London, 1824), 2–6.
24. See Goethe, cited in Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Triumph of Art for the Public*, (Garden City, NY, 1979), 76. The Frenchman Quatremère de Quincy also saw art museums as destroyers of the historical meanings that gave value to art. See Daniel Sherman, 'Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx: Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism', in D. Sherman and I. Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, Media and Society, (Minneapolis and London, 1994), vi. 123–43. Thanks to the author for an advance copy of his paper.
25. See especially Paul Dimaggio, 'Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organized Base for High Culture in America', *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (1982), 33–50 and 303–22; and Walter Muir Whitehill, *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: A Centennial History*, 2 vols., (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).
- In this chapter, I have quoted more from advocates of the aesthetic than the educational museum, because, by and large, they have valued and articulated more the liminal quality of museum space, while advocates of the educational museum tend to be suspicious of that quality and associate it with social elitism (see, for example, Dimaggio, 'Cultural Entrepreneurship'). But, the educational museum is no less a ceremonial structure than the aesthetic museum.
26. Benjamin Ives Gilman, *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), 56.
27. *Ibid.* 108.
28. Leach, 'Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time', in *Rethinking Anthropology* (London and New York, 1961), 124–36. Thanks to Michael Ames for the reference.
29. Recently, the art critic Donald Kuspit suggested that a quest for immortality is central to the meaning of art museums. The sacralized space of the art museum, he argues, by promoting an intense and intimate identification of visitor and artist, imparts to the visitor a feeling of contact with something immortal and, consequently, a sense of renewal. For Kuspit, the success of this transaction depends on whether or not the viewer's narcissistic needs are addressed by the art she or he is viewing ('The Magic Kingdom

of the Museum', *Artforum* (April 1992), 58–63). Werner Muensterberger, in *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, 1994), brings to the subject of collecting the experience of a practicing psychoanalyst and explores in depth a variety of narcissistic motives for collecting, including a longing for immortality.

30. See, e.g. Charles G. Loring, a Gilman follower, noting a current trend for 'small rooms where the attention may be focused on two or three masterpieces' (in 'A Trend in Museum Design', *Architectural Forum* (December 1927), vol. 47, p. 579).

31. César Graña, 'The Private Lives of Public Museums', *Trans-Action*, 4: 5 (1967), 20–5.

32. Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', in Karp and Levine, *Exhibiting Cultures*, 27.

33. Bazin, *The Museum Age*, 265.

**Walter Benjamin:** The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility Benjamin began work on this version of 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' in Paris, in connection with the French translation of the essay in early 1936, intending to publish it in a German periodical. He made numerous modifications over the next two years, before allowing it to be copied by Gretel Adorno. It was this significantly revised version—which Benjamin, as late as 1939, could still regard as a work in progress, rather than a completed essay—that served as source for the first publication of the German text in 1955 in Benjamin's *Schriften*.

1. The German political philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883) analyzed the capitalist mode of production in his most famous and influential work, *Das Kapital* (3 vols., 1867, 1885, 1895), which was carried to completion by his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). The translation of Benjamin's epigraph is from Paul Valéry, 'The Conquest of Ubiquity,' in *Aesthetics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon, 1964), p. 225. Valéry (1871–1945), French man of letters, is the author of books of verse, such as *Charmes* (1922), and prose writings, such as *Soirée avec M. Teste* (1895) and *Analecta* (1927).

2. Paul Valéry, *Pièces sur l'art* (Paris), p. 105 ('La Conquête de l'ubiquité'). [Benjamin's note. In English in *Aesthetics*, p. 226. Benjamin made use of the third,

augmented edition of *Pièces sur l'art*, published in January 1936.—*Trans.*]

3. Of course, the history of a work of art encompasses more than this. The history of the *Mona Lisa*, for instance, encompasses the kinds and number of copies made of it in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. [Benjamin's note. The *Mona Lisa* (*La Gioconda*) was painted in 1503–1506 by the Florentine artist and scientist Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). It now hangs in the Louvre.—*Trans.*]

4. Precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, the intensive penetration of certain (technological) processes of reproduction was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity. To develop such differentiations was an important function of the trade in works of art. Such trade had a manifest interest in distinguishing among various prints of a woodblock engraving (those before and those after inscription), of a copperplate engraving, and so on. The invention of the woodcut may be said to have struck at the root of the quality of authenticity even before its late flowering. To be sure, a medieval picture of the Madonna at the time it was created could not yet be said to be 'authentic.' It became 'authentic' only during the succeeding centuries, and perhaps most strikingly so during the nineteenth. [Benjamin's note]

5. The poorest provincial staging of Goethe's *Faust* is superior to a film of *Faust*, in that, ideally, it competes with the first performance at Weimar. The viewer in front of a movie screen derives no benefit from recalling bits of tradition which might come to mind in front of a stage—for instance, that the character of Mephisto is based on Goethe's friend Johann Heinrich Merck, and the like. [Benjamin's note. The first performance of Parts I and II of Goethe's *Faust* took place in Weimar in 1776. Johann Heinrich Merck (1741–1791), a German writer, critic, and translator, as well as a professional pharmacist, helped found the periodical *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* (1722), in which some of Goethe's earliest pieces were published. For his portrait of Mephisto in *Faust*, Goethe drew on certain personality traits of this friend of his youth (who later committed suicide)—namely, his cool analytic mind, his unconstrained love of mockery and derision, and his destructive, nihilistic view of human affairs.—*Trans.*]

6. Abel Gance, 'Le Temps de l'image est venue!' (It Is Time for the Image!), in Léon Pierre-Quint, Germaine Dulac, Lionel Landry, and Abel Gance, *L'Art cinématographique*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1927), pp. 94–96. [Benjamin's note. Gance (1889–1981) was a leading French film director, whose epic films *J'Accuse* (1919), *La Roue* (1922), and *Napoléon* (1927) made innovative use of such devices as superimposition, rapid intercutting, and split screen.—*Trans.*]
7. Alois Riegl (1858–1905) was an Austrian art historian who argued that different formal orderings of art emerge as expressions of different historical epochs. He is the author of *Stilfrage: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Questions of Style; Toward a History of Ornament; 1893) and *Die Spätromische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn* (1901). The latter has been translated by Rolf Winks as *Late Roman Art Industry* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985). Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909), also an Austrian art historian, is the author of *Die Wiener Genesis* (The Vienna Genesis; 1922), a study of the sumptuously illuminated, early sixth-century A.D. copy of the biblical book of Genesis preserved in the Austrian National Library in Vienna.
8. 'Einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag.' In Greek, *aura* means 'air,' 'breath.'
9. Getting closer (in terms of human interest) to the masses may involve having one's social function removed from the field of vision. Nothing guarantees that a portraitist of today, when painting a famous surgeon at the breakfast table with his family, depicts his social function more precisely than a painter of the seventeenth century who showed the viewer doctors representing their profession, as Rembrandt did in his *Anatomy Lesson* [Benjamin's note. The Dutch painter and etcher Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) painted *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* in 1632. It hangs in the Mauritshuis in the Hague.—*Trans.*]
10. Benjamin is quoting Johannes V. Jensen, *Exotische Novellen*, trans. Julia Koppel (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1919), pp. 41–42. Jensen (1873–1950) was a Danish novelist, poet, and essayist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1944. See 'Hashish in Marseilles,' in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 677.
11. The definition of the aura as the 'unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be,' represents nothing more than a formulation of the cult value of the work of art in categories of spatiotemporal perception. Distance is the opposite of nearness. The *essentially* distant is the unapproachable. Unapproachability is, indeed, a primary quality of the cult image; true to its nature, the cult image remains 'distant, however near it may be.' The nearness one may gain from its substance [*Materie*] does not impair the distance it retains in its apparition. [Benjamin's note]
12. To the extent that the cult value of a painting is secularized, the impressions of its fundamental uniqueness become less distinct. In the viewer's imagination, the uniqueness of the phenomena holding sway in the cult image is more and more displaced by the empirical uniqueness of the artist or of his creative achievement. To be sure, never completely so—the concept of authenticity always transcends that of proper attribution. (This is particularly apparent in the collector, who always displays some traits of the fetishist and who, through his possession of the artwork, shares in its cultic power.) Nevertheless, the concept of authenticity still functions as a determining factor in the evaluation of art; as art becomes secularized, authenticity displaces the cult value of the work. [Benjamin's note]
13. Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), French poet, translator, and editor, was an originator and leader of the Symbolist movement, which sought an incantatory language cut off from all referential function. Among his works are *L'Après-Midi d'un faune* (Afternoon of a Faun; 1876) and *Vers et prose* (Poetry and Prose; 1893).
14. In film, the technological reproducibility of the product is not an externally imposed condition of its mass dissemination, as it is, say, in literature or painting. *The technological reproducibility of films is based directly on the technology of their production. This not only makes possible the mass dissemination of film, in the most direct way, but actually enforces it.* It does so because the process of producing a film is so costly that an individual who could afford to buy a painting, for example, could not afford to buy a [master print of a] film. It was calculated in 1927 that, in order to make a profit, a major film needed to reach an audience of nine million.

Of course, the advent of sound film [in that year] initially caused a movement in the opposite direction; its audience was restricted by language boundaries. And that coincided with the emphasis placed on national interests by fascism. But it is less important to note this setback (which in any case was mitigated by dubbing) than to observe its connection with fascism. The simultaneity of the two phenomena results from the economic crisis. The same disorders which led, in the world at large, to an attempt to maintain existing property relations by brute force induced film capital, under the threat of crisis, to speed up the development of sound film. Its introduction brought temporary relief, not only because sound film attracted the masses back into the cinema but because it consolidated new capital from the electricity industry with that of film. Thus, considered from the outside, sound film promoted national interests; but seen from the inside, it helped internationalize film production even more than before. [Benjamin's note. By 'the economic crisis' Benjamin refers to the devastating consequences, in the United States and Europe, of the stock market crash of October 1929.]

15. This polarity cannot come into its own in the aesthetics of Idealism, which conceives of beauty as something fundamentally undivided (and thus excludes anything polarized). Nonetheless, in Hegel this polarity announces itself as clearly as possible within the limits of Idealism. We quote from his *Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Geschichte* [Lectures on the Philosophy of History]: 'Images were known of old. In those early days, piety required them for worship, but it could do without *beautiful* images. Such images might even be disturbing. In every beautiful image, there is also something external—although, insofar as the image is beautiful, its spirit still speaks to the human being. But religious worship, being no more than a spiritless torpor of the soul, is directed at a *thing*.... Fine art arose ... in the church ..., though art has now gone beyond the ecclesiastical principle.' Likewise, the following passage from the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* [Lectures on Aesthetics] indicates that Hegel sensed a problem here: 'We are beyond the stage of venerating works of art as divine and as objects deserving our worship. Today

the impression they produce is of a more reflective kind, and the emotions they arouse require a more stringent test.' The transition from the first kind of artistic reception to the second defines the history of artistic reception in general. Moreover, a certain oscillation between these two polar modes of reception can be demonstrated for each work of art. Take the *Sistine Madonna*. Hubert Grimme showed that the *Madonna* was originally painted for exhibition. His research was inspired by the question: What is the purpose of the molding in the foreground of the painting—the molding that the two cupids are leaning on? And, Grimme asked further, what led Raphael to furnish the sky with two draperies? Research proved that the *Madonna* had been commissioned for the public lying-in-state of Pope Sixtus. Popes traditionally lay in state in a certain side-chapel of St. Peter's. On that occasion, Raphael's picture had been hung in a niche-like area toward the back of the chapel, and positioned just above the coffin. In this picture Raphael portrays the cloud-borne Madonna approaching the papal coffin from the rear of the niche, which was framed by green drapes. The funeral service for Pope Sixtus was thus able to take advantage of a primary exhibition value of Raphael's picture. The painting was subsequently moved to the high altar in the Church of the Black Friars at Piacenza. This exile was a result of Roman Catholic doctrine, which stipulates that paintings exhibited at funeral services cannot be used as objects of worship on the high altar. The rule meant that Raphael's picture had declined in value; but in order to obtain a satisfactory price for the work, the Papal See decided to facilitate the sale by tacitly tolerating display of the picture above the high altar. To avoid attracting undue attention, the painting was turned over to the monks in that far-off provincial town. [Benjamin's note. The German Idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) accepted the chair in philosophy at Berlin in 1818. His lectures on aesthetics and the philosophy of history (delivered 1820–1829) were later published by his editors, with the text based mainly on notes taken by his students. The Italian painter and architect Raphael Santi (1483–1520) painted the *Sistine Madonna* in 1513; it now hangs in Dresden. See Hubert

Grimme, 'Das Rätsel der *Sixtinischen Madonna*' (The Riddle of the *Sistine Madonna*), *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 57 [33 in the new series] (1922), pp. 41–49.—*Trans.*]

16. Bertolt Brecht, on a different level, engaged in analogous reflections: 'If the concept of a "work of art" can no longer be applied to the thing that emerges once the work is transformed into a commodity, we have to eliminate this concept with due caution but without fear, lest we liquidate the function of the very thing as well. For it has to go through this phase unswervingly; there is no viable detour from the straight path. Rather, what happens here with the work of art will change it fundamentally, will erase its past to such an extent that—should the old concept be taken up again (and it will be; why not?)—it will no longer evoke any memory of the thing it once designated.' Brecht, *Versuche* (Experiments), 8–10, no. 3 (Berlin, 1931), pp. 301–302 ('Der Dreigroschenprozess' [The Threepenny Trial]). [Benjamin's note. The German poet and playwright Bertolt or Bert (Eugen Berthold Friedrich) Brecht (1898–1956) was the author of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera; 1928), with music by Kurt Weill, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (Mother Courage and Her Children; 1941), and *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (The Caucasian Chalk Circle; 1948). Benjamin became friends with Brecht in 1929 and, during the Thirties, was considerably influenced by the younger man's thinking on the subject of politics and art.

At this point in the text, Benjamin struck two paragraphs on the distinction between a first and a second technology. See the second version of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,' in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935–1938* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 107–108.—*Trans.*]

17. Eugène Atget (1857–1927), recognized today as one of the leading photographers of the twentieth century, spent his career in obscurity making pictures of Paris and its environs. See Benjamin's 'Little History of Photography,' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 518–519 (trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter).

18. A technological factor is important here, especially with regard to the newsreel, whose significance for propaganda purposes

can hardly be overstated. *Mass reproduction is especially favored by the reproduction of the masses.* In great ceremonial processions, giant rallies, and mass sporting events, and in war, all of which are now fed into the camera, the masses come face to face with themselves. This process, whose significance need not be emphasized, is closely bound up with the development of reproduction and recording technologies. In general, mass movements are more clearly apprehended by the camera than by the eye. A bird's-eye view best captures assemblies of hundreds of thousands. And even when this perspective is no less accessible to the human eye than to the camera, the image formed by the eye cannot be enlarged in the same way as a photograph. This is to say that mass movements, including war, are a form of human behavior especially suited to the camera. [Benjamin's note]

19. Cited in *La Stampa Torino*. [Benjamin's note. The German editors of Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften* argue that this passage is more likely to have been excerpted from a French newspaper than from the Italian newspaper cited here. Futurism was founded by the Italian writer Emilio Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876–1944), whose 'Manifeste de Futurisme,' published in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1909, called for a revolutionary art and total freedom of expression. Marinetti's ideas had a powerful influence in Italy and in Russia, though he himself, after serving as an officer in World War I, went on to join the Fascist party in 1919 and to become an enthusiastic supporter of Mussolini. Among his other works are a volume of poems, *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (War the Only Hygiene of the World; 1915) and a political essay, *Futurismo e Fascismo* (1924), which argues that Fascism is the natural extension of Futurism.—*Trans.*]

20. 'Let art flourish—and the world pass away.' This is a play on the motto of the sixteenth-century Holy Roman emperor Ferdinand I: 'Fiat iustitia et pereat mundus' ('Let justice be done and the world pass away').

**Satya P. Mohanty:** On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics

This essay was presented to audiences at the Universities of Wisconsin–Madison, California–Riverside, and Rome, as well as at Cornell, Rice, NYU, and Harvard. Early



drafts were read by Linda Alcoff, Michael Hames-García, Andrew Galloway, Terry Irwin, Dominick La Capra, Paula Moya, Ramon Saldivar, Paul Sawyer, and Harry Shaw, and I thank them for their helpful responses. A slightly different version of this chapter appears in *New Literary History* (Autumn 2001).

1. For an elaboration of these ideas, see Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Chapters 6 and 7; see also Moya's introduction and the essay by Caroline Hau in Moya and Hames-García, eds., *Reclaiming Identity*.

2. See, in addition to the discussion that follows, the brief discussion of Donna Haraway's notion of error in Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Chapter 7, note 19 (pp. 215–16).

3. Many postmodernist thinkers implicitly assume such impossible views of objectivity or truth when they make their epistemological arguments against objectivity. See, e.g., the discussion of Paul de Man in Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Chapter 1, esp. pp. 39–42. See also the discussion of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of the notion of objective social interests in Chapter 7, note 16 (pp. 212–13).

4. Foucault says, 'I admit to not being able to define, nor for even stronger reasons to propose, an ideal social model for the functioning of our ... society' (170–71). But his underlying arguments about power and knowledge apply not just to 'ideal' (in the sense of 'perfect') social models but also, as I have pointed out, to 'better' ones (than what we have now)—cf. his suspicion of the idea of a 'purer justice.' So it is not clear how we can criticize existing institutions to reveal their ideological distortions, which is part of what Foucault clearly wants to do: 'It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked' (171). How can we talk about the 'political violence' of existing institutions without drawing on normative notions, as well as on some conception of how such institutions can be 'better,' more 'just'? There is a basic confusion here. For a discussion of this kind of confusion more generally, see Taylor.

5. In both ways, however, they represent more than simply empirical information: that is, they include hunches and guesses, drawing on the imagination to make rational conjectures. This feature of values does not make them epistemically suspect, however, but rather—as the postpositivist philosophy of science tells us—fundamentally akin to any legitimate area of human inquiry: simultaneously empirical and theoretical, dependent for its progress not only on the right methodologies but also on social ideologies and practices (see Boyd; Kitcher). On reference, see Boyd, and the references in Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Chapter 2.

**Marquard Smith:** Visual Culture Studies: Questions of History, Theory, and Practice Thanks to Stuart Daniel, Jean-Baptiste Decavèle, Amelia Jones, Vivian Rehberg, and as always to Joanne Morra.

1. Mitchell (2002), 165–6.

2. There are extensive ongoing debates concerning the designation of the field of study under consideration here. See for instance *October's* 'Visual Culture Questionnaire' (1996), Walker and Chaplin (1997), Sturken and Cartwright (2001), Elkins (2002), Foster (2002), Mitchell (2002), and other texts cited in the references. In this chapter, 'visual culture studies'—rather than 'visual culture' or 'visual studies'—names the field of study while 'visual culture' designates the objects, subjects, media, and environments of study. In this I follow Walker and Chaplin (1997) for whom 'visual culture studies' does not designate a discipline so much as 'a hybrid, an inter- or multi-disciplinary enterprise formed as a consequence of a convergence of, or borrowing from, a variety of disciplines and methodologies' (1), that allows us to consider what Amelia Jones (2003) has called 'the formation of new interdisciplinary strategies of interpretation' (2).

3. There are of course many other books on the topic of visual culture that don't include the phrase itself in their title, including books on visual studies (often used interchangeably with visual culture). Some of the most important books and edited collections in the development of the area of inquiry include neither, such as Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*;

Jay, *Downcast Eyes*; and Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*. And there are also the accompanying journals, and journal articles, as well as conferences, departments, programs, and courses that have both spawned and been spawned by visual culture. In the English context, it is often said that the first avowedly visual culture journal is *Block*, 15 issues of which were produced by academics based at Middlesex University—then Middlesex Polytechnic—between 1979 and 1989.

4. See Rogoff (1998), 18.

5. On mobile screenic devices see Cooley (2004).

6. On scopic regimes see Jay (1993).

7. There is a concern, of course, within discussions of visual culture studies that the phrase can be applied in such undifferentiated and homogenizing ways.

8. Alpers (1996), 26. See also Alpers (1983) and Jay (1993).

9. Visuality has been defined by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999) as 'the visual register in which the image and visual meaning operate' (41), and more clearly by Amelia Jones (2003) who speaks of visuality as 'the condition of how we see and make meaning of what we see' (xx).

10. Crimp (1999), 52.

11. In noting Stuart Hall's insistence that Cultural Studies is a "discursive formation" rather than a discipline, Amelia Jones makes it possible for us to imagine also characterizing visual culture studies in the same way. See Jones (2003), 2.

12. Evans and Hall (1999) comment that Alpers is the first to use the phrase 'visual culture' in her *The Art of Describing* (xxv), but Alpers (1983) herself in that book attributes the phrase to Michael Baxandall (xxv). It is worth noting that those mentioned are firmly established within the discipline of art history. (Incidentally, for all the emphasis that visual culture studies is said by its detractors to place on analyses of the contemporary, it is well worth noting that these so-called earliest instances of visual cultural analysis are of fifteenth-century Italian and seventeenth-century Dutch culture.) Walker and Chaplin (1997) say that to the best of their knowledge, the first book to use the term 'visual culture' is in fact Caleb Gattegno's 1969 *Towards a Visual Culture: Educating through Television* (6, note 2). To my knowledge, no one writing on the development of visual culture studies from within art

history has noticed that in 1964 Marshall McLuhan used the phrase 'visual culture' in *Understanding Media*. It needed a scholar with a background in film and media studies, Raiford Guins, to spot this (in conversation).

13. For more on issues raised in points 3 and 4 see Walker and Chaplin (35–50).

14. Martin Jay, 'Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn,' *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1:3, December 2002, 267–78, 267, 268.

15. In *The Visual Culture Reader*, Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998) refers to visual culture as a 'tactic' (5). Recently Mieke Bal (2003) has referred to it as a 'movement' (6).

16. *October*'s 'Visual Culture Questionnaire' (1996) continues to be the most engaging critique of visual culture studies. In particular, the questions posed by the editors of the 'Questionnaire' rather than the answers to it accuse visual culture studies of ahistoricism (an over-attention to analyses of the contemporary) and of dematerializing the image. On this question of ahistoricism, it's well worth mentioning that art history, along with many other disciplines in the humanities, including visual culture studies, is no stranger to questions of historiography. From their inception, such questions necessarily plague, challenge, and offer ways forward for disciplines themselves. *October* is well aware of this. While the 'Questionnaire' has been a huge bone of contention in subsequent discussions of visual culture studies, a clear, extended elaboration of its underlying assertions written by one of its originators can be found in Foster (2002).

17. Roland Barthes, cited in Bal (2003), 7.

18. Mitchell (1995), 541; it is here that Mitchell first uses the wonderfully damning phrase 'safe default interdisciplinarity' (541) to characterize a particularly prevalent but ineffectual form of interdisciplinary study. It's a phrase that parallels Stephen Melville's comment in the *October* questionnaire (52–4). Carlo Ginsburg has also reasonably reminded us that 'there is nothing intrinsically innovative or subversive in an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge' (51–3).

19. See Donald Preziosi, 'Introduction,' *The Art of Art History* (1999), where he offers an astute account of art history's efforts to expand its object domain, its willingness and ability to extend its purview.

20. Rogoff (1998), 15.

21. Bal (2003), 23; Elkins (2002), 30.
  22. Muñoz (1996), 12.
  23. By 'place' I refer—following almost verbatim Vivian Rehberg's unpublished proposal for the exhibition entitled "The Poetics of Place"—to the social, cultural, political, and material dimensions and uses of a particular point or position that can be natural, built, deserted, inhabited, over-crowded, marginal and central, and foreign and familiar at the same time.
- María Fernández:** 'Life-like': Historicizing Process and Responsiveness in Digital Art
1. de Landa (2000), 21.
  2. Lynn (1999), 10.
  3. Massumi (2002), 5.
  4. Ibid., 192. See de Landa (2001) and de Landa (2003); in the latter he extends his argument to cover varied artistic practices.
  5. Langton (1999), 261.
  6. Some of these investigations were indebted to Turing (1950).
  7. Clarke 'From Thermodynamics to Virtuality,' in Clarke and Dalrymple (2002), 19, 20.
  8. Ibid., 26.
  9. For a succinct account of these developments see Gere (2002), 17–47. For a more extensive history see Winston (1998).
  10. Wiener (1954/1988), 16.
  11. Ibid., 24.
  12. Ibid., 21.
  13. von Bertalanffy (1972), 12, 92–3.
  14. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1977 physicist/chemist Ilya Prigogine stated that his fascination with time drove him to research irreversible processes in the mid 1940s and dissipative structures in the 1960s. These studies were vital to the later development of chaos theory. Prigogine credited computer science pioneers Alan Turing and John von Neumann, as well as the philosopher Henri Bergson, among his sources. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze also employed scientific ideas of irreversibility, nonlinearity, transformation, and instability. See Deleuze (1968). Links between science and philosophy continue to be vital to the theory and practice of digital arts.
  15. Popper (1977), 140.
  16. Ibid.; plates 236 and 238 and 239 illustrate several of these works included in the exhibition *Bewogen Beweging* at the Moderna Museet Stockholm in 1961.
  17. Agam worked with computers during his tenure at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University in 1968 where he taught a seminar entitled *Advanced Exploration in Visual Communication*.
  18. See Benthall (1972), 106.
  19. Pask (1971), 78.
  20. See Shanken (2002a), 1–97 (Ascott's early work is discussed in pages 26–35); and Shanken (2002b), 257.
  21. Ascott (2002b), 97, and (2002a), 110.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Penny (1994), 231–48; Hansen (2004).
  24. See Reichardt (1968).
  25. For a critical analysis of a-life narratives, see Hayles (1996), 146–64, and Whitelaw (2004), 181–205.
  26. Davis (1974), 77.
  27. Burnham (1973), 313.
  28. Ibid., 320.
  29. Burnham (1974), 16.
  30. Burnham (1973), 347–9.
  31. Medalla (2000), 299.
  32. [Ibid., 299 ff.]
  33. See the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency website (<http://www.darpa.mil/ipto/programs/sdr/>) and also the anonymous article 'Insects Help in Developing Military Hardware,' *Sydney Morning Herald* (8 August 2004), available at <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/08/25/1093246580311.html?oneclick=true>. Scientists have built several kinds of robotic birds including 'hummingbirds' developed by Dr Sunil Agrawal of the University of Delaware in 2003.
  34. Burnham (1973), 357.
  35. Kluver and Rauschenberg credited engineers as much as artists in the creation of technological works of art. This attitude was never embraced by the art world. Recently, theorist Lev Manovich proposed that a radical history of culture would acknowledge that 'the true cultural innovators of the last decades of the twentieth century were interface designers, computer game designers, music video directors and DJs—rather than painters, filmmakers or fiction writers.' Manovich (2003), 16.
  36. For an extensive and informative description of the building, see Garmire (1972), 173–246. The sound quotation is from *Experiments in Art and Technology* (1972), 275.
  37. Kluver in *ibid.*, x, xiii.
  38. Gere (2002), 108. For another view on the marginalization of electronic art, see Maxwell (1991).

39. See Davis (1974), 84–91; Shanken (2002a), 54–9; and Youngblood (1970).
40. On the liveliness of electronic images, see Marks (2002), 161–75.
41. Cited in Davis (1974), 89.
42. Krueger (2001), 113–14.
43. Nora and Minc (1978).
44. See Shanken (2002a), 65. ASCII is the standard code for representing English characters as numbers.
45. Ascott (2002c), 199.
46. Winston (1998), 330–1.
47. The piece employed Max/MSP, a set of graphical programming tools that has a broad range of artistic application from electronic music to media installations. David Zicarelli, an engineer specializing in interactive media software, developed MAX at IRCAM (the computer music institute at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris) in the late 1980s. MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) is a standard adopted by the electronic music industry for controlling devices, such as synthesizers and sound cards, that emit music. MIDI files contain not sounds but encoded information that describes the instruments, notes, pitch, and timing of the music, which can then be recreated on MIDI-capable devices.
48. See Springer (1996).
49. Duguët (1997), 44.
50. See Moravec (1988).
51. Grosz (1994); Lakoff and Johnson (1999); Massumi (2002); Hansen (2004).
52. CAVE was developed by Thomas Defantich and Dave Sandin at the Electronic Visualization Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1991.
53. See Whitelaw (2004), 8–9.
54. This research was published in von Neumann (1966).
55. Bense (1971), 57.
56. See Weibel (2003).
57. See Whitelaw (2004), 32–4.
58. See *ibid.*, 27.
59. See *ibid.*, 30–1 and Sims (2003), 512–15.
60. Penny (1999).
61. Maturana and Varela (1980).
62. Rinaldo (2004).

**Donald Preziosi:** The Art of Art History 1. See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Mediaeval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), and Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966) for introductions to the subject. On 19th-c. optical games and displays, see

- Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990). On the subject of museums and memory, see D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Museums and the Fabrication of Modernity*, forthcoming.
2. On this subject, see D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven and London, 1989), especially ch. 3, 'The Panoptic Gaze and the Anamorphic Archive', pp. 54–79. See also the references in n. 8 below.
  3. A poignant example being the discussions about 'visual culture' studies, formatted as a questionnaire circulated amongst friends of the editors of the New York art world journal *October*, 77 (Summer 1996), 25–70.
  4. The term is derived from the title of a Borges story 'Funes the Memorious', about an individual who remembered everything he had ever experienced; a *funeous* object or place incorporates traces of its entire history or ontogeny in its very structure. On the notion of funicity as employed in materials science, see Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, 188 n. 10.
  5. See in this regard Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cairo, 1988), and Zeynep Celik, *Displaying the Orient: The Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992) for interesting analyses of the modern European culture of spectacle and display as seen by non-Europeans.
  6. Other 'reading devices' or explanatory instruments would be anthropology, ethnography, history, the sciences, etc.; in short, any formal discursive formation. Modern tourism, for example, might be usefully understood as a 'scripting' of the world and its past in a manner complementary or parallel to professional art historical practice. In this regard, it might be recalled that, in England at least, companies that were to become by the end of the 19th century the major overseas tourist establishments (e.g. Cook's) began as companies organizing groups of urban and provincial visitors to London museums and expositions (beginning with the Crystal Palace exposition in the mid-19th c.).
  7. On which, see D. Preziosi, 'The Question of Art History', in J. Chandler, A. Davidson, and H. Harootian (eds.), *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and*

*Persuasion across the Disciplines* (Chicago, 1994), which examines the origins of Harvard University's Fogg Museum as the first institution specifically designed to house the entire ensemble of what then constituted art historical practices.

8. More has appeared on the subject during this time than during the entire two preceding centuries. While any list of recommendations will be largely idiosyncratic, the following represents a useful introductory cross-section of recent, easily available work: on the historical origins of modern museological practices, see O. Impey and A. MacGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1985); A. Lugli, *Naturalia et Mirabilia: Il collezionismo enciclopedico nelle Wunderkammern d'Europa* (Milan, 1983); J.-L. Deotte, *Le Musée: L'Origine de l'esthétique* (Paris, 1993); A. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre* (Cambridge, 1994). See also E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London, 1992); S. M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections* (Washington, 1992); K. Walsh, *The Representation of the Past* (London, 1992); and the anthologies D.J. Sherman and I. Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis, 1994); M. Pointon (ed.), *Art Apart* (Manchester, 1995). Other useful introductions include: F. Dagognet, *Le Musée sans Fin* (Paris, 1993); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London, 1995); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, 1994); and S. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC, 1993). See also D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body*. Major multi-volume series of studies on all aspects of museums and museology are currently being published by the Leicester University Press in the UK, and, on a smaller scale, by the Smithsonian Institution in the USA. The recent *Journal of the History of Collections* publishes important research on museum history and theory.

9. On the subject of perspective, see two important new studies: H. Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (Cambridge, 1994), and J. Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca, NY, 1994). An extensive evaluation of both volumes, and of the role of vision and the gaze in modern art historical practice, may

be found in a recently completed UCLA dissertation by Lyle Massey, forthcoming, 10. The classic studies are: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970), and id., *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972); and see also T.J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY, 1982). On the relationship of European Freemasonry to these developments, particularly as regards the origins of the modern museum (most of whose founders, in England, France, and America were Masons), see Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body*.

11. A preliminary version of part of the next section was published under the same title in *The Art Bulletin*, 77: 1 (March 1995), 13–15.

12. J. Lacan, 'Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York, 1977), 86.

13. See in relation to this Michel de Certeau, 'Psychoanalysis and its History', in M. de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1986), 3–16; and id., *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, 1988). Aspects of this question of historical juxtaposition and superimposition may also be found in Ronald Schleifer, Robert Con Davis, and Nancy Mergler, *Culture and Cognition: The Boundaries of Literary and Scientific Inquiry* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), esp. 1–63.

14. See Hayden White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', in H. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), 121–34.

15. On the question of distinctions between ego and subject, see J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York, 1993), esp. ch. 2, 'The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary', 57–91. See also Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversions* (New York, 1995) for an excellent discussion of the work of Jacques Lacan in relationship to the subject of ego-formation, as well as an insightful and thought-provoking critique of Butler.

16. Two explications of which within the parameters of traditional art history and aesthetic philosophy are Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' (1967) and Arthur Danto, 'Artworks and Real Things' (1973), both of which are reprinted in the anthology *Aesthetics Today* (revised edn.), ed. Morris Philipson and Paul Gudel (New York, 1980), 214–39 and 322–36.

17. See Part 2 below.
18. Sir John Summerson, 'What is a Professor of Fine Art?', a lecture on the occasion of his inauguration as the first Ferens Professor of Fine Art in the University of Hull (Hull, 1961), 17.
19. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London, 1977), particularly the chapter 'The Line and Light', 91–104.
20. The exhortation on the first page of the very widely circulated book by David Finn, *How to Visit a Museum* (New York, 1985). For an important critique of this and related 'communicational models', see J. Derrida, *SignepongelSignsponge*, trans. R. Rand (New York, 1984), 52–4; and Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, ch. 1, 'Sexual Signatures'; 9–24. See also a discussion of the Finn volume and related issues in D. Preziosi, 'Brain of the Earth's Body', in P. Duro (ed.), *The Rhetoric of the Frame* (Cambridge; in press 1996), and id., 'Museums/Collecting', in Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago, in press 1996).
21. See Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, and Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, for a general overview of the arguments here.
22. See Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, ch. 4, 'The Coy Science', 80–121.
23. On this subject as it pertains to the subject of modern national identity, see Karen Lang, *The German Monument, 1790–1914: Subjectivity, Memory, and National Identity*, UCLA doctoral dissertation, 1996, a portion of which is in *The Art Bulletin*, 79 (June 1997).
24. Essential to the burgeoning contemporary discourse on fetishism and modern culture is the work of William Pietz; see esp. his 'Fetishism', in Nelson and Schiff, eds, *Critical Terms for Art History*; 'The Problem of the Fetish', part 1, *Res*, 9 (Spring 1985), 12–13; Part 2, *Res*, 13 (Spring 1987), 23–45; and Part 3, *Res*, 16 (Autumn, 1988), 105–23. See also his 'Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx', in Emily Apter and William Pietz, (eds.), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 119–51. That anthology has a number of especially useful discussions of the subject as it pertains to research in various fields, including art history, such as A. Solomon-Godeau, 'The Legs of the Countess', 266–306, and K. Mercer, 'Reading Radical Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe', pp. 307–29. The observations by anthology co-editor E. Apter regarding the 'Eurocentric voyeurism of "other-collecting"' (p. 3) resonate with the perspectives being developed here. Other important recent sources on the subject include Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St Louis, 1981); Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in his *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster (New York, 1971), 162; and Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey and R. Rand (Lincoln, Neb., 1986), 226–7. See also the important essay by Vivian Sobchack, 'The Active Eye: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Vision', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 12: 3 (1990), 21–36. On fetishism for Kant, see I. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T.M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York, 1960), 165–8; Hegel discusses fetish worship in his *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1971), 42, and in his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. i (Oxford, 1975), 315–16.
25. On which, see above, n. 5, and Claire Farago, "'Vision Itself has its History": "Race," Nation, and Renaissance Art History', in C. Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650* (New Haven and London, 1995), 67–88.
26. See in this connection V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), 10 ff; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (revised and expanded edn., London, 1991).
27. A discussion of this may be found in D. Preziosi, 'The Wickerwork of Time', in *Rethinking Art History*, 40–4. On historicism, see *ibid.* 14 ff. See M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, esp. Part II, 'The Discursive Regularities', 21–76.
28. Most prominent of the earliest such evolutionary histories was Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors from Cimabue to Our Times* of 1550, which led up to the work of Vasari's own mentors and presumed audience, Michelangelo and Raphael.
29. See above, n. 5, and the following section.
30. This issue is taken up in some detail in Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body* in connection with an examination of Sir



- John Soane's Museum in London, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, and the Egyptian, Coptic, Islamic, and Graeco-Roman Museums in Cairo and Alexandria.
31. On the subject of Eurocentrism, see the important study by Vassilis Lambropoulos, *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), which discusses the perennial antitheses of Hebraic and Hellenic ethnocentrisms in the history of Europe, in connection with what he terms 'aesthetic faith'.
32. I owe this image to a fine paper by Zeynep Celik, "'Islamic' Architecture in French Colonial Discourse", presented at the 1996 UCLA Levi Della Vida Conference, Los Angeles, 11 May 1996.
33. On individuals as/on exhibit, see T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cairo, 1988), and Meg Armstrong, "'A Jumble of Foreignness": The Sublime Musayums of Nineteenth-Century Fairs and Expositions', *Cultural Critique*, 23 (Winter 1992-3), 199-250. In the latter is a fascinating discussion of the exhibition of a living Turk (pp. 222-3).
34. On which see J. Derrida, 'The Colossal', Part IV of 'Parergon' in his *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago, 1987), 119-47.
35. See Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', in T. Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (New York, 1989), 44-70.
36. Which can be discovered or unearthed in the 'best' of, say, the carvings of the Inuit peoples, or in aboriginal bark paintings, and which can thereby be marketed as such; as 'classic' examples of a (native) genre. The marketing itself constitutes a mode of canonizing and classicizing of the 'typical', which characteristically feeds back on the contemporary production of 'marketable' 'typical', i.e. 'classical', 'examples' of a (reified) genre. See in this connection the discussion on the organization of the original Fogg Museum curriculum in art history as beginning with a compulsory indoctrination into good design practice as a prerequisite for studying art history, in Preziosi, 'The Question of Art History' (above, n. 7). The role of Freemasonry in this is discussed in Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body*, forthcoming.
37. See the essays by Thomas Keenan, 'The Point is to (Ex) Change It: Reading *Capital*, Rhetorically', in Apter and Pietz (eds.), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, 152-85, and by William Pietz, 'Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx', 119-51.
38. On the question of the archive, see M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, esp. Part III, 'The Statement and the Archive', 79-131; J. Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics*, 25:2 (Summer 1995), 9-63.
39. On which see Eugenio Donato, 'Flaubert and the Quest for Fiction', in Donato, *The Script of Decadence* (New York, 1993), 64. See also Henry Sussman, 'Death and the Critics: Eugenio Donato's Script of Decadence', *Diacritics*, 25:3 (Fall 1995), 74-87.
40. This is quite explicit in the writings of early museum founders in the late 18th c.; see e.g. Alexander Lenoir, who spelled out the nature of the political and pedagogical motivations and justifications for new museums in Paris in his *Musée des monuments* (Paris, 1806), 36; see also F. Dagognet, *Le Musée sans fin* (Paris, 1993) 103-23.
41. See Alain Schnapp, *The Conquest of the Past*, forthcoming.
42. See the interesting hypotheses developed by Whitney Davis in his essay 'Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History' (*Journal of Homosexuality*, 27: 1/2 (1994), 141-59, and reprinted here in this collection) regarding this mode of erotic conflation. If Davis is correct, then Winckelmann's move resonates quite clearly with certain strains of the very ancient European arts of memory, in particular the work of *lectio* as propounded by Hugh of St Victor, who defines such 'tropological' interactions with textual entities as that of transforming a text onto and into one's self: see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* ch. 5, 'Memory and the Ethics of Reading', 156-88, and app. A, 261-6.
43. On fetishism in Kant, see above, n. 24.
44. A key 19th-c. exemplar being the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford: see Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body*, ch. 2.
45. It may be asked if certain theoretical positions within the modern academic discipline of art history correspond to different emphases upon one or another dimension of this social and epistemological enterprise.
46. In one sense, these are all solutions to the problem of designing a memory, whether one's own or a machine's. In which case, they represent recent metamorphoses of a very ancient and rich European

tradition; see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 16–45 and ch. 156–88.

47. On which, see Michel de Certeau, 'Psychoanalysis and its History', in id., *Heterologies*, (Minneapolis, 1986), 3–16.

48. On the semiotic status of the disciplinary object as *irreducibly ambivalent*, see Preziosi, 'Brain of the Earth's Body', in Duro (ed.), *The Rhetoric of the Frame* (Cambridge, 1996), 96–110; and 'Collecting/

Museums', in Nelson and Schiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago, 1996), 281–91.

49. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 86.

50. On relativism vs. relativity, see Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body*, ch. 1, on Sir John Soane's Museum (preserved in its final state at Soane's death in 1837) as the first fully realized art historical instance of the latter.

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**Judith Butler**, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4, Dec. 1988 (taken from Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism & Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 392–401.

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30. Asclepius with serpent. Serpentarius, star constellation. Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit (Cod. Voss. Q79.f.10b), Leiden.
31. Guilio Romano: *Vendor of Antidote against Snake Bites*. Fresco. Palazzo del Te, Mantua/ photo Alinari Archives, Florence.
32. Serpent and Crucifixion, 14th century. Fragment of a *Biblia Pauperum*, Flanders or Germany. British Library (Add.31303, f.2), London.
33. Hopi schoolboy's drawing. Photograph, 1895–96, Aby Warburg. The Warburg Institute, University of London.
34. 'Children stand before a cave.' Photograph, 1895–96, Aby Warburg. The Warburg Institute, University of London.
35. 'Uncle Sam.' Photograph, 1895–96, Aby Warburg. The Warburg Institute, University of London.
36. Aby Warburg with unidentified Hopi Dancer, Oraibi, Arizona, May 1896.
37. Jean de Léry, illustration for Chapter 8 of *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil autrement dite Amérique*, (Geneva, 1578). British Library, London (576.c.29).
38. Jean de Léry, illustration for Chapters 14 and 15 of *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil autrement dite Amérique*, (Geneva, 1578). British Library, London (576.c.29).
39. Andreas Vesalius, 'Anterior View of the Body', Plate 1, Book 2, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543). British Library, London (548.i.2(1)).
40. Parte Prima. Disegno, ? sixteenth century.
41. Magdalena de Passe, *Apollo and Coronis*. Engraving after Adam Elsheimer, c. 1625 © Trustees of the British Museum, London.
42. Vincent van Gogh, *A Pair of Shoes*, Paris, 1886, oil on canvas, 72 × 55cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent Van Gogh Foundation; so011 V/1962).
43. René Magritte, *The Red Model*, (Le Modèle rouge), 1935, oil on canvas, 60 × 45cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris/Lauros-Giraudon/Bridgeman Art Library/© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2008.
44. René Magritte, *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (La Philosophie dans le boudoir), 1947. Private Collection/Sotheby's New York/© ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London 2008
45. René Magritte, *The Well of Truth* (Le Puits de vérité), 1963. Museum of Modern Art, Toyama/© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2008.
- 46, 47. Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1974–5. Courtesy the artist.
48. Sherrie Levine, *After Edward Weston (#2)*, 1980, black and white photograph, 25.4 × 20.3 cm. Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.
49. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still (#54)*, 1980. Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.
50. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)*, 1981, photograph, 140 × 104 cm. Ydesa Art Foundation, Toronto/courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York..
51. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Charles Bowman*, 1980. © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation/courtesy Art and Commerce, New York.
52. François Boucher, *Toilet of Venus*, 1751, oil on canvas, 108.3 × 85.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 1920 (20.155.9). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
53. Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 103.5 × 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris/ Bridgeman Art Library, London.
54. J. A. D. Ingres, *Odalisque with a Slave*, 1839–1840, oil on canvas, 72 × 100.3 cm. Fogg Art Museum (Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop), Harvard University Art Museums/Bridgeman Art Library.
55. Renee Cox, *Yo Mama*, 1993, silver gelatin print, 213.4 × 116.8 cm. Courtesy the artist and Von Lintel Gallery, New York. All Rights Reserved.
56. Andy Warhol, *Sex Parts*, 1978. Photograph Jennifer Doyle. © 2008 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ DACS, London.
57. The Glyptothek, Munich. Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.



58. The National Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Photo Carol Duncan.
59. Instructions to visitors to the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC. Photo Carol Duncan.
60. National Gallery, Washington DC: gallery with a work by Leonardo da Vinci. Photo Carol Duncan.
61. Modern art in the Tate Gallery, London. Photo Carol Duncan.
62. Edward Ihnatowicz, *Senster*, 1971 (*in situ*). Courtesy Olga J. Ihnatowicz/photo courtesy Alex Zivanovic/Lansdown Centre for Electronic Arts.
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65. Ken Rinaldo, *Autopoiesis*, 2000. *Alien Intelligence* exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki. Courtesy the artist/photo courtesy Central Art Archives, Helsinki/Pirje Mykkunen.

The publisher and author apologize for any errors or omissions in the above list. If contacted they will be pleased to rectify these.

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# Biographical Notes

**Mieke Bal** is Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences Professor and is associated with the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis in Amsterdam. Among her books are *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word Image Opposition* (1994), *Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis* (1994, with Inge Boer), *Double Exposures: Subject of Cultural Analysis* (1996), and *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002).

**Stephen Bann** is Professor of the History of Art, University of Bristol; among his books on the relationships between art history and visual culture are *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (1984), *The True Vine: On Visual Representation and Western Tradition* (1989), and *Ways Around Modernism: Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism in the Visual Arts* (2006).

**Michael Baxandall** is Professor Emeritus of Art History at the University of California, Berkeley, and formerly Professor of the History of the Classical Tradition at the Warburg Institute, University of London. His publications include *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (1972), *Giotto and the Orators* (1971), *Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (1980), and *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1987).

**Walter Benjamin** (1892–1940) was a social and cultural critic and philosopher and the author of the monumental and unfinished *The Arcades Project* (1999, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin), and *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on the Media* (2008, edited by Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin).

**Norman Bryson** is Professor in the Department of Visual Arts, University of California, San Diego, and former Director of the Ph.D. Programme in Visual and Theoretical Studies at the Slade School of

Fine Art, University of London. Among his books are *Vision and Painting: The Logic of Gaze* (1983), *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (1983), *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* (1988), and *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (1990).

**Judith Butler** is Maxine Elliot Professor in the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (2000), and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005).

**Rey Chow** is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities in the Department of Modern Culture and Media at Brown University and the author of *Women and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between East and West* (1991), *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Modern Chinese Cinema* (1995), and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2006).

**Hubert Damisch** is the former Director of the Centre for the History and Theory of Art at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. Among his many books are *Le Jugement de Paris* (1992), *The Origin of Perspective* (1995, trans. J. Goodman), and *Skyline: The Narcissistic City* (2001, trans. John Goodman).

**Whitney Davis** is Professor of History and Theory of Ancient and Modern Art, University of California, Berkeley, and is the author of *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (1992), *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History* (1994), and *Replications: Art History, Psychoanalysis* (1996).

**Jacques Derrida** (1930–2004) was one of the foremost philosophers of the twentieth century, and professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales,

Paris. Among his many books are *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1976), *Positions* (1981), *Dissemination* (1981), *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), *Of Grammatology* (1976), *The Truth in Painting* (1987, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod), *The Post Card* (1987), *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), *Of Hospitality* (2000), *Acts of Religion* (2002), *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive, and Psyche: Inventions of the Other; Vols. I and II* (2007, 2008).

**Jennifer Doyle** teaches American literature, gender studies, and visual studies at the University of California, Riverside, and is the author of *Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire* (2006), co-editor (with Amelia Jones) of *New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture* (Signs, Spring 2006), and co-editor (with Jonathan Flatley and José Muñoz) of *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (2006).

**Carol Duncan** is Professor Emerita at Ramapo College of New Jersey and is the author of two books on art history and museums, *Aesthetics of Power: Essays in the Critical History of Art* (1993), and *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (1995).

**Claire Farago** is Professor of Art History at the University of Colorado and the author of *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation* (1992), *Reframing the Renaissance* (1995), *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of Time* (2003, ed. and contrib. with Robert Zwijnenberg), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (2004, ed. and contrib. with Donald Preziosi), and *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds* (2006, with Donna Pierce).

**María Fernández** teaches the history and theory of digital art in the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University, and is the co-author of *Domain Errors! Cyberfeminist Practices* (2003, with Faith Wilding and Michelle Wright).

**Michel Foucault** (1926–84) was a major philosopher and critical historian, whose work had a profound effect upon many disciplines. Among his many publications are *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1969), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

**Ernst Gombrich** (1909–2001), one of the leading art historians of the twentieth century, was Director and Professor of History of the Classical Tradition at the Warburg Institute, University of London, 1959–76, and Slade Professor at both Oxford and Cambridge. His many publications include *The Story of Art* (1950), *Art and Illusion*

(1960), and *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art* (1994).

**Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel**

(1770–1831) was a German philosopher and teacher whose published writings were profoundly influential on modern ideas on art, philosophy, history, and the state. His *Aesthetics: Lectures on the Fine Arts* were delivered at the University of Berlin between 1820 and 1830 (1975, trans. T. M. Knox).

**Martin Heidegger** (1889–1976) was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century; among his important works were *Being and Time* (1927) and *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936).

**Amelia Jones** is Pilkington Chair and Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Manchester; her publications include *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (1994), *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* (1999), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (ed., 2003), *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (2004), and *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945* (2006),

**Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804) is arguably the most influential modern philosopher. His greatest achievement—the *Critique of Pure Reason*—was also his first major publication, appearing in 1781. This was followed by *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and the *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

**Mary Kelly** is one of the most influential artists and critics in the contemporary world, whose project-based works have included *Post-Partum Document* (1973–9), *Interim* (1984–9), and *Gloria Patri* (1992). She is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studio in the Art Department at UCLA, of which she is former Chair. Among her recent publications are *Imaging Desire* (1996), *Post-Partum Document* (1998), and *Rereading Post-Partum Document* (1999).

**Stephen Melville** is Professor of Art History at Ohio State University. His books include *Vision and Textuality* (1995, ed. with Bill Readings), *Seams: Art as a Philosophical Context: Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture* (1996, with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe), and *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (2001, with Philip Armstrong and Laura Lisbon).

**Timothy Mitchell** is Professor in the Department of Politics at New York University and is the author of *Colonizing Egypt* (1991), and *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (2002).

**Satya Mohanty** is Professor of English at Cornell University and is the author of *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (1997).

**Craig Owens** (1950–90) was a prominent New York art critic among whose many publications was *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (1992).

**Erwin Panofsky** (1892–1968), one of the associates of Aby Warburg, taught in Hamburg before coming to New York in 1934. His most influential books were *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (1924, trans. J. J. S. Peake), *Studies in Iconology* (1939; 1962), *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2 vols. (1953), and *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art* (1960).

**William Pietz** has written extensively on aspects of fetishism and modernity, and was co-author of *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (1993, with Emily Apter).

**Alois Riegl** (1858–1905) was a key figure in the establishment of the modern principles of art historical practice; he was the author of *Late Roman Art Industry* (1985, trans. R. Winkes).

**D. N. Rodowick** is Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies, Harvard University, and the author of *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), and *The Afterimage of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy* (2008).

**Meyer Schapiro** (1904–96) was Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts, Columbia University, New York. His numerous publications included books on van Gogh, Cézanne, and papers on Romanesque art, modern art, and late antique, early Christian, and medieval art.

**Marquard Smith** is Senior Lecturer in Visual Culture at Kingston University, London, editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Visual Culture*, and co-editor of *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (2007, with Joanne Mora).

**David Summers** is William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of the History of Art at the

University of Virginia. He is the author of *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (1981), *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (1987), and *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003).

**Giorgio Vasari** (1511–1574) was a painter and architect and most famously known as the author of *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550 and 1568).

**Aby Warburg** (1866–1929) was an interdisciplinary cultural historian whose own scholarship (on the survival and transformation of the classical tradition) and whose library (first in Hamburg and later in London) were crucial factors influencing the work of twentieth-century scholars such as Ernst Cassirer and Erwin Panofsky. The Warburg Library and Institute was moved to London in 1933 by Warburg's associate Fritz Saxl; it was incorporated into the University of London in 1944.

**Johann Joachim Winckelmann** (1717–68) was the founder of the discipline of art history. He published his *History of Ancient Art* in Dresden, 1764, and this is often taken to be the first true 'history of art'.

**Edgar Wind** (1900–71) was the author of many books on modern and early modern art history, including *Art and Anarchy* (1985), *Hume and the Heroic Portrait: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Imagery* (1986), and *Eloquence of Symbols: Studies in Humanist Art* (ed. 1993, with Jaynie Anderson).

**Heinrich Wölfflin** (1864–1945) was one of the most influential and popular teachers of art history in Switzerland and Germany. His most important book was *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, 'Fundamental Concepts of Art History', published in 1915. Its seventh edition was translated by M. D. Hottinger in 1932 as *Principles of Art History*.

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# Glossary

The most complete contemporary glossary of art historical terms is the encyclopaedic 'A–Z section' of Paul Duro and Michael Greenhalgh's *Essential Art History* (London, 1993), 25–311. A shorter glossary of more general terms and issues may be found in the anthology *Art History and its Methods*, edited by Eric Fernie (London, 1995), 323–68. Most of the technical terms used in this volume are discussed and explained in the text, either in the chapter introductions or in the readings. The following is a brief summary of the more important terms found in the text.

*Aesthetic(s)*: systematic philosophical speculation on the nature of concepts of beauty and taste began during the mid-eighteenth century. The term *aesthetic* was proposed by Baumgarten (see Ch. 2) as the complement to rational or logical thinking; it was also one pole of an Enlightenment (q.v.) opposition with *fetishism* (see below and essay no. 36). The term was adapted from the ancient Greek *aisthetikos*, referring to feeling or sense-perception. In the twentieth century, the term has become a synonym for the 'fine arts' (q.v.) in contrast to the 'decorative' or 'applied' arts.

*Anamorphosis*: 'without shape' (Gk: anamorphic). The picture on the cover of this book is of the painting by Hans Holbein (*The Ambassadors*, 1533; London: National Gallery) in which the lower central portion is a grotesquely distorted image, anamorphic. It will only resemble a three-dimensional form (here a skull) by placing the eye close to one side of the picture-plane.

*Anthropology*: the disciplinary name for a network of investigations of the past and present of the human species, ranging from the 'physical' (concerned with relations of humans to the remainder of the planetary biosphere) to the 'cultural' (q.v.) and

'symbolic' (q.v.) (referring to the social and artefactual aspects of human behaviour). The concerns of art history and anthropology have overlapped since their professional beginnings in the nineteenth century. By the latter half of the twentieth century art historians became more explicitly engaged with understanding artefacts through their social and cultural uses and functions, whilst anthropologists have increasingly concerned themselves with aspects of artefacts traditionally studied by art historians, such as style, aesthetics, and questions of value and taste.

*Antiquity, Antiquarian(ism)*: antiquarian interests in the past, whether of Greek or Roman antiquity or of the cultural artefacts of non-European peoples and cultures, have been concerned since early modern times with the acquisition and collection of data, particularly the material remains of objects of specific kinds or belonging to certain groups. In the twentieth century the term accrued negative connotations, referring to an a-historical interest in cultural artefacts, or a lack of interest in the social life and functions of things.

*Archaeology*: in contrast to antiquarianism, archaeological interest in the material evidence of past societies is commonly linked to attempts to reconstruct the social and historical contexts in which cultural artefacts were used and acquired significance. In this respect, archaeology—one of whose modern 'founders' (also a 'founder' of art history) was Winckelmann (see Ch. 1)—complements the concerns of anthropology, whilst differing from it (and from modern art history) in its direct concern with excavation and with the technical investigation of aspects of unearthed material. At the same time, archaeology distinguished its domain from

history in its greater emphasis on material culture in contrast to textual records. Traditionally, archaeologists have been less concerned than art historians with such issues as aesthetics, quality, and taste.

*Art history*: the principal concern of art history has been the construction of historically grounded explanations for why cultural artefacts—works of art—appear as they do (see essay no. 1). Definitions of art have varied widely over the centuries. The acknowledged object-domain of the academic discipline has varied from a select assemblage of materials considered to be of the highest quality (art or ‘fine’ art (q.v.); see ‘canon’ below) produced in the past or the present, to the entire range of objects of human manufacture (‘visual culture’) playing roles in individual and social life. While art historians traditionally concerned themselves primarily with the ‘aesthetic’ dimensions of cultural artefacts, leaving other aspects of the lives and functions of objects to historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, philosophers, and psychologists, in the latter half of the twentieth century they increasingly attended to a wider range of evidence deemed necessary to the basic task of explaining why objects appear as they do. The last quarter of the twentieth century was characterized by intense disputes over the primacy or necessity of one or another approach to disciplinary knowledge-production, and the beginnings of an acknowledgement of an inevitable and possibly inescapable diversity of disciplinary subject-matters, theories (q.v.) and methodologies (q.v.). Whether in the twenty-first century what is now called art history comes to resemble a diffuse, heterogeneous field such as present-day anthropology, or diversifies into several institutionally distinct areas of interest and expertise, is unclear.

*Canon*: traditionally, a body of (art) work regarded by an influential group of professionals as of the highest quality of its type (see ‘fine art’; ‘classicism’). More currently, the term has come to apply to any body of materials of the greatest significance or pertinence to the interests of a particular (national, social, political, racial, class, or gender) group. Because of the core interest of the discipline of art history in questions of quality, taste, and social and historical

significance, the systemic institutional role of ‘canonization’ has remained intact, even if the justifications and admissible materials have differed markedly. Many of the debates over art historical ‘theory’ and ‘methodology’ during the last quarter of the twentieth century also concerned the valorization or canonization of specific subject-matters worthy of professional or public attention. In this regard, one group’s ‘masterpieces’ and another’s ‘politically correct’ or ‘socially relevant’ artworks perform equivalent disciplinary roles in maintaining hierarchical distinctions amongst cultural objects—that is, in maintaining a belief that certain kinds and styles of artefacts provide more typical or deeper insights into the mentality or character of an individual or group.

*Classicism*: originally derived from Roman maritime vocabulary, denoting the most seaworthy ships in a fleet (*classis*), ‘classical’ has come to refer generally to works considered by a dominant group to be the best of their kind, as well as those whose qualities are most enduring. In art history, the term has had multiple, and often superimposed roles. By extension it has referred to the most typical or characteristic works or products of a person, group, society, or nation. Both time-bound and a-historical, ‘classic’ has referred, on the one hand, to absolute, even transhistorically superior quality. On the other hand, it has been a relational term, part of the pervasive organic metaphor projected upon the history of artworks, the period after the ‘archaic’ or early (childhood) phases of development, representing the ‘adult’ or fully mature phase of a style, before its decline into (baroque) senescence. By the late twentieth century, virtually any social or cultural phenomenon could be designated as having a ‘classic’ quality—from soft drinks to medical syndromes. Less common today is the (early nineteenth-century) usage of the term as the (earlier) polar (rational, lucid) opposite of the (later irrational, emotional) ‘romanticism’ in art, music, literature, and philosophy.

*Collection*: the assembly of objects of singular or diverse types according to particular criteria justifying their association in a particular place. Collecting is an extremely ancient practice in many parts of the world, from Europe to East Asia. Both the Greeks and (on a much more massive



scale) the Romans formed collections of art and precious objects, both as (semi-) public treasury-offerings in temples and sanctuaries, and on a private scale. By the late twentieth century, collecting became a pastime pursued by large segments of modern populations, for whom distinctions between the consumption of commodities and the collection of all kinds of objects and phenomena have often been a matter of degree rather than of kind, both activities subsumed into the practice of constructing identity and forging social allegiances. See 'museum', 'exhibition'.

*Connoisseurship*: the term *connoisseur* referred generally to a person with expert knowledge; connoisseurship in matters of art has a long history in Europe. In the Renaissance, the connoisseurship of artworks (often practised by those with professional medical skills) concerned the diagnostic evaluation of evidence (or, in semiotic terms, the 'signs') that an object might provide for skill in artistry and/or authentic (and, typically, ancient) origins or provenance. The most famous connoisseurs in European art history were Vasari (sixteenth century), Winckelmann (eighteenth century), Morelli (nineteenth century), and Berenson (early twentieth century). Connoisseurship today commonly entails an ability to discern original or authentic works (or collections of works) from copies or forgeries, on the assumption that the former exhibit finer skill or aesthetic integrity than the latter.

*Criticism*: closely allied to aspects of connoisseurship, art criticism normally entailed an ability to discern quality and skill in works, as defined by particular standards or canons of taste common to a time or place. As a modern professional public practice, art criticism came to be increasingly allied in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with commodity market forces and their connection to the monitoring of (and fabrication of) changing trends in taste and fashion.

*Culture*: in the widest sense, the entire set of means, materials, and methods through which a society or social group fabricates and maintains its realities. In a more narrow modern sense, the term is commonly used to denote a certain range of practices and materials (e.g. 'material culture'; 'visual culture') considered by one or another

dominant or subordinate social group to refer to practices and products typical or characteristic of themselves individually or collectively. Such phenomena often overlap with notions of a 'canon' (q.v.) or tradition in practice, values, taste, or attitude. The term culture has also been employed relationally, in a bipolar opposition with 'nature', as referring to all those productions stemming from human social agency—as opposed to those which might be traced to biologically or genetically inherited abilities. Art was traditionally characterized as a mode of cultural production: as reflecting a pan-human (and hence genetically based) tendency towards making, building, representing, or narrating, which takes culturally specific forms or manifestations.

*Deconstruction*: in certain respects, deconstruction (which is not a 'method' as such; on this term, coined by Jacques Derrida, see Ch. 8) entails an approach to the 'reading' of texts (or artefacts) of any kind 'against the grain' of their ostensible agendas—'anamorphically', so to speak—and in such a way as to foreground their internal self-contradictions (or 'otherness'), and the gaps between intention and effect. No less dependent upon diagnostic or semiotic skills than connoisseurship, while constituting a critique of certain key idealist aspects of structuralist (q.v.) semiotics, deconstructive approaches towards the visual environment, whether in the production or interpretation of art and architecture, were widely influential in many humanities and social-science disciplines during the last quarter of the twentieth century, as part of the 'poststructuralist' (q.v.) facets of critical and theoretical writing and practice.

*Enlightenment*: the liberal, pro-scientific, rationalist philosophical movement (see essay no. 5, Ch. 2) beginning in France in the eighteenth century, and entailing the celebration of the modern nation-state and its representative community groups and institutions (from universal education to art museums) as the most effective and socially responsible medium for the improvement of all aspects of human life.

*Exhibition*: generally, the public display of artworks in modern times, most likely originating historically in Europe in the practice of making objects for sale or

dissemination (as souvenirs or mementos) at religious fairs or festivals. With the rise of the artistic academies (and the rise of the social status of artists) during the Renaissance (see Ch. 1), modern exhibitionary practice came to be standardized as a necessary facet of artistic production, whereby the latest works by an individual or workshop were assembled for view (and/or sale) to the public. Closely tied to this was the rise of galleries and auction houses in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, along with the rise of connoisseurship and art criticism as professional practices.

*Feminism*: feminist art practice and feminist art history became important stages for the political and ideological critique of patriarchy and patriarchal institutions, beginning in the 1960s in Europe and America (see Ch. 7). In art history, feminist theory and criticism focused upon a wide variety of issues, from the incorporation into the disciplinary canon of female artists whose work or even identity had been either marginalized, trivialized, or rendered invisible, to challenges of a foundational nature to art historical and critical practices—to an entire system of knowledge-production—which was held to be gender-biased. Feminist practice and theory in art and art history has entailed questioning many essential (and largely unquestioned) assumptions regarding everything from the nature of the art ‘object’ to gendered perception and the very structure of social and cultural institutions.

*Fetish(ism)*: in its common modern usage, the term (derived ultimately, via the Portuguese *fetisso*, from the late Latin term *factitius*, an adjective meaning that which relates to things made) refers to an obsessive concern with, and/or an attribution of ‘magical’ agency to human or non-human objects. Early definitions of ‘art’ and of the ‘aesthetic’ during the Enlightenment (see Ch. 1 and Ch. 9, the final essay) entailed the articulation of ways to situate the latter with respect to the former, commonly as defining an opposition between a ‘civilized’ and ‘disinterested’ interaction with objects and things (read ‘European’) and a ‘primitive’ attachment to things (read ‘African’ or ‘pagan’). See also ‘sublime’, below.

*Fine art(s)*: the term had its origins in distinctions made during the Renaissance

between artefacts serving predominantly functional or decorative ends (the ‘applied’ arts or ‘practical’ crafts) and those serving higher intellectual and liberal (i.e. liberating) ends. Painting, sculpture, and architecture came to be framed (potentially) as forms of intellectual work, on a par or complementary to that of writing. The distinction is equally grounded in differences in the social and class status of producers, and in the professional circumstances of their training (in academies for ‘fine’ artists, in guilds for craftspeople), as discussed by Vasari and other artists and architects such as Leonardo da Vinci and Alberti.

*Formalism*: commonly refers to an approach to the appreciation and analysis of artefacts privileging their formal or morphological qualities over (or without respect to) other aspects of a work’s production, reception, subject-matter, or thematic significance. The term has had a variety of inflections during the history of art history, forming for example a primary organizing paradigm for Wölfflin’s 1915 *Principles of Art History* (see Ch. 3) or for broadly based attempts to articulate a universally applicable framework for the analysis of all products of human manufacture at all times and places (see Ch. 4 and 5). In the mid-twentieth century, the term came to have positive connotations in modernist art criticism, privileging non-figurative art over nineteenth-century narrative or realist art. Panofsky’s ‘iconographic’ methodology (q.v.) was a reaction to Wölfflin’s extreme formalism, which was also opposed by ‘social’ historians (q.v.) of art, for whom content (as the other pole in a ‘form–content’ opposition) came to be privileged.

*Historicism*: generally, the belief that an adequate understanding of any phenomenon and its value can best be gained by considering it in terms of its place within a process of development or evolution. Art history, or history in general, were modern forms of knowledge-production originating during the European Enlightenment as ways of formatting the relationships between past and present in a narrative or causal fashion, as a linear, largely progressive, development. Historicism may be understood as an extreme version of such a paradigm, often allied to metaphysical, spiritualist, or teleological construals of human experience

(see the section on Hegel, Ch. 2, and Ch. 9, the final essay).

*Historiography*: commonly used to refer to the specific historical development of an institution or discipline. In recent years it has also come to imply a critical perspective upon the transitoriness and mutability of particular views on history, art, and their interrelationships, and a concern with delineating the development of different theoretical and methodological approaches to art and its histories. See 'psychoanalysis' below.

*Iconography, Iconology* although the term 'iconology' was used during the Renaissance to suggest a systematic accounting for the appearance and variety of imagery, it was appropriated in the twentieth century by Erwin Panofsky (see Ch. 5) in a systemic relationship with what he termed in complementary fashion 'iconography', referring to the study of subject-matter in art. Panofsky's 'iconology' referred to the study of the deeper meanings of artworks. An iconographic interest in works implied a broad knowledge of a work's referential subject-matter as a particular variation upon or development out of a common stock of images and themes.

*Kunstwollen*: the 'force' or 'will' behind the production of and motivation for art, primarily understood on a broad communal, national, ethnic, or racial scale (see Ch. 4 on Riegl).

*Marxist art history*: one branch of the 'social history' of art (q.v.) achieving prominence during the third quarter of the twentieth century mostly amongst historians of modern realist painting. 'Marxist' art history was devoted to articulating ways in which the thesis of Karl Marx (1818–83) that the modes of economic production in material life bore a determinate relationship to the character of social, political, and spiritual life might provide a useful methodological paradigm for understanding the place and role of art in society and culture. Essentially a variant of Hegel's historicist-idealist argument (see Ch. 2) that human history was a reflection or representation of the progress of a divine or world Spirit towards self-realization, Marx's historical 'materialism' was structurally and theoretically identical to its Hegelian complement. Marxist art

historians sought to articulate possible ways in which an economic social 'base' and its artistic or cultural 'superstructure' could be related in a causal manner, whether in fine detail or more broadly.

*Meaning*: generally, the significance or referential content of an art work; the values or issues, themes, or subject-matter which it may be said to 'contain' or point to.

*Medium*: the term has had a variety of meanings, referring to the actual matter or material vehicle of a work, as well as to the general idea that any artwork is a 'medium' standing between the artist and his or her intentions, and the viewer or user of a work. In this sense the object would be understood as a means by which the former (intention) is conveyed to the latter. Generally speaking, the term parallels similar understandings of speech and language, wherein a spoken utterance's auditory 'medium' is taken to be the vehicle for transferring the intentions (or 'meanings') of a speaker to a listener.

*Methodology*: a particular way of approaching the analysis of an artwork, comprising sets of principles referring to the kinds of evidence that are to be admissible as adequate or sufficient in explaining why an object appears as it does. Commonly paired with 'theory' in contemporary art historical pedagogy, and referring to the historical study of the development of different ways of analysing and conceiving of art historical objects of study.

*Modernity*: a relational term, in contrast to 'antiquity', which as such has been employed within much of European history since the early Renaissance as a synonym for the present artwork (mostly anti-naturalist) produced in the nineteenth and/or twentieth centuries. Discourse on 'postmodernism' (q.v.), begun in the 1960s, had the effect of framing modernity and artistic modernism within fixed historical parameters, although views have been divided as to precisely what those parameters might be. In the arts and in social and cultural history, modernity may be broadly construed as referring to the period beginning with the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, and the rise of the 'modern' nation-state, its colonial and imperial extensions, along with an entire scientific system of

knowledge-production, extending into the 1960s. The (ideally monocultural) nation-state of modernity is seen by some as being transcended by the (multicultural) contemporary world.

*Museum*: derived from the Greek *mousetion* or home of the Muses, the personifications of various arts and sciences. (See 'Wunderkammer' below.) Museums as public collections of objects (in most cases formerly in private hands) became an important feature of the new nation-states of Europe beginning in the late eighteenth century; by the mid-nineteenth century, and paralleling the rise of national expositions, fairs, and exhibitions, museums became a necessary component of cities large and small throughout Europe and its extensions as the venues for the promotion of public scientific and cultural knowledge, as well as for articulating the history and evolution of particular national and ethnic groups by means of historically organized displays of objects and art works.

*Orientalism*: during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term referred to the European romantic interest in the 'Orient', construed widely as encompassing both the Middle and Far East. It was used most commonly to refer to artists and writers who travelled amongst and depicted the (largely Muslim) peoples and places of the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the term acquired a distinctly critical edge since the publication by Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, which sparked the extensive investigation of the historical and ideological circumstances surrounding the fabrication of the semitic Near East as the antirationalist, antimodern, anti-humanist, and semi-barbaric antithesis to European modernity: Europe's other and anterior.

*Postmodernism*: see 'modernity' above. 'Postmodernity' has been defined both as a historical period beginning in the 1960s and contesting modernity (as modernity itself contested traditional knowledge during the eighteenth century), and as one of modernity's antitheses, coexisting with it since the Enlightenment (see essay no. 36). Associated by some with a multicultural contemporary world, it is often contrasted with the (monocultural) ideals of the

(modernist) nation-state; in that sense modernity and its so-called posterior(s) are, and have been, coexistent.

*Poststructuralism*: see 'structuralism', below.

*Psychoanalysis*: generally, the systematic investigation into the causes and motivations for individual and collective behaviour, seen to be situated in those 'un' conscious aspects of the individual subject knowable only indirectly or by their traces or effects. It consequently comprises an explanatory model for social and cultural phenomena, including artistic production, which links them to concurrent rather than historical forces. Psychoanalytic explanation thus deals with the superimposition and intertwining of cause and effect, in contrast to the distinct and juxtaposed (past and present) facets of historical explanation or 'historiography' (q.v.).

*Representation*: perhaps the most enduring concept in art history; representation referred generally to a view of artworks as *re*-presenting, reflecting, or standing in for, the aims and intentions of an artist or maker, and, by extension, those of a time, place, or people. Theories of representation are grounded in traditional Western philosophical and religious notions of the 'sign' (see below and final essay), and are also closely tied to concepts of imitation and naturalism, in which art is understood as a practice of rendering perceptions of things within the parameters of time- and space-specific conventions. To view an artwork as a 'representation' was to adhere to a very particular concept of explanation, concerned with accounting for what might be characterized as congruities and incongruities between the object (copy, surrogate, representation, signifier) and what it is thought to represent. The object thus becomes a trace, sign, symbol, or index of some absent and/or prior event, force, spirit, intention, will, ethnicity, and so on. (The term was also used in the twentieth century in the sense of realism, in contrast to 'abstract' or non-figurative art.)

*Semiology, semiotics*: the systematic investigation of how signs generate meaning; the term is an ancient Greek one, originally associated with medical diagnosis and the inferring of certain invisible diseases from their physical signs or symptoms. See Ch. 5.

*Sign*: in semiotics, the basic unit of meaning, with a double facet—both that which is ‘signified’, and (usually a form of some kind) that which signifies, the ‘signifier’. The key concept of modern linguistics, itself seen as a branch of semiology by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the first decades of the twentieth century.

*Social history of art*: generally, the phrase came to refer during the latter third of the twentieth century to theories (of which Marxism was one; see ‘Marxist art history’ above, and ‘historicism’) for explaining the history of artworks and artistic practice by means of the social, political, and economic contexts within which works were conceived, produced, perceived, and used. A very wide variety of ‘contextualist’ explanatory models were developed to account for the historical appearance and significance of works, from political environments to the nature of art and craft professionalization to hypotheses about the influence of gender, class, and ethnicity on artistic subject-matter, technique, materials, and stagecraft.

*Structuralism*: in the most general sense, the systematic investigation of the underlying organizational models held to be determinative or productive of cultural practice. Grounded in principles of binary organization discovered as constituting the ‘semiotic’ (q.v.) sign structure of spoken language, structuralist principles came to be applied to the investigation of the visual arts, architecture, and culture early in the twentieth century, absorbing and merging with art historical concerns with iconography during the last third of the century (see Ch. 5). Structuralism problematized the autonomy of the individual human subject, the transparency, and fixity of meaning, and the originality and uniqueness of works, by highlighting the social and historical constructedness of all these concepts. ‘Poststructuralism’ took this critique further, beginning in the 1960s by foregrounding the metaphysical and theological underpinnings of traditional humanist modernism, as well as the hierarchical presuppositions and ahistoricism of certain structuralist ideas. See also ‘deconstruction’ and ‘psychoanalysis’ above.

*Style*: see Ch. 3. The concept (or ‘theory’; see below) of ‘style’ makes it possible to

group artworks into related and affiliated groups on the basis of shared and/or contrastive distinctive (stylistic) features; in this manner objects (and their makers, societies, cultures, or nations) can be situated as close to or distant from each other in varying ways. Essentially a form of semiotic analysis, stylistic analysis became a means for fabricating relations of filiation, kinship, descent, or difference amongst objects (as surrogates or ‘representations’ (q.v.) of connections or differences between their makers) and societies. Along with representation, the term is one of the central concepts of the modern discipline of art history, and both presupposes and promotes the hypothesis of a shared stylistic or family resemblance amongst the artefacts of a group, studio, region, nation, ethnicity, or race. The entire possibility of art history as a discipline rests upon the stylistic hypothesis, and it is a key support for ideas about the ideal homogeneity of the (modernist; see above) nation-state, and the constant selfsameness or identity of its citizen subjects and what is proper to (and the property of) them.

*Sublime*: a term gaining philosophical and aesthetic currency during the Enlightenment, and referring generally to that which exceeded (rational) understanding either because of awesome or extraordinary qualities, or a massiveness of scale, beyond human comprehension. The contrast with rational understanding links (but hierarchically discriminates) the sublime with another eighteenth-century rational antithesis or excess, the concept of fetishism (q.v.)

*Symbol*: of many general and discipline-specific uses of ‘symbol’, the most common in art history has been the notion that an art object may have a double meaning—one that is more literal, and one that is more conventional or allusory: the use of a certain colour, for example, referring both to an actual material property of something represented, as well as to a certain religious or political belief. Because the latter connection is conventional or time- and place-specific, symbolism is a primary concern of various forms of semiotic (q.v.) analyses such as iconography (q.v.). In semiotics, there have been many different uses of the term symbol; most commonly it is used to refer to one kind of association (a

conventional one) between a signifier and a signified.

*Teleology*: the notion that the sequential development of forms or ideas is in some manner driven by a force, impulse, or anticipation of a particular outcome. Thus, Hegel's theory of the history of art as a representation (q.v.) of the developmental evolution or unfolding of a world Spirit is a teleological system (see 'historicism', above). The early attractiveness of teleological explanatory paradigms in art history was related to the pragmatic social functions of a network of early modern historical and interpretative disciplines that provided support for narrative histories of the origins and differential progress toward modernization of various peoples, races, and nations (see essay no. 36; introductions to Ch. 2 and 3).

*Theory*: (see 'methodology' above). From Greek words referring to sight or seeing,

the 'theory' of anything may be understood to be a particular view that unifies in some fundamental sense a wide variety of disparate phenomena. In the last quarter of the twentieth century an interest in 'theory' (or 'critical theory') came to mean an engagement with one or another 'poststructuralist' (or 'postmodernist') perspectives on art, history, culture, and politics (psychoanalytic theory, deconstruction, semiotics, feminism, social history, and so on).

*Wunderkammer*: a German term often rendered in English as 'cabinet of curiosities', and used to refer to a collection of objects, artefactual and/or natural, unusual in variety, origins, or form; literally, a chamber of wondrous things. See 'museum' and 'collection' above.

*Zeitgeist*: the (dominant) spirit of an age, period, or time.



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*Note:* References to illustrations are in *italic*.

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