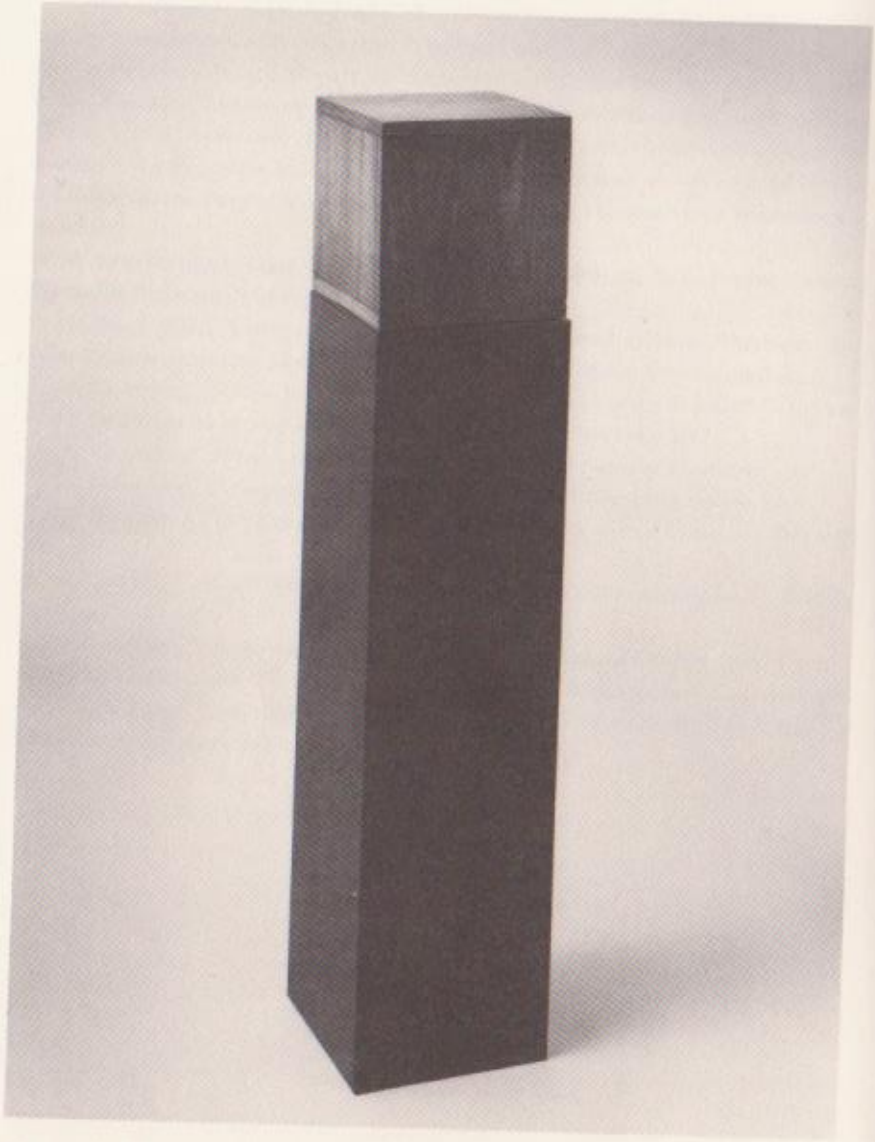


BOX WITH THE SOUND OF ITS OWN MAKING (1961) BY ROBERT MORRIS. COURTESY: SEATTLE ART MUSEUM AND MR. AND MRS. BAGLEY WRIGHT. PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL MACAPIA.

CHAPTER FIVE

From Aesthetics to Art Criticism

I BEGIN by citing a passage from Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophical masterpiece *The World as Will and Idea*, in which he speaks of the relationship between two, as he sees it, antithetical values—beauty and utility. He is discussing the romantic notion of genius, which he identifies as the intellect working independently of the will, so that "the productions of genius serve no useful purpose":

> The work of genius may be music, philosophy, painting, or poetry; it is nothing for use or profit. To be useless and unprofitable is one of the characteristics of works of genius; it is their patent of nobility. All other human works exist only for the maintenance and relief of our existence; only those here discussed do not; they alone exist for their own sake, and are to be regarded in this sense as the flower . . . of existence. Our heart is therefore gladdened at the enjoyment of them, for we rise out of the heavy earthly atmosphere of need and want.[1]

This powerful distinction drawn in one of the great originating works of philosophical aesthetics, between aesthetic and practical considerations, has tended to stultify any propensity to ask what practical utility aesthetic experience itself might have. For questions of practicality are defined by the interests an individual or group might have—by what Schopenhauer refers to as the will—but Kant, in the work that generated a tradition which included Schopenhauer and which extended, which *extends*, well into modern times, writes that "taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful*."[2]

Schopenhauer contended that, analogous to the way in which aesthetics and utility are disjoint from one another, "we rarely see the useful united with the beautiful. . . . The most beautiful buildings are not the useful ones; a temple is not a dwelling house." Modernism has not been quite so rigorous. The Museum of Modern Art displays objects of acknowledged utility which exemplify the principle of aesthetic high style.

The Barnes collection displays amidst the masterpieces of painting and sculptures objects of unmistakable utility. The furniture of the Shakers seems clearly to fuse beauty and utility. Still, Schopenhauer might ask to what degree the beauty is related to the utility. A spark plug might be considered by some a beautiful object, with its knurled and polished surfaces and its exquisitely proportioned distribution of metal and ceramic parts, but it would, so far as beautiful, satisfy no interest of the sort sparkplugs exist to serve: if you were anxious to have one which worked, issues of spark plug beauty would be beside the point, for to judge it beautiful would be, according to Kant, as an "object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction," since "every interest spoils the judgment of taste."[3] And the puzzling question would certainly be: what kind of satisfaction could that be? For what would constitute satisfaction if there were no interest to be served?

Let us follow Kant in speaking as if there were a kind of satisfaction *an sich* (in itself), a distant philosophical relative of the thing *an sich*. Just as the thing in itself exists independently of everything else, satisfaction in itself depends, as the classical aestheticians insisted, upon no possible practical interest nor on its satisfaction. It immediately follows, of course, that aesthetic considerations are extruded from the realm of function and utility, a momentous consequence which has been taken to justify the elimination of ornament and decoration from the domain of architectural design and the elimination of art subsidies from the federal budget as frill by definition, so far as artworks fall under the category of the aesthetic. Like the (limited) beauty of the sparkplug, beauty may be an accidental by-product of features, for each of which there is a good clear practical justification. But the beauty plays no further role in accounting for how the sparkplug works.

No distinction is especially drawn between natural and artistic beauty in Kant: "Nature is beautiful because it looks like art, and art can only be called beautiful if we are conscious of it as art while yet it looks like nature."[4] So the judgment of beauty may be invariant as to whether it is beautiful art or natural beauty , and though we may be mistaken, in the event of illusion, as to whether or not it is art, we are not mistaken in point of its beauty—"Beautiful art must *look* like nature." Schopenhauer, for all his emphasis upon genius, sees the disjunction between beauty and utility in objects which would not ordinarily be attributed to genius: "Tall and fine trees bear no fruit; fruit trees are small, ugly, and stunted. The double garden rose is not fruitful, but the small, wild, almost scentless rose is." There is something scary in this line of thought, which seems to

want to connect usefulness and plainness if not ugliness Perhaps you can get a sense of what is scary in Schopenhauer's way of thinking if you consider the German contrast between *gut* and *schlecht*, different from the contrast between *gut* and *böse*. "Good" contrasts with both "bad" and "evil," and Nietzsche, who was Schopenhauer's great disciple, shows us in *The Genealogy of Morals* how "good" designated what the masters claimed they were by virtue of the traits that defined them—traits the slaves of course called "evil." But at least they were not *schlecht*, like the slaves who were the human equivalent of the "small, ugly, stunted fruit trees." But my interest lies in drawing out the thought, common to Kant and to Schopenhauer, that there is no special line to draw between the beautiful in art and in nature. For this leads, by a path worn smooth by those who have taken the disjunction between beauty and utility as a deep truth, from philosophical aesthetics to a highly influential form of the practice of art criticism, construed as the discrimination of good art from bad. In any case, there is nothing, other than the knowledge that it is art one is experiencing, which distinguishes what Greenberg called "quality in art"[5] from the beautiful in nature: beautiful art is *gut*. If art lacks beauty or "quality," it is *schlecht*.

The qualification "knowledge that it is art that one is experiencing" ought to sound a warning that if the beautiful is invariant to artworks and other things, beauty forms no part of the concept of art, though in Kant's time it would have been taken as a matter of course that artworks as a class aimed at beauty, and that beauty was implied by their existence, even though they might fail in their aim.[6] Once more consider the displayed spark plug. Spark plugs could not have existed in Kant's time, nor, contrary to historical fact, could they have been artworks if they had existed. They could not have existed because the state of industrial ceramics and of metallurgy was not evolved enough to have produced them, quite apart from the fact that the mechanism which gave rise to the spark plug—the internal combustion engine—had not as yet been thought of. But imagine, even so, that a spark plug slipped through a time warp and was found by a woodcutter just outside Koenigsburg in 1790. It would be incapable of satisfying any interest at the time, since the *Zeugganz* in which it could do so was not to be in place for a century and a half, so it would have value only as a curiosity, like the coconuts that would, rarely, wash up on European shores in the sixteenth century, to be credited with magical attributes. The time-displaced spark plug might very well find a place in Frederick the Great's *Wunderkammer*, where it

would be an object of contemplation which was forcibly disinterested since there was nothing other than contemplation that one could do with it, except perhaps use it as a paperweight. It would almost exactly fit Kant's characterization of beauty as "purposiveness without specific purpose": it would perhaps look too useful to be ornamental, but no one could imagine how.

In any case, a spark plug could not, given the state of art, be a work of art in 1790. Today, in consequence of a revolution engendered by some mischief of Marcel Duchamp circa 1917, it could be, albeit not for reasons of its beauty. The ready-made objects were siezed upon by Duchamp precisely because of their aesthetic nondescriptness, and he demonstrated that if they were art but not beautiful, beauty indeed could form no defining attribute of art. The recognition of that, one might say, is what draws so sharp a line between traditional aesthetics and the philosophy of art, indeed the practice of art, today. That line, of course, was very faint in general consciousness when Duchamp sought to exhibit a urinal at the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, under a false signature and the title *Fountain*. Even members of Duchamp's immediate circle, like Walter Arensberg, thought Duchamp was drawing attention to the white gleaming beauty of the urinal. As if an artist whose philosophical agenda was in part to extrude the aesthetic from the artistic were bent upon reducing works of art to aesthetic objects, in the manner of Kant or Schopenhauer! There is an argument recorded between Arensberg and the artist George Bellows in 1917, in which the former said, "A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, there a man has clearly made an aesthetic contribution."[7] But in 1962 Duchamp wrote to Hans Richter, "When I discovered readymades, I thought to discourage aesthetics. . . . I threw the bottle rack and the urinal in their faces as a challenge, and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."[8]

Greenberg, incontestably the foremost Kantian art critic of our time, had little use and less patience with Duchamp as an artist, and I want to discuss Greenberg's achievement against the background of a distinction I regard as crucial between aesthetic objects and works of art which Duchamp made central to his enterprise, but which Greenberg hardly took notice of as philosophically important. Kant, Greenberg conceded, had bad taste and scant experience with art—"Yet his capacity for abstraction enabled him, despite many *gaffes*, to establish in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* what is the most satisfactory basis for aesthetics we yet have."[9] I am anxious to discuss Greenberg from this angle because his

way of doing art criticism has become extremely problematic in an art world almost defined by Duchamp as its generative thinker. Greenberg's aesthetic philosophy is being carried forward by Hilton Kramer and the writers of his journal *The New Criterion*, and it pivots precisely on the issue of "quality in art," which Kramer identifies specifically with aesthetic quality but which Duchamp and his followers—and I must count myself among them—would identify in some other way. I am uncertain that one can come up with a sort of "unified field theory of artistic goodness," nor hence whether one can explain the artistic goodness of works Greenberg prized for their aesthetic goodness in some other terms. But I at least know that it is bad critical practice to dismiss works which lack aesthetic goodness in Greenberg's terms as artistically bad. If a unified theory is not to be had, art criticism is a very divided practice. Whether in addition it needs to be an essentially conflicted practice remains to be decided, and perhaps a close examination of the way Greenberg sought to ground his own critical practice in Kantian aesthetics will facilitate that decision. But the existence of that conflict gives us a reason to examine the background in aesthetic theory from which it arises: a theory which entails a conflict in application must be itself a conflicted theory, just as a set of axioms is inconsistent if it entails a contradiction. The conflict was screened by the historical accident that aesthetics was hammered out as a discipline at a time when art had been singularly stable in its practice and conception over several centuries, and where such revolutions in art as there may have been were in the nature of reversions to earlier conditions—from rococo to neoclassicism in the time of Kant, and from romanticism to pre-Raphaelitism in the time of Schopenhauer. Modernism began insidiously in the 1880s, but it did not especially force aestheticians to rethink their distinctions, which fit fairly readily with Cézanne and Kandinsky and could even, as we saw, be made to fit with Duchamp. Aesthetics seems increasingly inadequate to deal with art after the 1960s—with "art after the end of art" as I have elsewhere termed it—a sign of which was an initial disposition to refuse to consider non- or anti-aesthetic art as art at all. That paralleled the reflex of regarding *abstract* art as not art at all, with which Greenberg, as an advocate of abstraction, had to deal. That momentary crisis was overcome by revising the theory that art must be mimetic, a felicitous move which classical aesthetics facilitated precisely through the weak distinction it insisted upon between artistic and natural beauty, leaving it now open that all that mattered *was* aesthetic quality. But classical aesthetic theory could not be appealed to with "art after

the end of art" precisely because it seemed to scorn aesthetic quality altogether: it was precisely in terms of classical aesthetics that the refusal to call it art was grounded. Once its status as art was established, it was fairly clear that aesthetics as a theory was badly in need of repair if it was to be helpful in dealing with art at all. And in my view that was going to mean overhauling the distinction between the aesthetic and the practical as the default basis of the discipline. But let us return to an aesthetics-based art criticism, and to Clement Greenberg's views.

Greenberg derived two tenets from his reading of Kant. The first was based on a famous formulation of the relationship between the judgment of beauty and the application of rules. "The concept of beautiful art does not permit the judgment upon the beauty of a product to be derived from any rule which has a concept as its determining ground, and therefore has as its basis a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Therefore beautiful art cannot itself devise the rule according to which it can bring about its product."[10] Critical judgment, in Greenberg's view, operates in the abeyance of rule: "Quality in art can be neither ascertained nor proved by logic or discourse. Experience alone rules in this area—and the experience, so to speak, of experience. This is what all the serious philosophers of art since Immanuel Kant have concluded."[11]

So "the most satisfactory basis for aesthetics we yet have" was nothing less than the most satisfactory basis for art criticism as Greenberg believed himself to practice it. Greenberg credited himself with good taste, a matter in part of temperament and in part of experience. "The practiced eye tends always toward the definitely and positively good in art, knows it there, and will be dissatisfied with anything else."[12] It will, in brief, be dissatisfied with anything less that the satisfying *an sich*. The Kantian art critic, pressed for an answer to the question of what good is art—what art is good for—has to deflect the question as reflecting a philosophical misunderstanding. "What does practicality have to do with art?" is the rhetorical retort of those persuaded that art exists for aesthetic satisfaction alone—for satisfaction *an sich*. So the same logical gulf that separates the aesthetic from the practical separates art from anything useful. And Kantian aesthetics has served the contemporary conservative art critic well in setting aside as irrelevant to art any instrumental ambitions artists might have of putting art to work in the service of this human interest or that, and most particularly political interests. "What has art got to do with politics?" the conservative critic asks, as if the question were rhetorical and the answer—"Nothing!"—a foregone certitude.

Greenberg's second Kantian tenet derives from the deep reason in Kant's system that the aesthetic was strictly segregated from the practical. It was because the judgment of beauty had to be tacitly universal, and universality would be incompatible with interest, and hence with practicality. "In all judgments by which we describe anything as beautiful, we allow no one to be of another opinion," Kant writes, not as a prediction that "everyone *will* agree with my judgment, but that he *ought*."[13] Kant invokes a special notion of what he terms "subjective universality" which bases itself on the postulation of a certain kind of *sensus communis* which in turn allows a certain parity of form between moral and aesthetic judgments in his system. Greenberg derived from the tacit universality of aesthetic judgments the thesis that art is all of a piece. He was particularly intent on demonstrating that there is no difference in our aesthetic experience of abstract as against representational art. Remember, he was writing at a time when critics were enough uncertain of abstract painting that they were prepared to argue that experiencing it was different in kind from experiencing representational art. In 1961 he wrote,

> Experience itself—and experience is the only court of appeal in art—has shown that there is both bad and good in abstract art. And it has also revealed that the good in one kind of art is always, at bottom, more like the good in all other kinds of art than it is like the bad in its own kind. Underneath all apparent differences, a good Mondrian or good Pollock has more in common with a good Vermeer than a bad Dali has. [There were no good Dalis for Greenberg.] A bad Dali has far more in common, not only with a bad Maxfield Parrish, but with a bad abstract painting.[14]

And Greenberg goes on to say that people who do not make the effort to experience or appreciate abstract art "do not have the right to pronounce on any kind of art—much less abstract art." They do not because they "have not taken the trouble to amass sufficient experience of it, and it makes no difference in this respect how much experience they have in other fields of art." To be seriously interested in art, we might paraphrase Greenberg as saying, is to be seriously interested in the good in art. "One is not for Chinese, or Western, or representational art as a whole, but only for what is good in it." And Greenberg's second tenet entailed that "the practiced eye" can pick out the good from the bad in art of whatever sort, independently of any specific knowledge of the circumstances of production in the tradition to which the art belongs. The owner of the practiced eye is aesthetically everywhere at home. Recently a well-

known curator boasted that without knowing anything about African art, he could, by means of his good eye alone, distinguish the good, the better, and the best.

Greenberg's strengths and weaknesses as a critic derived from these tenets. It was, for example, his confidence that the good in art is everywhere and always the same that underlay his openness to goodness to which others at the time were largely blind and explains his early identification of Jackson Pollock as a great painter. Little in the way in which abstract painting was produced in the 1940s would have prepared one for Pollock's work, and the ability to sense its artistic goodness—even to proclaim its artistic greatness—at a time when this was far indeed from the received view, gave Greenberg in retrospect credentials of a kind few other critics enjoyed. It also came to constitute a criterion for goodness as a critic that one make discoveries of a parallel sort, which has inevitably had certain pernicious consequences in subsequent critical practice: the critic is supposed to make discoveries in order to validate his or her "practiced eye," and this has defined for the critic a role of champion for one or another artist: one's stature as a critic rises and falls with the reputation of the artist on whose goodness one has staked one's critical reputation. The critic in search of credentials stalks the unknown or the underrecognized, which in part gives hope to the marginal gallery, the fresh talent, the venturesome dealer, and keeps the productive system from rigidification. The reverse of this has been the confession of an insufficiently good eye when the artist a critic opposes turns out after all to have been good or even great. Often, of course, this can be accounted for along the same lines Greenberg adduces in connection with the resistance to abstract art, where it can be argued that the stubborn critic—the terrible John Canaday of the *New York Times* is a case in point—will not open his eyes because of some a priori theory of what art has to be—for example, that it has to be representational. What Greenberg designates as "the opponents of abstract art" will argue that the experience of abstract art is not *artistic* experience "and that works of abstract art cannot be classified as art, properly speaking."[15] And one feels that clearly it must have been certain prior definitions of art which prevented those hostile to impressionism from seeing the goodness of those canvases, or which made it impossible to see the goodness of post-impressionist painting because the drawing was eccentric or the colors arbitrary. The implication is that if people would but *open their eyes* and, equally important, open their minds by allowing the mind to take its cue from what the practiced eye delivers it, there will be, just as Kant suggests, no final

disagreements: "Quality in art is not just a matter of private experience," Greenberg writes. "There is a *consensus* of taste. The best taste is that of the people who, in each generation, spend the most time and trouble on art, and this best taste has always turned out to be unanimous within certain limits, in its verdicts." If each individual cultivates an open mind and, to use a favorite expression of his, *bears down* hard enough, there will be no ultimate major disagreements.

The idea of a mind not closed by theory, and of trusting to sustained visual experience alone, is almost caricatured in Greenberg's mode of confronting a painting. At a memorial meeting a year after Greenberg's death, the painter Jules Olitski—whom Greenberg in later years often celebrated as our finest painter—described the format of a studio visit from the critic. Greenberg would stand with his back to a new painting until it was in place, and then wheel abruptly around to let his practiced eye take it in without giving the mind a chance to interpose any prior theories, as if there were a race between the transmission of visual stimuli and the speed of thought. Or he would cover his eyes until it was time to look. There are innumerable anecdotes of this sort regarding Greenberg, and it became something of a standard posture in studio and gallery. Thomas Hoving describes the setting for the two major acquisitions of his tenure as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in just those terms—the portrait by Velasquez of Juan de Pereija, and the *krater* of Europhronios, which came to be known as the Metropolitan's "million dollar pot," but which Hoving defended as the most beautiful artwork of his entire experience. In the former case, he refused to look at the painting until the lighting was just right, and then he commanded, "Hit me!"[16] With the illumination of the work, presumably, his eyes were flooded with preconceptualized beauty. He would not look at the pot until it had been carried out into the light of day. It was on the basis of this first glance that he made the decision to purchase these works, and while there is no doubt that Hoving needed to have the outcome of tests for authenticity of provenance in hand when he went before his board, it was the testimony of the practiced eye that finally counted for him.

Greenberg would say very little other than grunt a kind of approval or disapproval. In a late interview—indeed, in the final text of *The Collected Essays and Criticism*—he voices a corollary of the tenet regarding the authority of experience. Asked to state criteria for the difference between minor and major art, he remarked, "There are criteria, but they can't be put into words—any more than the difference between good and bad in

art can be put into words. Works of art move you to a greater or lesser extent, that's all. So far, words have been futile in the matter. . . . Nobody hands out prescriptions to art and artists. You just wait and see what happens—what the artist does."[17] It is striking that Greenberg sees critical response as of a piece with artistic creation, which is just what we would expect from his suspiciousness toward rules, which was after all a position Kant worked out in connection with artistic genius, granting of course the difference between taste and genius—between what Kant calls "a judging and not a productive faculty." Greenberg's monosyllabic utterances—visceral responses put into words, but words which were themselves visceral responses—were the critic's counterpart to the coming-from-the-guts of painterly gesture in the sort of art with which Greenberg must always be identified: abstract expressionism, though he deplored this as a label. Greenberg could hardly have achieved his tremendous reputation as a critic by grunts and grimaces. It is altogether instructive to read his review in November 1943 of Jackson Pollock's first exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery. Of course, he had by then seen a certain amount of Pollock's work through studio visits which were perhaps very similar to those Jules Olitski described, movingly and comically, after his death. But in his review he gave reasons why Pollock's painting was good, even if the ascertaining of its goodness was a function of the eye, and, one might add, without taking a scrap away from any credit due him, a function of the fact that others whose taste he admired—Lee Krasner, Hans Hoffman, Piet Mondrian, Peggy Guggenheim herself—were unanimous in their admiration. In the end the task of the critic was to say what was good and what was not, based always on the deliverances of the eye as a kind of seventh sense: a sense of the beautiful in art, knowing it was art. If we think of this as what I term *response-based* criticism, then the tradition is being carried forward by critics very much less philosophically fortified in their practice than Greenberg was.

Greenberg effectively stopped writing criticism in the late 1960s, and it is difficult not to suppose that he did so because his entire practice as a critic was unable to gain a relevant purchase on an artistic practice governed by the principle, articulated by the two most influential artistic thinkers of that era, Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys, that anything can be an artwork, that there is no special way that artworks have to look, that everyone can be an artist—a thesis Warhol advanced in his paint-by-the-numbers paintings which look like what anyone can do. Greenberg, according to a recollection by William Phillips, was singularly egalitarian—he really thought that anyone could paint—and he tried to get Phillips to paint until Phillips's inability to stand the smell of paint got in the lesson's way. I have heard his widow read from a moving but callow letter, written in his thirties, describing his own first efforts at painting. He thought his work was marvelous; he wrote his correspondent that painting came as natural to him as "fucking." But he was not an ontological egalitarian, and he would have dismissed the paint-by-the-numbers paintings of Warhol as inconsistent with the philosophy of art he had learned from Kant: they could be achieved by following rules, by putting red where the numbers said one should. Of course, Warhol followed no particular rule in making the work, but it would have been altogether consistent with his impulses as an artist that he follow the rules in a paint-by-the-numbers kit and exhibit the result. He probably did not, but let us imagine that he did, and then exhibited the work. The eye, the practiced eye, would not have been able to tell that an *artist* had filled in the numbered cells, since the result would have looked like the real thing (something anyone in a senior citizen's home might have done) and would have inherited whatever aesthetic qualities the latter had. And yet Warhol's piece and an ordinary paint-by-the-numbers painting would have very different artistic qualities. Warhol might be making the statement that anyone can be an artist; he might be poking fun at the idea that painting has to be something that is torn from the artist's soul. The former trolley conductor in the senior citizen recreation center who paints by the numbers is simply following the rules in order to make a pretty picture. Warhol, had he read Kant, could have made a statement about the Third Critique by means of the paint-by-the-numbers paintings!

Pop art, or much of it, was based on the commercial art—on illustrations, labels, package design, posters. The commercial artists responsible for these colorful proclamatory images themselves had good eyes. Willem de Kooning had been a sign painter, and it is difficult to suppose that in appropriating to the ends of fine art the special equipment of the sign painter, he did not also employ the eye that made him successful as a sign painter. An instructive case of the reverse of this was Watteau's appropriating the equipment and the eye that went into his *fêtes galant* when he executed, as what turned out to be his last work and indeed his masterpiece, a shop sign for his dealer, Gersaint, which actually did hang in front of the latter's gallery for a time, showing what it looked like inside. The *Ensigne de Gersaint* is an incidental counterexample to the first dogma of

aesthetics that art serve no practical use; it probably fit the conventions of the shop signs of Paris in the eighteenth century perfectly. But my only concern is to suggest that such commercial efforts are selected by someone with a good eye who said, confronting, say, a Campbell's Soup label or a Brillo box design, "That's it!" In making their facsimiles, pop artists appropriated designs that had already passed an aesthetic test of some sort—which were selected because it was supposed they would catch the eye, or convey information about the product, or whatever. But what made pop art high art rather than commercial art had only incidentally to do with the aesthetic qualities that caused it to succeed as commercial art. The art criticism of pop art, which as a genre of art I always found intoxicating, had nothing to do with what met the eye, since what met the eye only explained its interest and value as commercial art. And the eye alone could not account for the difference.

But this is true of much of the art of the sixties and the seventies, and of the nineties as well. (The eighties was a somewhat retrograde moment because painting reasserted itself as the dominant mode of art making.) The Kantian art critic would have been reduced to silence or to sputtering in the face of the slashed felt, the shattered glass, the spattered lead, the splintered plywood, the crudely twisted wire, the latex-soaked cheese cloth, the vinyl-soaked rope, the neon signs, the video monitors, the chocolate-smeared breasts, the tethered couple, the slashed flesh, the torn garments, or the sundered house with which artistic statements were made in those years and since.

Consider an important work of the sixties, Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961). It is a wooden cube of not especially distinguished carpentry inside of which there is a tape of the hammering and sawing noises which went into its manufacture. The tape is like the box's memory of its own coming into being, and the work has at the very least a comment to make on the mind-body problem. Greenberg had no way to deal with this work. In 1969, he wrote with an almost breathtaking obtuseness,

> Art in any medium, boiled down to what it does in the experiencing of it, creates itself through relations, proportions. The quality of art depends on inspired, felt relations or proportions as on nothing else. There is no getting around this. A simple unadorned box can succeed as art by virtue of these things; and when it fails as art it is not because it is a plain box, but because its proportions, or even its size, are uninspired, unfelt. The same applies to works in any form of "novelty" art. . . . No amount of phenomenal, describable newness avails when the internal relations of the work have not been felt, inspired, discovered. The superior work of art, whether it dances, radiates, explodes, or barely manages to be visible (or audible or decipherable), exhibits, in other words, "rightness of form."[18]

"To this extent," Greenberg goes on to say, "art remains unchangable. . . . It will never be able to take effect *as art* except through quality."[19] Morris's work is brilliant and inspired, and certainly has "quality" as a work of art, but hardly quality as defined by "rightness of form." Greenberg felt that the art of the sixties was, beneath surface appearances, singularly homogeneous and even monotonous. He even ventured to identify the common underlying style as what "Wölfflin would call linear."[20] His tone in this late essay is biting, sarcastic, dismissive. It was the kind of response we recognize whenever a revolutionary moment has occurred in art—that the artists are out to shock, have forgotten how to draw, are behaving like very bad boys and girls. Whether it is to his credit or not, he did not change his mind for the last thirty years of his life. I heard him say these very things in 1992. Art had gone through a revolutionary moment, one that invalidated forever the easy transit from aesthetics to art criticism. The two could be connected again only by revising aesthetics as a discipline in light of the changes in critical practice the revolution of the sixties imposed.

I want now to say something about Greenberg's second Kantian tenet, which led criticism into much the same kind of hot water as the first tenet did, although this did not become quite as apparent until some years later. This tenet asserts the "unchangeableness of art," which Greenberg affirmed in an interview in 1969. He wanted to concede that American taste had matured over the years "but insisted that this is not the same thing as saying that there's been progress in art itself as distinct from taste. There certainly hasn't. Art hasn't gotten better or more 'mature' over the past 5,000, 10,000, or 20,000 years."[21] So taste has a developmental history, but art does not. Greenberg in fact argued that there has been a "broadening of taste in our time, in the West," and this he believed was "owed in a certain large part to the effect of modernist art." He believed that the ability to appreciate modernist painting makes it easier for us to appreciate traditional art or art from other cultures, since representational art distracts us into thinking about what it shows rather than about what it is. "It's harder, I think, for a beginner to develop his taste with representational than with abstract art, all other things being equal. Abstract art is a wonderful way in which to learn to see art in general. You appreciate

the Old Masters all the more once you can tell a good Mondrian or a good Pollock from a bad one."[22] This position, as I have often said, has the tendency to transform all museums into Museums of Modern Art, in which everything is to be appreciated in terms of the one thing art everywhere and always has, and which the eye trained on modernist painting learns how to identify and to grade. All artists are contemporaries, insofar as they are artists. They are not contemporaries on matters irrelevant to art.

This philosophy informed a number of heavily criticized exhibitions in the 1980s, chiefly the 1984 show "Primitivism and Modern Art" at the Museum of Modern Art, which was based upon "affinities" between Oceanic and African works and their formally similar counterparts in the modern movement. As an historical explanatory thesis, this is perhaps unexceptionable, true when it is true, false when it is false. Modern artists really have been influenced by primitive art. But affinities are different from explanations. They imply that the African or the Oceanic artist was driven by the same kind of formal considerations as the modernists. And many critics felt this to reek of what we might call cultural colonialism. Multiculturalism was on the ascendant in 1984, and was to overtake the art world, in America at least, in epidemic proportions in the nineties. According to the multicultural model, the best one can hope to do is try to understand how people within a given cultural tradition appreciated their own art. One cannot, from outside that tradition, appreciate it as it is appreciated from within, but one can at least attempt not to impose one's own mode of appreciation on traditions to which it was alien. This relativization was extended to the art of women, blacks, and minority artists even within our own culture. Small wonder that Greenberg was villainized in the art world of the late eighties and the nineties, as if he himself were to blame for such baleful shows as "Primitivism and Modern Art." When Kantian universalism was replaced with this unforgiving sort of relativism, the concept of quality became odious and chauvinist. Art criticism became a form of cultural criticism, chiefly of one's own culture. In candor, I am no happier as an art critic with this attitude than I was with Greenberg, and it would be altogether wonderful if one could turn to aesthetics as a discipline for guidance out of the chaos. If aesthetics could clarify the condition of criticism, the question of its practicality would be spectacularly established. I agree with Greenberg to this extent: there is a criterion of quality for works such as Warhol's by-the-number paintings and for Robert Morris's chatter-box, and if we worked out the art criticism for these objects, we would be in a better position to appreciate the good and bad in modern works like paintings by Mondrian and Pollock, as well as in the Old Masters. A general theory of quality might then contain aesthetic goodness not as a defining trait but as a special case. For I hope I have shown that aesthetic goodness will not help with art after the end of art.

As an essentialist in philosophy, I am committed to the view that art is eternally the same—that there are conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be an artwork, regardless of time and place. I do not see how one can do the philosophy of art—or philosophy *period*—without to this extent being an essentialist. But as an historicist I am also committed to the view that what is a work of art at one time cannot be one at another, and in particular that there is a history, enacted through the history of art, in which the essence of art—the necessary and sufficient conditions—are painfully brought to consciousness. Many of the world's artworks (cave paintings, fetishes, altar pieces) were made in times and places when people had no concept of art to speak of, since they interpreted art in terms of their other beliefs. It is true that today our relationship to these objects is primarily contemplative, since the interests they embody are not our own, and the beliefs in the light of which they were regarded as effective can no longer be widely held, least of all among those who admire them. It would be a mistake to suppose that contemplation belongs to their essence as artworks, for it is almost certain that the people who made them had little interest in their contemplation. In any case, makeshift notions like satisfaction *an sich* or Schopenhauer's will-less perception, as definitions of the aesthetic have roughly the conceptual finesse of "featherless biped" as a definition of man. One often finds oneself staring out a window, or turning a mustard pot idly in one's hand like a Françoise Sagan heroine, for no particular reason except to kill time. And the mystic's posture of contemplation, which stills the mind, has no special rapport with the aesthetic.

There is, just possibly, a universal aesthetic notion, which had for a time—fatefully the time when the originary works of aesthetic philosophy were framed—a certain application to works of art, so that for that time the work of art was an intersection of crossed universals—the universal which belongs to art by essentialist considerations, and the universal aesthetic which belongs to human, perhaps to animal sensibility through being coded for in the genome. About this I will say a few reckless words to conclude this chapter and then return to my primary concerns.

Recently I have been struck by some empirical work in psychology which strongly supports the thesis that there are perceptions of beauty which cut across cultural lines. A 1994 study in *Nature* reported that both British and Japanese men and women ranked women's faces in order of attractiveness when certain features were exaggerated like large eyes, high cheekbones, and a narrow jaw. Caucasians, moreover, ranked Japanese women's faces the same way Japanese themselves did, and the authors of the article claim that there are "greater similarities than differences in cross-cultural judgments of facial attractiveness."[23] The faces used were generated by computer, and the most attractive faces exaggerated certain traits in such a way as to give empirical support to a thesis of Schopenhauer that the visual arts yield "Platonic" ideas of the beauty found in actual persons. The features in question are exaggerations in much the same way that the tails of peacocks are exaggerations, but they are, in a commentary on the study, said to imply certain highly desirable traits in their owners, perhaps in the same way the tremendous feather display of the peacock does: traits such as resistance to disease, fertility, and youth.[24] And again Schopenhauer has something right when he refers to "the marvelous sense of beauty" of the Greeks

> which enabled them alone of all nations to set up for the imitation of all nations the standards of beauty and grace; and we can say that that which, if it remains unseparated from the will, gives sexual impulse, with its discriminating selection, i.e., *sexual love* . . . becomes the *objective sense of beauty* for the human form, when, by reason of the presence of an abnormally preponderating intellect, it detaches itself from the will, and yet remains active.[25]

And needless to add, we have the myth of the sculptor who creates a statue of a woman he would fall in love with if she were real, giving vividness to Kant's idea that natural and artistic beauty are one.

This principle of beauty, as I suggested, at a certain level of abstractness, cuts across not only cultural lines but lines of species.[26] Evolutionary biologists have lately begun to associate symmetry with sexual desirability in a wide variety of species. The female scorpion fly shows invariant preference for males with symmetrical wings. The female barn swallow prefers a male with symmetrical wishbone pattern of feathers the same size and color on both sides of the tail. Asymmetrical antlers will cut the male who has them out of the mating game. Symmetry is perhaps a sign that the male has an immune system resistant to certain parasites which

are known to cause uneven growth. This is a growing field of experimentation, but it suggests, there being nothing more "practical" than sex, that dear old natural selection accounts for aesthetic preferences which the clever Greeks introduced into their art, at which, even when the will is out of play because we know them to be statuary, we enjoy looking with the same prurient eyes we cast on one another. You may not be able to "put it all into words," but you can go a long way in that direction from the perspectives of evolutionary biology. The principles of good design are the same as the outward emblems of health and fertility—a consideration which rejoins the somewhat morally difficult identification of goodness with beauty and badness with its absence, as in the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Of course, there are complicating factors with human beings. A human male with a disfigurement parallel to the elk with asymmetrical antlers can procure a sexual partner with high cheekbones and a narrow jaw if he happens to have pots of money, a mismatch due to cultural mischievousness which gives rise to the basic situation of comedy. And everyone in the world can specify the physical attributes of the attractive male who makes up the third figure in the eternal triangle. And now that we know that chimpanzees are carnivores, we have also discovered that an ill-favored male with a haunch of monkey-meat to share can secure the sexual favors of the classiest female in the clan.

Schopenhauer denies that symmetry is a necessary condition of beauty, offering as counterexample the case of ruins.[27] One does not idly offer counterexamples: the thesis of symmetry and beauty had to have been in the air, and the move from symmetry to ruin marks the transition in the history of taste from neoclassicism to romanticism. There are ruins and ruins, of course, some more beautiful than others, but it seems to me that with them we more or less leave the sphere in which sexual response is triggered and enter the sphere of meaning. We leave, in Hegel's terms, the sphere of natural beauty for the beauty of art and of what he termed spirit. The ruin connotes the relentlessness of time, the decay of power, the inevitability of death. The ruin is a romantic poem in the medium of dilapidated stone. The ruin is like the cherry tree in bloom when we visit the cherry trees to see the bloom, and think of the transience of the features that give us a leg up in the evolutionary Olympics, the fragility of beauty, and the passage of time. We think of A. E. Housman's springs that will never come again. Even if nobody made the blossoms, someone planted the trees, and, as Hegel puts it in speaking of the work of art, "It

is essentially a question, an address to the responsive breast, a call to the mind and the spirit."[28] And that is true of Morris as of Warhol, of Pollock as of Mondrian, of Hals as of Vermeer.

In the famous passage already cited on the end of art, Hegel speaks of intellectual judgment of "(i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation." Criticism needs nothing further. It needs to identify both meaning and mode of presentation, or what I term "embodiment" on the thesis that artworks are embodied meanings. The mistake of Kantian art criticism is that it segregates form from content. Beauty is *part* of the content of the works it prized, and their mode of presentation asks us to respond to the meaning of beauty. All of that can be put into words when one does art criticism. Putting all that into words is what art criticism *is*. To its credit, Kantian art criticism was able to dispense with narratives, which meant, since Greenberg is identified with a narrative, that there was a flaw at the heart of his thought. Little matter. Few have achieved as much. How to do art criticism which is neither formalist nor enfranchised by a master narrative is something I shall attend to later.

NOTES

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. G. Payne (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1958), 2:388. Unless otherwise indicated, all reference to Schopenhauer are to this text.
2. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. M. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1951), 45.
3. Ibid., 58.
4. Ibid., 149.
5. Greenberg, "The Identity of Art," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:118.
6. Art could succeed at the other aim Kant acknowledges, namely "the sublime." But once again, the concept of sublimity cuts across the distinction between art and nature.
7. Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde*, 313–14.
8. Marcel Duchamp, "Letter to Hans Richter, 1962," in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 313–14.
9. Greenberg, "Review of *Piero della Francesca* and *The Arch of Constantine*, both by Bernard Berenson," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 3:249.
10. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 150.
11. Greenberg, "The Identity of Art," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:118.
12. Ibid., 120.
13. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 76.
14. Greenberg, "The Identity of Art," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:118.

15. Ibid., 4:119.
16. Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 256.
17. Greenberg, "Interview Conducted by Lily Leino," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:308.
18. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:300.
19. Ibid., 301.
20. Ibid., 294.
21. Greenberg, "Interview Conducted by Lilo Leino," 4:309.
22. Ibid., 310.
23. D. J. Perrett, K. A. May, and S. Yoshikawa, "Facial Shape and Judgements of Female Attractiveness," *Nature* 368 (1994): 239–42.
24. Nancy L. Etcoff, "Beauty and the Beholder," *Nature* 368 (1994): 186–87.
25. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, 2:420.
26. Paul J. Watson and Randy Thornhill, "Fluctuating Asymmetry and Sexual Selection," *Tree* 9 (1994): 21–25.
27. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, 1:216.
28. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 71.

THE LIBRARY OF THE ARTIST ARMAN, PHOTOGRAPH BY JERRY L. THOMPSON.

Painting and the Pale of History: The Passing of the Pure

THERE ARE few better exercises for those who seek to think philosophically about history—who seek, as I am attempting to do, for objective narrative structures in the way human events unfold—than to attempt to see the way the past saw the future, and hence the way those who saw the future as they did had to see their present as they did. Construing the future in terms of possible chains of events which would intimately depend upon the actions they took or failed to take, the agents sought to organize their present so as to generate chain of events favorable to their perceived interests. And of course it does sometimes happen that the future really, so far as we can tell, happens the way it happens because of what we do or fail to do in the present, and those who successfully give shape to the course of events can congratulate themselves with what philosophers call contrary-to-fact conditionals. They can say, "Had we not done such and such, then so and so would never have happened." But we actually act in the light of conditionals we *believe* true, and it is probably a presupposition of rational action that our actions have reasonably predictable outcomes and that within limits we are able to guide our actions in the light of those anticipated outcomes. On the other hand, there is a great deal to which we are blind, and one value of seeing the past's way of seeing the future is that, knowing how their future looks from *our* own vantage point in history, we can see how it differs from how the agents of the past construed it. They, of course, necessarily lacked our perspective: if they could have seen the present as it would appear to the future, they would have acted differently. The great German historian Reinhart Koselleck wrote a book with the marvelous title *Vergangene Zukunft* (The Futures of the Past), arguing that the futures in the light of which people of the past lived their present are an important part of the past.[1] Think of the belief that the world was going to end in A.D. 1000 as a case in point. There would be

little point in doing much except pray: you would not put up pickles for the winter to come, or repair the pig pen, or buy life insurance, if you thought everything was going to be erased in a blast of angelic trumpets!

From this perspective it is instructive to see the way Greenberg viewed the historical present of the early 1960s, given his powerful narrative, which after all defined the shape of the future as well as his own set of critical practices, grounded as they were by that narrative. What in objective historical fact happened, of course, was that the visual arts began to turn toward a kind of art for which an aesthetics-driven critical practice stopped having much applicability—a turn neither Greenberg's narrative nor his critical practice could easily accommodate. Though Greenberg was aware that art was taking that sort of turn, he tended to regard it as a deviation from the orthogonal of history as he projected it. He continued to see abstract expressionism as the main agency of modernist art history, but at the same time, in the early 1960s, he began to see it faltering, slipping the rails of historical destiny. It did so, one might say, by failing to heed the imperatives of modernism to which Greenberg was totally committed. He had defined the subject of painting as painting—as the creation of physical objects consisting of pigment spread across flat surfaces of a certain shape. But, almost dialectically, it seemed that the abstract expressionists also accepted the materialist imperative of modernism altogether too fervently. And in doing so they violated the larger modernist imperative that each art to stay within the limitations of its own medium and not to usurp the prerogatives of any other art or medium: to Greenberg's eye, abstract expressionism spilled over its defining boundary into the domain of sculpture. "To each its own" was the drive of modernist art history, rather in the way in which the division of labor was the basis of justice in Plato's *Republic*, where injustice consisted in the mismatch of person and position.

In his 1962 essay "After abstract expressionism," Greenberg made a surprising claim. It had to do with what one might have supposed inevitable, given his materialist aesthetics. One would have thought that the abstract expressionist treatment of paint as paint—juicy, viscous, dripping, fat—was just what the theory demanded, that paint would become its own subject. This turned out not to be the case:

> If the label 'Abstract Expressionism' means anything, it means painterliness: loose, rapid handling, or the look of it; masses that blotted and fused instead of shapes that stayed distinct; large and conspicuous rhythms; broken color; uneven saturations or densities of paint, exhibited brush,

> knife, or finger marks—in short, a constellation of qualities like those defined by Wölfflin when he extracted his notion of the *Malerische* from Baroque art.[2]

But, ironically, space in abstract expressionism "could not help becoming once again a matter of *trompe l'oeil* illusion. . . . it became more tangible, more a thing of immediate perception and less one of 'reading.'" As near as I can understand this, it means that as paint became three-dimensional, it took on the identity of sculpture, and space became illusory once again. One would have thought that it became *real*—but in any case, "a good deal of Abstract Expressionist painting began fairly to cry out for a more coherent illusion of three-dimensional space, and to the extent that it did this it cried out for representation, since such coherence can be created only through the tangible representation of three-dimensional objects." Hence Willem de Kooning's *Women* pictures of 1952–55. On Greenberg's view, the only way to carry art forward on its historical mission, since abstract expressionism failed, was through what he called "post-painterly abstraction" in a show he organized for the Los Angeles County Museum or Art in 1964. And in his essay for the catalog he spoke of the decline of abstract expressionism into what he termed a "mannerism." Greenberg began to see the champions of art's progress in Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland; and his disciple, Michael Fried, in a crucial monograph, *Three American Painters*, widened this heroic group to include Frank Stella and Jules Olitski, whom Greenberg also came to admire and to identify as the great hope of art. Sculpture played an auxiliary role: David Smith and Anthony Caro carried the narrative of materialist aesthetics forward, and Greenberg did not hesitate to intervene actively in order to assure that this took place.

Greenberg, so far as I know, nowhere asks why abstract expressionism, "having produced art of major importance, . . . turned into a school, then into a manner, and finally into a set of mannerisms. Its leaders attracted imitators, many of them, and then some of these leaders took to imitating themselves." Was there anything internal to abstract expressionism that made it incapable of sustaining further progress? I am no more certain of the answer to this question than I am of how it was possible for abstract expressionism as a style to make the first artists who took it up into masters overnight: Kline, Rothko, Pollock, and even de Kooning were really quite modest painters until they found themselves abstract expressionists. But I think one answer might have to do with the fact that, by contrast with the painting of the tradition, there was nothing for the

abstract expressionist canvas to be but art. It could play no social role in murals, for example, or fit into the workaday artisanry of traditional painting. It really had only its own drives, externally reinforced by the drives of the market, and hence it existed mainly to be collected. It belonged in the collection, and hence, by contrast with the Vasarian painting, was more and more cut off from life, and lived more and more a segregated existence in the world of art. It really did fulfill the Greenbergian requirement that painting have its own autonomous history, and it collapsed from lack of external input. The next generation of artists sought to bring art back into touch with reality, and with life. These were the pop artists, and in my historical perception, it was pop above all which set the new course for the visual arts. But Greenberg, locked into an historical vision and a critical practice that had no space for pop, was unable to accommodate it to his concepts and categories. He of course was not alone in this. It was very difficult for critics, not to speak of artists, whose future was defined by abstract expressionism and its associated ideals, to perceive pop as anything but a transient blip in the unfolding of that future.

It is in no sense to Greenberg's discredit that he did not see pop art as marking a major historical change. "So far," Greenberg wrote, "it amounts to a new episode in the history of taste, but not to an authentically new episode in the evolution of contemporary art." What Greenberg regarded as a "new episode in that evolution" was the work in his show of post-painterly abstractionism, probably because it thematized the flatness of which he made so much and, since staining rather than brushing became its favored mode of "post-painterly" laying of paint onto surfaces, supported his theory that the brushstoke needed to be eliminated to keep painting "pure." For it remained an axiom that the evolution of contemporary art was to be enacted through the evolution of painting. And what Richard Wollheim has called "painting as an art" was in for some very rough times in the following decade and a half. It was the seeming rebirth of painting, spectacularly in the work of Julian Schnabel and David Salle in the early 1980s, which gave so many the sense that art history was back on track—but *that* proved to be an episode of taste rather than of the evolution of contemporary art; and, as the eighties wore on into the nineties, it became clearer and clearer that painting was no longer the Siegfried of art-historical change.

Greenberg was finally unable to take pop art seriously. He relegated it to the category of novelty art, along with op, minimalism ("'novelty' in the old-fashioned sense of novelties sold in stores," he somewhat meanly

clarifies). But he was not able to take any art seriously after post-painterly abstraction, and his own critical output pretty much came to a halt: the last volume of his collected writings, published in 1993, ends at 1968. He had no way, no serious way, of fitting the new art into his marvelous narrative, and his sour remarks are strikingly similar in tone to those made at the advent of modernism to the effect that modernist artists could not draw or paint, or, if they could, that they were engaged in some hoax or other, and that, surely, once this was seen through, the "threat" it posed would vanish and "real" art would once again prevail. He tried to argue that the new art was "rather easy stuff, familiar and reassuring under all the ostensibly challenging novelties of staging," that it was not really avant-garde, that it was "'hard' and 'difficult' only on the outside," but soft on the inside.[3] Meanwhile there was a saving remnant, "a handful of painters and sculptors between the ages of thirty-five and fifty still produc[ing] high art." In 1967 he cautiously predicted that novelty art would collapse as a movement "as second generation Abstract Expressionism did so suddenly in 1962." And Greenberg speculated on the possibility "of the production of high art in general coming to an end along with the avant garde."

In the summer of 1992, Greenberg spoke for a small group in New York. He claimed that perhaps never in history had art "moved so slowly." Nothing, he insisted, had happened in the past thirty years. *For thirty years* there had been nothing but pop. He found this incredible, and he was extremely pessimistic when someone in the audience asked what he foresaw. "Decadence!" he answered, I think in anguish. He still thought, that is, that painting would somehow save us and that the history of art could be moved forward only through a revolution of painterly invention. I was, I must admit, thrilled to hear history talked about in such grand and sweeping terms. But I also thought that, just as at some point the explanation that modern artists have forgotten how to draw or have all become hoaxers stopped being acceptable and a new narrative was called for, so the explanation that art in the past thirty years is merely the ceaseless effort to satisfy the appetite for novelty had to be surrendered and the art of our period looked at from the perspective of a master narrative as compelling as Greenberg's narrative of modernism was.

Hence my thesis of the end of art.

Let me somewhat self-consciously and somewhat sheepishly invoke the heavy metaphysical conceit that Painting with a capital *P* or Art with a capital *A* exists on a plane with Spirit or Geist in the old Hegelian narratives, and that "what Art wanted" defined the pale of history for a

master narrative of art. I take the notion of "what Art wanted" from an idiom of the American architect Louis Kahn, who, in working out the form of a building, used to ask "what the building wanted," as if there were an internal drive, or what the later Greeks called an entelechy, an end state of fulfillment in which the building found the form through which it fulfilled its being. Employing this conceit, the proposal is that Art identified itself with a certain form of representationalism in the Vasarian era of its biography, and was jolted out of this mistaken identification sometime in the late nineteenth century, and came instead (this is Greenberg's view) to identify itself with its material vehicle, with paint and canvas, surface, and shape, at least in the case of painting. Other art was being made in these eras which did not exactly fit this scheme, but it fell outside the pale of history, so to speak. In his *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, Bernard Berenson wrote that the painter Carlo Crivelli "does not belong to a movement of constant progress, and is therefore not within the scope of this work."[4] In a fascinating discussion of Crivelli, Jonathan Watkins cites writers who found difficulty in fitting Crivelli into their narrative of "constant progress."[5] Crivelli, according to Roberto Longhi, was incapable of incorporating into his work the "profonda innovazione pittorica e prospettica" of Giovanni Bellini; and according to Martin Davies, he took an "agreeable high-class holiday far away from great pictures and the aesthetic problems they pose." Watkins undertakes to show that Crivelli was using illusion to destroy illusion, and doing so in order to achieve an altogether profound criticism of Renaissance art. Berenson appreciated something profound in Crivelli, but goes on to say that it would be "distorting our entire view of Italian art in the fifteenth century to do full justice to such a painter . . ." So either you can say Crivelli falls outside the pale of history, or, like Watkins, you can say "so much the worse for history" and "feel free to reconstruct [the past] should the need arise." "So much the worse for history" means, surely, so much the worse for narratives. But in fact it is only against a defining developmental narrative that the true originality of Crivelli can be made visible. It is heroic to seek to abolish narratives altogether, but that would at the very least press Hans Belting's question of the end of art history back into the quattrocento. And it would, beyond that, blur what seems to me to be the historical mark of the present—namely, that no master narrative applies.

A similar criticism of the Greenbergian narrative is raised in a powerful critique by Rosalind Krauss, whose book *The Optical Unconscious* discusses with immense sympathy and understanding a number of great

artists whose contributions formalist criticism had, in a nearly psychoanalytical way, consigned by "repression" to a state of critical oblivion.[6] Criticism, especially under the influence of Greenberg, had no way of dealing with Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, or Alberto Giacometti, or even with certain works of Picasso. Greenberg had no use whatever for surrealism, which he regarded as historically retrograde. "The anti-formal, anti-aesthetic nihilism of the Surrealists—inherited from Dada with all the artificial nonsense entailed—has in the end proved a blessing to the restless rich, the expatriates, and the aesthetic flaneurs who were repelled by the asceticisms of modern art."[7] Because their aim, as Greenberg sees it, was to shock, the surrealists were obliged to cultivate the kind of virtuosity in naturalistic representation that we find in Dali. On the other hand, it is not easy to see how abstract art could shock except by virtue of its contrast to a reigning norm of naturalistic representation. But the moment when abstraction could be shocking was long past, and so surrealism could achieve its aim only through juxtapositions of realistically rendered objects which can have no natural meeting place in the real, but only in the sur-real world. And, greatest sin of all, given Greenberg's vision of each medium to itself, "it is possible to construct faithful duplicates in wax, papier-mâché, or rubber of most of the recent paintings of Ernst, Dali, and Tanguy. Their 'content' is conceivable, and too much so, in other terms than those of paint."[8] So surrealism had to be explained away as outside the pale of history.

In my own version of the idea of "what art wants," the end and fulfillment of the history of art is the philosophical understanding of what art is, an understanding that is achieved in the way that understanding in each of our lives is achieved, namely, from the mistakes we make, the false paths we follow, the false images we come to abandon until we learn wherein our limits consist, and then how to live within those limits. The first false path was the close identification of art with picturing. The second false path was the materialist aesthetics of Greenberg, in which art turns away from what makes pictorial content convincing, hence from illusion, to the palpable material properties of art, which differ essentially from medium to medium. Logicians draw a standard distinction between the use and mention of an expression. An expression is used when one wants to talk about what the expression refers to in our language. Thus "New York" is used to refer to the city of New York in the sentence "New York is the home of the United Nations." But we *mention* an expression when the expression itself is what we talk about. Thus the expression "New York" is mentioned in "New York consists of two syllables." In a

way, the shift from a Vasarian to a Greenbergian narrative was a shift from artworks in their use-dimension to artworks in their mention capacity. And criticism, accordingly, shifted its approach from interpreting what works were about to describing what they were. It shifted, in other words, from meaning to being, or, loosely speaking, from semantics to syntax.

One can get a fair sense of the implications of this shift if one thinks of the difference in the way works of art outside the pale of history were addressed. During the course of modernism, African art rose in esteem, making a transition from the museum of natural history and the curio shop to the museum of art and the art gallery. If art historians had difficulty fitting Carlo Crivelli into the great developmental and progressive narrative of art, what possible case could be made for African fetishes and idols? Riegl supposes himself to be "following the spirit of today's natural science" in "assuming that contemporary primitive cultures are the rudimentary survivors of the human race from earlier cultural periods."[9] This justifies him in thinking that "their geometric ornament must represent an earlier phase of development in the decorative arts and is therefore of great historical interest." But so must their mode of representation, on this assumption—which is essentially the assumption of Victorian anthropology—give us an insight into a stage of mimesis earlier by far than any we might know about in European art, and this makes African art of considerable scientific interest. Hence the status of curios and specimens that was assigned to objects collected from so-called primitive peoples by those who studied and classified them. Primitive cultures were, as it were, living fossils in a phylum whose latest and highest exemplars were our own. Or like natural mummies, preserved by change, giving us access to earlier stages of ourselves.

When these objects became pivotal to the history of modernism, spectacularly in the case of Picasso, whose visit to the anthropological museum at Trocadero proved momentous for his own development and the subsequent development of modernist art, critics and theorists began to look at them in a new way, no longer seeing the need to distinguish between modern and "primitive" art, since they were presumed to be comparable at the level of form. Roger Fry wrote a powerful essay on "Negro Sculpture" in 1920 and emphasized the immense change that had taken place from the assumptions of the Victorian anthropology with which Riegl was so unquestioningly comfortable. "We would like to know what Doctor Johnson would have said to any one who had offered him a negro idol for several hundred pounds," Fry reflects. "It would have seemed then sheer lunacy to listen to what a negro savage had to

tell us of his emotions about the human form." Fry contends that some of the objects on view are "great sculpture—greater, I think, than anything we produced even in the Middle Ages."[10] Another formalist thinker, the American eccentric Albert Barnes, had no difficulty whatever in displaying African sculpture along with the modernist artworks he collected. Even more open than that, since he displayed objects of craftsmanship on the walls of his gallery between paintings, as if there was no longer, as indeed on formalist principles there no longer was, a serious basis for discriminating art from craft. But in fact modernism dissolved a great many boundaries, largely by aestheticizing or formalizing objects from diverse cultures which Riegl's contemporaries—not to mention Doctor Johnson's!—would have found beyond the pale of taste.

I think a fascinating study could be done of the way in which earlier periods—those without, for example, the complacent picture provided by Victorian anthropology—responded to "exotic art." The first evidence we have, for example, of the way in which goldwork from Mexico was perceived is striking. The author of the following remarks is Albrecht Dürer:

> I have also seen the things brought to the king from the new golden land: a sun all of gold a whole fathom broad, also a moon all of silver and just as large; also two chambers full of instruments of these people, likewise all kinds of weapons, armor, catapults, wonderful shields, strange garments, bed hangings, and all kind of things for many uses, more beautiful to behold than prodigies. These things were all so precious that they are valued at a hundred thousand gulden. All the days of my life I have not seen anything that gladdened my heart as these things did. For I saw among them wonderful works of art and marvelled at the subtle ingenuity of people in strange lands. I do not know how to express all that I experienced there.[11]

Spanish historian of the New World Petrus Martyr, who saw the objects sent by Moctezume to Charles V in Valladolid the same year Dürer saw them in Brussels, had no difficulty in responding to them aesthetically: "Though I little admire gold and precious stones, I am amazed by the skill and effort making their work exceed the material. . . . I do not recall ever seeing anything so appealing by its beauty to human eyes."[12]

These witnessings took place in 1520. The first edition of Vasari's text was published in 1550, and I suppose it is important to stress the difference in aesthetic response to works of art before the invention of art history, taking Vasari to have founded art history in the sense at least that he saw

art as an unfolding progressive narrative. Neither Dürer nor Petrus Martyr had the task of fitting this work into a narrative, the way Berenson would later have to abandon the hope of dealing art historically with Crivelli, since there was no way of fitting the latter into the story he had to tell. Nor did Fry, Barnes, and Greenberg have to deal with this problem, since modernism enfranchised "exotic art" by liberating its viewers from the obligation to narrativize it. But that is because they could deal with it ahistorically in terms of the transcendental principles—of what Greenberg, following Kant, refers to as taste. But this merits a word or two.

Taste was the central concept in eighteenth-century aesthetics, and the central problem in that era was how to reconcile what appeared to be two undeniable truths about taste: that "de gustibus non est disputandum" (there is no disputing taste), on the one hand, and that there is such a thing as good taste so that taste is not as subjective and relative as the first truth would appear to require. "The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under everyone's observation," Hume wrote. "But those who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still more surprised at the great inconsistence and contrariety."[13] Speaking preemptively for his contemporary Doctor Johnson, Hume remarks that "we are apt to call *barbarous* whatever departs widely from our own taste and apprehension." But then, he notes, common sense would also oppose as absurd a claim that the work of a poet like Ogilby is equal to that of Milton—a claim, Hume contends, as extravagant as that a heap of sand is as high as Mount Teneriffe. And if someone should persist in false aesthetic judgments or preferences, that simply manifests a certain indelicacy of taste, and, more important, a defective education of taste. As the term implies, there is little to distinguish aesthetic taste from a refined palate, and in both cases instruction will demonstrate that certain things are in the end more rewarding—are aesthetically better—than others. And Hume draws attention to the existence of critics who, by distancing themselves from practice and liberating their imagination, can be counted on to give the sorts of judgments the rest of us would arrive at were we to undergo a comparable discipline. It is this premise that underlies Kant's extraordinary thesis that to find something beautiful is tacitly to make a universal judgement—that is, to prescribe that everyone will find it beautiful. And it is this idea, as I have tried to show, which underlay Greenberg's own vision of criticism. Hume offers what could be extrapolated as commandments for the critic in *Of the Standard of Taste*. When the critic "has no delicacy," when "he is not aided by practice," "where no comparison has been employed," "where he lies under the influence of prejudice," and "where good sense is wanting," the critic "is not qualified to discern the beauties of design and reasoning, which are the highest and most excellent." So the ideal critic is delicate, practiced, open, able to compare, and hence possesses knowledge of a wide range of art and is endowed with good sense: "The joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty."

All works of art are as one, under this view, and in a sense modernism was the art movement that enfranchised the broadening of taste that enables us to place works of Negro sculpture in museums of fine art, conceived as institutional encyclopedias of form. All museums, as I said, are museums of modern art, to the extent that the judgment of what is art is based on an aesthetic of formalism. The aesthete is at home everywhere, and the Baule mask or the Asanti figure hangs beneath the Pollock and the Morandi in the libraries of discriminating collectors the world round. Form is after all form, and once we are liberated from the Johnsonian disposition to stigmatize African art as barbaric, how easily we accept that the art of Africa rubs elbows with that of Paris or Milan. How easily, indeed, given that so much cosmopolitan art has a geneaology that includes at least some African ancestor. This was the thesis the widely criticized exhibition "Primitvism and Modern Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984 attempted to demonstrate. But was it for the beauty of its design that Picasso was moved by the art he encountered at the Trocadero in 1907? Not according to the testimony of his own recollection.

> When I went to the Trocadero it was disgusting. The flea market. The smell. I was all alone, I wanted to get away. But I didn't leave. I stayed. I stayed. I understood something very important: something was happening to me, right? The masks weren't like other kinds of sculpture. Not at all. They were magical things. And why weren't the Egyptian pieces or the Chaldean? We hadn't realized it: those were primitive [note the voice of Victorian anthropology here], not magical things. The Negro's sculptures were intercessors. I've known the French word ever since. Against everything, against unknown, threatening spirits. I understood; I too am against everything. I too think that everything is unknown, is the enemy. . . . All the fetiches were used for the same thing. They were weapons. To help people stop being dominated by spirits. . . . *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have come to me that day.[14]

Modernist art is art defined by taste, and created essentially for persons of taste, specifically for critics. But African art was created for its power over the dark forces of the threatening world. "I went to see the carvings,"

Virginia Woolf wrote her sister in 1920. "I found them dismal and impressive, but heaven knows what real feeling I have about anything after hearing Roger discourse. I dimly see that something in their style might be written, and also that if I had one on the mantelpiece I should be a different sort of character—less adorable, as far as I can make out, but somebody you wouldn't forget in a hurry."[15] I salute Woolf's response. But those African carvings have found their way onto numerous mantelpieces as ambassadors of good taste, without in any way changing the character of those who place them there. A wonderful exhibition of contemporary artists who collect African art shows, in fact, that the preexisting character of the artist tends to define what African art means to him or her.[16] But the general point remains that feeling and form, to use the conjunction I first heard made by my teacher Susanne K. Langer, have tended overall to rule one another out. Or rather, in African art feeling rather than taste defines form. The end of modernism meant the end of the tyranny of taste, and indeed, opened room precisely for just what Greenberg found so unacceptable in surrealism—its antiformal, anti-aesthetic side. Aesthetics will carry you no great distance with Duchamp, nor will the kind of criticism Duchamp requires obey Hume's tablet of commandments.

Greenberg understood this perfectly, up to a point. In 1969 he wrote, in an essay on the avant-garde, that "things that purport to be art do not function, do not exist, as art until they are experienced through taste." But he felt that a good many artists at the time were working "in the hope, periodically renewed since Marcel Duchamp first acted on it fifty-odd years ago, that by dint of evading the reach of taste while yet remaining in the context of art, certain contrivances will achieve unique existence and value. So far this hope has proved illusory."[17] Of course it has—if Greenberg is right that nothing exists as art unless experienced through taste. The project would be incoherent, like endeavoring to make art by evading the reach of art. But the *ontological* success of Duchamp's work, consisting as it does in art which succeeds in the absence or the abeyance of the considerations of taste, demonstrates that the aesthetic is in fact not an essential or defining property of art. This, as I see it, not merely put an end to the era of modernism, but to the entire historical project that characterized modernism, namely, by seeking to distinguish the essential from the accidental qualities of art, to "purify" it, alchemically so to speak, of the contaminants of representation, illusion, and the like. What Duchamp did was to demonstrate that the project ought rather to have been to discern how art was to be distinguished

from reality. This, after all, was the problem that animated Plato at the very beginning of philosophy, and which I have often argued gave rise to the great Platonic system nearly in its entirety.[18] Plato knew what Picasso was to discover in an artistic tradition that had not been corrupted by philosophy, that art was a tool of power. In raising the question of art and reality as he did, Duchamp reconnected art with its philosophically disenfranchising beginnings. Plato had the right problem—he just gave a disfiguring answer.

To solve the philosophical problem of the relation of art and reality, critics had to begin analyzing art of a kind so like reality that the differences had to survive the test of perceptual indiscernibility. They had to answer a question like mine: "What distinguishes Warhol's *Brillo Box* from the Brillo boxes in which Brillo comes?" The witty deconstructionist Sam Wiener moved the issue back even further historically by exhibiting a box with real Brillo in it on which he pasted the Magritte-inspired label "This is not a Warhol!" But I did not intend to give Warhol all the credit for this breakthrough to philosophy. It was taking place all across the art world, especially in sculpture. It was happening with the minimalist use of industrial materials, with *arte povera*, with the kind of post-minimalist art that Eva Hesse was making. In an interview, sculptor Ron Jones has spoken of what he terms "Pictures aesthetics," by which he means, I believe, the aesthetic that defines the gallery which represents him—Metro Pictures in Soho. "If there was a preceding generation that Metro artists as a whole respond to (this is a very dangerous statement of course), it would be Warhol." In discussing my own work, particularly as it concerns precisely the difference between artworks and real things, he remarks, "I think he could have just as well have been describing Cindy's work [Cindy Sherman] or Sherrie's work [Sherrie Levine] as Warhol's work."[19] And that means, if true, that the borderline between art and reality was the theme and site of American art from the sixties on into the nineties, when this interview was granted.

Of course, a good many artists in the last thirty years have not engaged in this sort of quest at all, and if I were to apply the exclusionary spirit of philosophies of art history, I would say that they lie outside the pale of history. But that is not the way I view things. In my sense, once art itself raised the true form of the philosophical question—that is, the question of the difference between artworks and real things—history was over. The philosophical moment had been attained. The questions can be explored by artists who are interested in them, and by philosophers themselves, who can now begin to do the philosophy of art in a way that will

yield answers. To say that history is over is to say that there is no longer a pale of history for works of art to fall outside of. Everything is possible. Anything can be art. And, because the present situation is essentially unstructured, one can no longer fit a master narrative to it. Greenberg is right: nothing has happened for thirty years. That is perhaps the most important thing to be said about the art of the past thirty years. But the situation is far from bleak, as Greenberg's cry of "Decadence!" implies. Rather, it inaugurates the greatest era of freedom art has ever known.

I would like to suggest that our situation at the end of art history resembles the situation before the beginning of art history—before, that is, a narrative was imposed on art that made painting the hero of the story and cast whatever did not fit the narrative outside the pale of history and hence of art altogether. Vasari ends his narrative with Michelangelo and Leonardo, and of course Raphael. But though they conclude his narrative, they made art before the idea of that narrative had come to define the centrality of painting and its progressive developmental nature. They after all were close in time to Dürer, who was able to appreciate things like the goldwork of the Aztecs without feeling the slightest conceptual twinge, and without feeling it necessary to say that it was greater than anything in Europe, and without condescension. And Leonardo ended his life at the great court of François I, whose other great import was the master jeweler Benvenuto Cellini. Cellini was a sculptor, but his *Perseus* is not a greater work than the salt dish he fabricated for the king's condiment. There was no invidious distinction before the beginning of art history between art and craft, nor was it necessary to insist that the latter be treated as sculpture in order to be taken seriously as art. There was no imperative that an artist must specialize, and we find, in the artists who best exemplify the post-historical moment—Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Rosemarie Trockel, and others for whom all media and all styles are equally legitimate—the same protean creativity we find in Leonardo and Cellini. Somehow, the idea of pure art went with the idea of the pure painter—the painter who paints and does nothing else. Today that is an option, but not an imperative. The pluralism of the present art world defines the ideal artist as a pluralist. Much has changed since the sixteenth century, but we are in many ways closer to it than we are to any succeeding period in art. Painting, as the vehicle of history, has had a long run, and it is not surprising that it has come under attack. That attack provides the subject for a later chapter. I need first to situate pop in its historical present.

NOTES

1. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

2. Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:123.

3. Greenberg, "Where Is the Avant-Garde?" *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:264.

4. Bernard Berenson, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: C. P. Putnam, 1894), x. On the other hand, Berenson beautifully observes that "art is too great and too vital a subect to be crowded into any single formula; and a formula that would, without distorting our entire view of Italian art in the fifteenth century, do full justice to such a painter as Carlo Crivelli does not exist" (ibid.).

5. Jonathan Watkins, "Untricking the Eye: The Uncomfortable Legacy of Carlo Crivelli," *Art International* (Winter 1988), 48–58.

6. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

7. Greenberg, "Surrealist Painting," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:225–26.

8. Ibid., 231.

9. Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style*, 16.

10. Fry, "Negro Sculpture," 88.

11. Cited in George Kubler, *Esthetic Recognition of Ancient Amerindian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 208, n. 11.

12. Ibid., 43.

13. David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Political* (London: Ward, Lock, 1898), 134–49. All references are to this edition, but Hume's essay is a classic of aesthetics and easily found in the main anthologies.

14. Cited in Jack Flam, "A Continuing Presence: Western Artists/African Art," in Daniel Shapiro, *Western Artists/African Art* (New York: The Museum of African Art, 1994), 61–62.

15. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautman (New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1976), 2:429.

16. I refer to Western Artists/African Art, curated by Daniel Shapiro. See note 14.

17. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:293.

18. See especially the title essay in my *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

19. Andras Szanto, "Gallery: Transformations in the New York Art World in the 1980s" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1996). See appendix for interview with Ron Jones.

THE KISS BY ROY LICHTENSTEIN, AS IT APPEARED IN *ART NEWS*, MARCH 1962. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ CHAPTER SEVEN

Pop Art and Past Futures

If we attempt to return to the perspective of artists and critics in the early 1960s, putting in brackets, as it were, the history of art as it worked itself out between then and now, and attempt to reconstruct the *vergangene Zukunft*—the future as it appeared in that past moment to those whose present it was—it must have seemed to the abstract expressionists and their supporters alike, that the future was very much theirs. The Renaissance paradigm had lasted for over six hundred years, and there seemed reason enough to suppose that the New York paradigm might last at least as long. To be sure, the Renaissance paradigm turned out to be developmental and progressive—to sustain a narrative—and though modernism, in the thought of Clement Greenberg, was itself developmental and progressive, it is difficult to suppose that this aspect of Greenberg's thought was widely shared or even widely known. But perhaps an argument for longevity could have been induced from the diversity of the New York School itself, made up, as it was, of figures of such distinctive artistic manners. Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, Newman, Rothko, Motherwell, Still—each was distinctively himself and sufficiently unlike the rest that one would never have been able even to deduce the possibility of Rothko's style, had Rothko himself not found it, from the disjunction of other styles which defined the New York School. So it must have seemed that as new personalities became part of the school, new and utterly unimagined styles, as different from the existing styles as they were from one another, would as a matter of course emerge, with no internal limit to their number and variety.

But if abstraction held the future in its grip, what was to happen to the realists, who still existed in large numbers in America, and indeed in New York? The realists were not prepared to surrender the future to abstract expressionism, and that meant that their present was one of protest and aesthetic battle. They felt their back to the wall, not merely of art history, but of the practical production of art—for abstract expressionism was sweeping the institutional infrastructure of the art world and it seemed as

if abstraction was an enemy to be defeated, or at least repelled, and that one's entire future as an artist—indeed the very question of whether one was going to have a future as an artist—depended upon what one did here and now.

Let us consider the case of Edward Hopper. There is a direct line of descent from Thomas Eakins through Robert Henri to Hopper, in that Henri was Eakins's student and Hopper was Henri's—and Eakins himself descended from the Beaux Arts Academy in Paris and the painter Gérôme. Abstract expressionism, indeed high modernism, intersects this history the way a meteor intersects the orderly swing of planets in the solar system. Hopper would have been altogether content to work out the further implications of Eakins's agenda, just as Henri did. Henri led a battle of the so-called Independent Artists against the practices of the National Academy. In 1913, and even earlier, at Stieglitz's gallery, artists like Picasso and Matisse were but marginal presences, too wild in a way to constitute a serious threat to art as Henri, his followers, and his enemies understood it. But in Hopper's era, abstract expressionism was hardly marginal. Hopper and the artists who understood him, and whom he understood, were marginal, and in danger of being pushed off the board altogether. And the Academy represented no threat or obstacle whatsoever, as it had done for Henri, and, in a way for Eakins. Eakins, indeed, set the agenda that Henri transformed into an aesthetic ideology and which Hopper merely adopted as a matter of course.

Let's just consider the treatment of the nude figure. Eakins reacted, while still a student at the Beaux Arts Academy in Paris, against the artificial way in which the paintings in the Salon of 1868 presented the nude: "The pictures are of naked women, standing, sitting, lying down, flying, dancing, doing nothing," he wrote, "which they call Phrynes, Venuses, nymphs, hermaphrodites, houris, and Greek proper names." He more or less vowed to paint the nude in a real situation, rather than as "smirking goddesses of many complexions, amidst the delicious arsenic green trees and gentle wax flowers. . . . I hate affectation."[1] So he painted the great *William Rush Carving his Allegorical Figure of the Skuylkill River* after his return to Philadelphia, for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. It showed the nude as model, one of the ways in which a woman might naturally appear undressed. Henri, who founded the so-called Ash Can School, not only showed models as naked women, but did so in an altogether natural way, that is, showing the way real as against idealized women look with their clothes off. And Hopper, when he painted the nude, did so in erotic

situations in which a woman might naturally be undressed, such as *Girlie Show* of 1941 or *Morning Sunshine* of 1952, where one feels the woman is fantasizing. There is nothing especially modern in these paintings of Hopper's: it was, virtually, as if the late nineteenth century continued on, encapsulated in the twentieth century, as if modernism, as we have come to understand it, had never happened—though of course, with their shadows and golden lights, Eakins's pictures have the look of Old Master paintings in a way that Hopper's pictures never do: his pictures are spare and clear, with no unexplained, or so to speak, *metaphysical* shadows.

But modernism is a concept which has itself evolved. Hopper was in fact included in the Museum of Modern Art's second show, "Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans," in 1929. Alfred Barr thought Hopper "the most exciting painter in America" when he gave him a retrospective at that museum in 1933. The show was criticized as "the reverse of that which characterized the modern movement" by the critic Ralph Pearson;[2] and Barr gives us a deep insight into how modernism was understood by the institution most closely associated with it in America and, certainly in 1929, in the world: he accused Pearson of trying "to transform a popular and temporary implication of the word modern into an academic and comparatively permanent label."[3] Modernism circa 1933 was very different from modernism circa 1960, when Clement Greenberg wrote his canonical essay "Modernist Painting." But by then modernism was very nearly over with, and its demise has to be distinguished from the demise of abstract expressionism: Greenberg took a certain pleasure in noting the death of the latter in 1962, but modernism, he felt, would go on, even if it seemed to have become stalled when I heard him speak in 1992. Whatever the case, in 1933, the "modern" stood for a tremendous diversity of art: the impressionists and post-impressionists, including Rousseau; the surrealists, the fauves, the cubists. And of course, there were the abstractionists and suprematists and the nonobjectivists. But they were felt merely part of modernity, which also included Hopper, and as such modernism was no threat to realism. But by the 1950s, and especially in consequence of the immense critical success of abstract expressionism, art of the sort Hopper exemplified was in danger of being swamped by a modernism narrowly defined in terms of abstraction. What had been a part now threatened to become the whole. And the future seemed bleak for art as Hopper and his peers understood it. That defined their present as a field of battle in the style wars of the twentieth century.

Gail Levin narrates the Hoppers' involvement in the campaign against abstraction, or "gobbledegook," as they called it. They supported the action taken by a group of realist painters against the Museum of Modern Art, felt to favor abstraction and "nonobjective art" to the exclusion of realism. They were appalled by the way the Whitney annual of 1959–1960 was marked by the sparsity of realist canvases (a protest reenacted on 29 September 1995). They banded together with other artists, Jo Hopper wrote in her diary, "to preserve existence of realism in art against the wholesale usurpation of the abstract by Mod. Mus., Whitney, and thru them spread thru most of the universities for those who cannot abide not subscribing to le dernier cri from Europe."[4] They helped put out a magazine called *Reality*, which ran through several issues. They felt sincerely that if they did not prevail in these efforts, realist painting was a doomed thing.

I do not think it possible to convey the moral energy that went into this division between abstraction and realism, from both sides, in those years. It had an almost theological intensity, and in another stage of civilization there would certainly have been burnings at the stake. In those days a young artist who did the figure did so with the sense of espousing a dangerous and heretical practice. "Aesthetic correctness" filled the role which has come to be filled by political correctness today, and the actions of the Hoppers and their cohorts convey the indignation and shock that all the conservative books on political correctness do today, although it has to be remembered how the realists were freely consigned to artistic oblivion by those who ideologized abstraction. The realists of course felt their very existence threatened, which is perhaps matched by the way in which professors have been threatened with loss of tenure, or at least have been made fearful of such loss, unless their syllabus and their classroom vocabulary is brought into line.

Whatever the merits of the analogy, the conflict was essentially over in five or six years. Greenberg is an interesting case to examine in this light. In 1939 he saw abstraction as an historical inevitability: abstraction was, as we saw him argue in "Towards a Newer Laocoön," an "imperative [that] comes from history." In "The Case for Abstract Art" of 1959, he implied that representation is irrelevant, that "the abstract formal unity of a picture by Titian is more important to its quality than what that picture images"—a point made earlier in the century by Roger Fry. "It is a fact," Greenberg continues, "that representational paintings are essentially and most fully appreciated when the identifications of what they represent

are only secondarily present to our consciousness." He largely repeated this invidious characterization in his canonical essay "Modernist Painting" of 1960, where he wrote that "modernist painting in its latest phase has not abandoned the representation of recognizable objects in principle. What it has abandoned in principle is the representation of the kind of space that recognizable objects can inhabit." Painting did this in order to set itself logically apart from sculpture, he famously argues, and it is only fair to observe that this distinction, while it might give credibility to an artist like Stuart Davis or Miró, situates Hopper and the realists on a lower rung of historical evolution. But by 1961 he had ascended to a level from which he could say that there is good and bad in all of us, so that even abstraction has lost its note of historical destiny: "there is both bad and good in abstract art." And by 1962 abstract expressionism was all but finished, though this was not in any obvious way immediately apparent to anyone in that year.

Hopper and the realists saw the future as empty of their presence if they did not fight for it, the way, I suppose, the factions in Bosnia must feel about their country. But in just a few years Greenberg was able to say that there was no basic difference at all between the abstractionist and the realist, since there was a level at which all that mattered was quality, not kind, which is very much the situation today. Just as the Armory Show of 1913 made it plain that the differences between the Independents and the academicians were of small moment by contrast with the difference between both of them and cubism or fauvism, so, today, the difference between figuration and abstraction, since both are modes of painting, is of vastly lesser importance than the difference between painting in whatever mode, and video, say, or performance art. By 1911 the future both of the Ash Can painters and the academicians was a *vergangenes Zukunft*, as was, by 1961, the future of the realists and the abstractionists. They identified the future of art with the future of painting. And the future, as it happens, all at once put painting in the position abstraction had occupied in the early years of modernism as defined by the Museum of Modern Art: it was just one of a large number of artistic possibilities. The entire shape of art history had undergone change, however difficult it was to perceive in the early sixties when art and painting were virtually synonymous. And it is striking that neither abstract expressionism's advocates, like Greenberg, nor its opponents, were able to perceive the historical present in which they lived, because each saw the future in a way that proved irrelevant to the way things were.

The cause of the change, in my view, was the emergence of the somewhat unfortunately named pop art, again in my view the most critical art movement of the century. It began somewhat insidiously in the early sixties—insidiously in the sense that its impulses were disguised under drips and dribbles of paint in the manner of abstract expressionism, the emblem of artistic legitimacy at that time. But by 1964 it had thrown off the disguises and stood, in its full reality, as what it was. Interestingly enough, the Whitney decided to mount a Hopper retrospective in 1964. This had certainly little to do with the efforts of the realists, or their magazine *Reality*, or their picket lines in front of museums, or their letters in defense of John Canaday's attacks on abstract expressionism in the *New York Times*. "The decision to organize the retrospective came at a time when younger artists, especially among the pop and the photorealist movements, were taking a renewed interest in realism and in one of its leading exponents."[5] "At a time when younger artists . . . were taking a renewed interest" leaves it open whether this was a cause or merely a coincidence. Even the abstract expressionists "took an interest" in Hopper; at least de Kooning did, though he might be considered a compromised member of the movement due to the use of the figure. "You're doing the figure," Pollock charged. "You're still doing the same goddamn thing. You know you never go out of being a figure painter."[6] And the critical uproar when de Kooning exhibited his *Women* at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1953 is legendary: he had betrayed, or at least imperilled "our [abstract] revolution in painting." But de Kooning said to Irving Sandler in 1959, "Hopper is the only American I know who could paint the Merritt Parkway."[7] Once popular graphic imagery became thematic in pop, scholars found in Hopper a "predecessor," thinking of the way he painted the words "Ex Lax" in his picture of a drugstore, or the logo of Mobil Gas in his celebrated image of a gas station. But these are all externalities. They throw light neither on Hopper nor on pop. We really have to try to think of pop—or at least I think we have to think of pop—in a more philosophical way. I subscribe to a narrative of the history of modern art in which pop plays the philosophically central role. In my narrative, pop marked the end of the great narrative of Western art by bringing to self-consciousness the philosophical truth of art. That it was a most unlikely messenger of philosophical depth is something I readily acknowledge.

I want at this point to insert myself into this narrative, for I am now discussing an event I lived through. Artists, when they show their slides and talk about their work, characteristically report turning points in their

development. It is less common for historians or philosophers to do this, but perhaps it is justified, since my experience of the pop movement was a set of philosophical responses that led to the body of thought that occasioned my having been invited to deliver the lectures on which this book is based. My own *vergangene Zukunft* in the 1950s, so far as painting was concerned, was one in which reality was represented gesturally, exactly in the manner of de Kooning's *Women* and his subsequent landscapes, such as *Merritt Parkway*. So, to the degree that I participated in the controversies, which were in any case unavoidable if one associated with artists in those years, I was too abstract for realists and too realist for abstractionists. I was myself attempting an artistic career in the fifties, and my own work sought to make that future present. But I was also attempting a philosophical career, and I have the most vivid recollection of seeing my first pop work—it was in the spring of 1962. I was living in Paris and working on a book which appeared a few years later under the somewhat daunting title *Analytical Philosophy of History*. I stopped one day at the American Center to read some periodicals, and I saw Roy Lichtenstein's *The Kiss* (printed sideways) in *Art News*, the crucial art publication of those years. I found out about pop the way almost everyone in Europe found out about it—through art magazines, which were, then as now, the main carriers of artistic influence. And I must say I was stunned. I knew that it was an astonishing and an inevitable moment, and in my own mind I understood immediately that if it was possible to paint something like this—and have it taken seriously enough by a leading art publication to be reviewed—then everything was possible. And, though it did not immediately occur to me, if everything was possible, there really was no specific future; if everything was possible, nothing was necessary or inevitable including my own vision of an artistic future. For me, that meant that it was all right, as an artist, to do whatever one wanted. It also meant that I lost interest in doing art and pretty much stopped. From that point on I was single-mindedly a philosopher, and so I remained until 1984, when I began to be an art critic. When I returned to New York, I was keen to see the new work, and began to see the shows at Castelli's and the Green Gallery, though pop paintings and other works were turning up everywhere, including the Guggenheim Museum. And there was a singular exhibition at Janis's. My great experience, often enough described, was my encounter with Warhol's *Brillo Box* at the Stable Gallery, in April of 1964, the year of Hopper's Whitney retrospective. It was a most exciting moment, not least of all because the entire structure of debate which had defined the New York art scene up to that point had

ceased having application. A whole new theory was called for other than the theories of realism, abstraction, and modernism which had defined the argument for Hopper and his allies and his opponents.

As luck would have it, I was invited that year to read a paper on aesthetics for the American Philosophical Association meeting in Boston. The person who had been scheduled to give it dropped out, and the program chairman thought to invite me as substitute. The paper was titled "The Art World," and it was the first philosophical effort to deal with the new art.[8] I take a certain pride that Warhol, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg, and Oldenberg were discussed in *The Journal of Philosophy*—which published the symposium papers of the APA meeting—well before they were featured in what used to be called "the slicks." And that paper, not once so far as I know cited in the copious bibliographies on pop in later years, really did become the basis for philosophical aesthetics in the second half of this century. Another sign of how distant from one another the worlds of art and philosophy have continued to stand, however deeply related art and philosophy as such must be in the philosophy of what Hegel terms Absolute Spirit.

What struck me in particular with pop at that time was the way it subverted an ancient teaching, that of Plato, who famously relegated art, construed mimetically, to the lowest imaginable rung of reality. The notorious example is set forth in book ten of *The Republic*, where Plato specifies the three modes of reality of the bed: as idea or form, as what a carpenter might make, and then as what a painter might make, imitating the carpenter who has imitated the form. There are Greek vases on which the artist shows Achilles in bed, with the corpse of Hektor prone on the floor beneath it, or Penelope and Odysseus in conversation beside the bed Odysseus had built for his bride. Since you can imitate, Plato wanted to say, without knowing the first thing about the thing you are imitating (as Socrates sought to make plain in an infuriating dialogue with Ion the Rhapsode), artists lack knowledge. They "know" only the appearances of appearances. And now, all at once, one began to see actual beds in the art world of the early sixties—Rauschenberg's, Oldenberg's, and, not long after that, George Segal's. It was, I argued, as if artists were beginning to close the gap between art and reality. And the question now was what made these beds art if they were after all beds. But nothing in the literature explained that. I began to develop something of a theory in "The Art World," which gave rise, among other things, to George Dickie's institutional theory of art. The *Brillo Box* made the question general. Why was it a work of art when the objects which resemble it exactly, at least under perceptual criteria, are mere things, or, at best, mere artifacts? But even if artifacts, the parallels between them and what Warhol made were exact. Plato could not discriminate between them as he could between pictures of beds and beds. In fact, the Warhol boxes were pretty good pieces of carpentry. The example made it clear that one could not any longer understand the difference between art and reality in purely visual terms, or teach the meaning of "work of art" by means of examples. But philosophers had always supposed one could. So Warhol, and the pop artists in general, rendered almost worthless everything written by philosophers on art, or at best rendered it of local significance. For me, through pop, art showed what the proper philosophical question about itself really was. It was this: What makes the difference between an artwork and something which is not an artwork if in fact they look exactly alike? Such a question could never occur when one *could* teach the meaning of "art" by examples, or when the distinction between art and reality seemed perceptual, like the difference between a picture on a vase of a bed and a real bed.

It seemed to me that now that the philosophical problem of art had been clarified from within the history of art, that history had come to an end. The history of Western art divides into two main episodes, what I call the Vasari episode and what I call the Greenberg episode. Both are progressive. Vasari, construing art as representational, sees it getting better and better over time at the "conquest of visual appearance." That narrative ended for painting when moving pictures proved far better able to depict reality than painting could. Modernism began by asking what painting should do in the light of that? And it began to probe its own identity. Greenberg defined a new narrative in terms of an ascent to the identifying conditions of the art, specifically what differentiates the art of painting from every other art. And he found this in the material conditions of the medium. Greenberg's narrative is very profound, but it comes to an end with pop, about which he was never able to write other than disparagingly. It came to an end when art came to an end, when art, as it were, recognized that there was no special way a work of art had to be. Slogans began to appear like "Everything is an artwork" or Beuys's "Everyone is an artist," which would never have occurred to anyone under either of the great narratives I have identified. The history of the art's quest for philosophical identity was over. And now that it was over, artists were liberated to do whatever they wanted to do. It was like

Rabelais's Abbaye de Theleme, whose injunction was the counterinjunction "Fay ce que voudras" (do what you like). Paint lonely New England houses or make women out of paint or do boxes or paint squares. Nothing is more right than anything else. There is no single direction. There are indeed no directions. And that is what I meant by the end of art when I began to write about it in the mid-1980s. Not that art died or that painters stopped painting, but that the history of art, structured narratively, had come to an end.

A few years ago I gave a talk in Munich titled "Thirty Years after the End of Art." A student raised an interesting question. For her, she said, 1964 was really not an interesting year, and she was astonished that I made so much of it. The uprisings of 1968 were what interested her, and the emergence of the counterculture. But she would not have found 1964 nondescript had she been an American. It was the year of our "Summer of Freedom," during which blacks, with the support of thousands of whites, busloads of whom converged on the South to register black voters, worked to make civil rights real for an entire disenfranchised race. Racism in the United States did not end in 1964, but a form of apartheid which had sullied political life in our country ended that year. In 1964 a congressional committee on women's rights released its findings, giving support to the tremendous feminist movement detonated with the publication of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* of 1963. Both liberationist movements became radicalized by 1968, to be sure, but 1964 was the year of liberation. And it cannot be forgotten that the Beatles made their first personal appearance in the United States on the Ed Sullivan show in 1964, and they were emblems and facilitators of the spirit of liberation which swept the country and in time the world. Pop fit into this entirely. It really was a singularly liberating movement outside the United States, via the same channels of transmission as the one through which I first learned about it—the art magazines. In Germany Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter's powerful capitalist realist movement was directly inspired by pop. In the then Soviet Union, Komar and Melamid invented Sots art, and appropriated as a painting the design of a cigarette pack logo of the face of the dog named Laika who died in outer space. The painting was a realistic portrait of a stylized representation of a dog, and satisfied the stylistic imperatives of Soviet realist painting while subverting them by portraying a dog as Soviet hero. In terms of art-world strategies, American pop, German capitalist realism, and Russian Sots art could be seen as so many strategies for attacking official styles—socialist realism in the

Soviet Union, of course, but abstract painting in Germany, where abstraction was itself heavily politicized and felt to be the only acceptable way of painting (easily understandable in terms of the way figuration was itself politicized under Nazism), and then abstract expressionism in the United States, which also had become an official style. Only in the Soviet Union, so far as I know, was pop art the object of a repressive attack—in the celebrated "bulldozer" show of 1974, when artists and journalists were chased by police using bulldozers. It is worth mention that it was the worldwide coverage of the event which seemed to bring about a policy of artistic detente in the Soviet Union, allowing in principle everyone to do as they liked, just as it was the intense television coverage of the beatings of civil rights protesters in Alabama which stopped them, the South somehow not being able to tolerate the image of itself that was being internalized by the rest of the world. In any case, it would hardly have been consistent with the liberating spirit of pop art that its artists should have allowed themselves to become victims of their own style. One mark, it seems to me, of artists after the end of art is that they adhere to no single avenue of creativity: Komar and Melamid's work has a spirit of impishness, but no visually identifying style. America has been conservative in this, but Warhol made films, sponsored a form of music, revolutionized the concept of the photograph, as well as made paintings and sculpture, and of course he wrote books and achieved fame as an aphorist. Even his style of dress, jeans and leather jacket, became the style of an entire generation. At this point I enjoy invoking the celebrated vision of history after the end of history that Marx and Engels put forward in *The German Ideology*, under which one can farm, hunt, fish, or write literary criticism, without *being* a farmer, a hunter, a fisherman, or a literary critic. And, if I may bring forward alongside them a true piece of philosophical artillery, this refusal to be any particular thing is what Jean-Paul Sartre calls being truly human. It is inconsistent with what Sartre calls *mauvaise foi* (bad faith), or regarding oneself as an object, and hence as having an identity as a waiter if a waiter, or a woman if a woman. That the ideal of Sartrian freedom is not necessarily easy to live by is I think testified to by the search for identity that is part of the popular psychology of our time, and by the effort to absorb oneself into the group to which one belongs, as in the political psychology of multiculturalism, and certain forms of feminism and of "queer" ideology, all so much part of this moment. But it is exactly the mark of the post-historical moment that the quest for identity is undertaken by those who are after all distant from

their target—who, in a kind of Sartrian way of putting things, are not what they are and are what they are not. The Jews of the *stetel* were what they were, and did not have to *establish* an identity.

The term pop was invented by Lawrence Alloway, my immediate predecessor as art critic for *The Nation*, and though I feel it captures only certain surface features of the movement, it was not a bad designation in terms of its irreverence. Its sound is the noise of abrupt deflation, as of an exploding balloon. "We discovered," Alloway writes,

> that we had in mind a vernacular culture that persisted beyond any special interests or skills in art, architecture, design, or art criticism that any of us might possess. The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, Pop music. [This, one might observe, is the standard bill of fare in each issue of ArtForum today.] We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically. One result of our discussions was to take Pop culture out of the realm of "escapism,""sheer entertainment," "relaxation," and to treat it with the seriousness of art.[9]

I certainly think these discussions prepared the way for the acceptance of pop, but I would like to draw a few distinctions. There is a difference between pop *in* high art, pop *as* high art, and pop art as such. We must think of this when we try to seek predecessors for pop. When Motherwell used the Gauloise cigarette package in certain of his collages, or Hopper and Hockney used elements from the world of advertising in paintings which were themselves far from pop, this is pop *in* high art. To treat popular arts *as* serious art is really what Alloway is describing: "I used the term, and also 'Pop culture,' to refer to the products of the mass media, not to works of art that draw upon popular culture."[10] Pop art as such consists in what I term transfiguring emblems from popular culture into high art. It requires recreating the logo as socialist realist art, or making the Campbell's soup can the subject of a genuine oil painting which uses commercial art as a painterly style. Pop art was so exciting because it was transfigurative. There were plenty of buffs who treated Marilyn Monroe in the same way they would treat one of the great stage or opera stars. Warhol transfigured her into an icon by setting her beautiful face on a field of gold paint. Pop art as such was a properly American achievement, and I think it was the transfigurativeness of its basic stance that made it so subversive abroad. Transfiguration is a religious concept. It means the adoration of the ordinary, as, in its original appearance, in the Gospel of

Saint Matthew it meant adoring a man as a god. I tried to convey this idea in the title of my first book on art, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, a title I appropriated from a fictional title in a novel by the Catholic novelist Muriel Spark. It seems to me now that part of the immense popularity of pop lay in that fact that it transfigured the things or kinds of things that meant most to people, raising them to the status of subjects of high art.

Erwin Panofsky, among others, has argued that there is a certain unity in a culture's various manifestations, a common tincture affecting its painting and philosophy, for example. Positivistically, it is easy to be skeptical about such notions, but I do think there is a degree of confirmation of Panofsky's basic intuition in the state of the visual arts and of philosophy at the middle of the twentieth century. This is rather rarely commented upon, and I want to sketch the philosophical counterpart of pop. It too is something I lived through and, within limits, believed in.

The prevailing philosophy in the post World War II years, in the English speaking world at least, was something loosely designated "analytical philosophy," which divided into two branches with rather different views of language, and both of which descended in one way or another from different stages in the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein. However they may have differed, both modes of analytical philosophy were committed to the view that philosophy as it had been traditionally practiced, and most particularly that part of philosophy known as metaphysics, was intellectually suspect if not downright bogus, and that the negative task of both branches of analytical philosophy was to exhibit, to demonstrate, the emptiness and nonsense of metaphysics. The one branch was inspired by formal logic, and was dedicated to the rational reconstruction of language—rebuilding language on solid foundations, themselves defined in terms of direct sensory experience (or observation), so that there would be no way in which metaphysics—which was not based on experience—could infect the system with its cognitive rot. Metaphysics was nonsense because it was radically disconnected from experience, or from observation.

The other branch thought language in no great need of reconstruction, so long as it was employed in a correct way: "Philosophy begins when language goes on holiday" is one of the things Wittgenstein says in his posthumous masterpiece, *Philosophical Investigations*. Under both its aspects, analytical philosophy was tied to common human experience at the most basic level, and ordinary discourse of the kind everyone is master of. Its philosophy was in effect what everybody always knows.

J. L. Austin was for a time the leader of the school of ordinary language philosophy at Oxford, and here is something he said which bears on my speculation. It was something of a credo:

> Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon.[11]

I think that pop art too transfigures into art what everybody knows: the objects and icons of common cultural experience, the common furnishing of the group mind at the current moment of history. Abstract expressionism, by contrast, was concerned with hidden processes and was predicated on surrealist premisses. Its practitioners sought to be shamans, in touch with primordial forces. It was metaphysical through and through, whereas pop celebrated the most ordinary things of the most ordinary lives—corn flakes, canned soup, soap pads, movie stars, comics. And by the processes of transfiguration, it gave them an almost transcendental air. Something in the 1960s explains, has to explain, why the ordinary things of the common world suddenly became the bedrock of art and philosophy. The abstract expressionists despised the world the pop artist apotheosized. Analytical philosophy felt that traditional philosophy had come to an end, having radically misconceived the possibilities of cognition. What philosophy was to do henceforward, after the end, is difficult to say, but presumably something useful and of direct human service. Pop art meant the end of art, as I have argued, and what artists were to do after the end of art is also difficult to say, but it was at least a possibility that art, too, might be enlisted in the direct service of humanity. Both faces of the culture were liberationist—Wittgenstein spoke of how to show the fly the way out of the fly bottle. It was then up to the fly where to go and what to do, just so long as it kept out of fly bottles in the future.

The temptation, of course, is to see both art and philosophy at midcentury as reactive—as reactions against. For example, there is a level of taunting of abstract expressionist pretensions in Lichtenstein. But I think both movements were really on a new level altogether, largely because they viewed the philosophy and the art before them as wholes. Analytical philosophy set itself against the whole of philosophy, from Plato through

Heidegger. Pop set itself against art as a whole in favor of real life. But I think, beyond that, that both of them answered to something very deep in the human psychology of the moment, and that this is what made them so liberating outside the American scene. What they answered to was some universal sense that people wanted to enjoy their lives now, as they were, and not on some different plane or in some different world or in some later stage of history for which the present was a preparation. They did not want to defer or to sacrifice, which is why the black movement and the women's movement in America were so urgent, and why, in the Soviet Union, one had to stop celebrating the heros of a distant utopia. Nobody wanted to wait to go to Heaven for their reward, or to take joy in members of the classless society living in a future socialist utopia. Just being left alone to live in the world pop raised to consciousness was as good a life as anyone could want. Whatever social programs there were to be had to be consistent with that. "We don't need another hero," Barbara Kruger writes on one of her posters, putting into a nutshell what Komar and Melamid sought in Sots. It was the perception, through television, that others were enjoying the benefits of ordinary life *now* that brought the Berlin Wall down in 1989.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, in *To Renew America*, has a sense of history not unlike mine. For him 1965 was the pivotal year, but the precise year can hardly matter.What took place in 1965, according to him was "a calculated effort by cultural elites to discredit this civilization and replace it with a culture of irresponsibility."[12] I cannot believe it was a calculated effort, nor can I believe that artists and philosophers should have effected a revolution which, to the contrary, explains the art and the philosophy. There was a tremendous change in the fabric of society, a demand for liberation which has not ended yet. People decided that they wanted to be left in peace to "pursue happiness," which is on the short list of fundamental human rights according to the enabling documents of our country. It is not likely that a populace dedicated to this can be reconciled to an earlier form of life, however nostalgic some may be for the law and order that defined it, and it is even arguable that wanting to be left alone by a government perceived as overbearing forms part of Representative Gingrich's agenda.

I have sought here to situate pop art in a far wider context than the common art-historical contexts of causal influence and iconographic innovation. In my view pop was not just a movement which followed one movement and was replaced by another. It was a cataclysmic moment

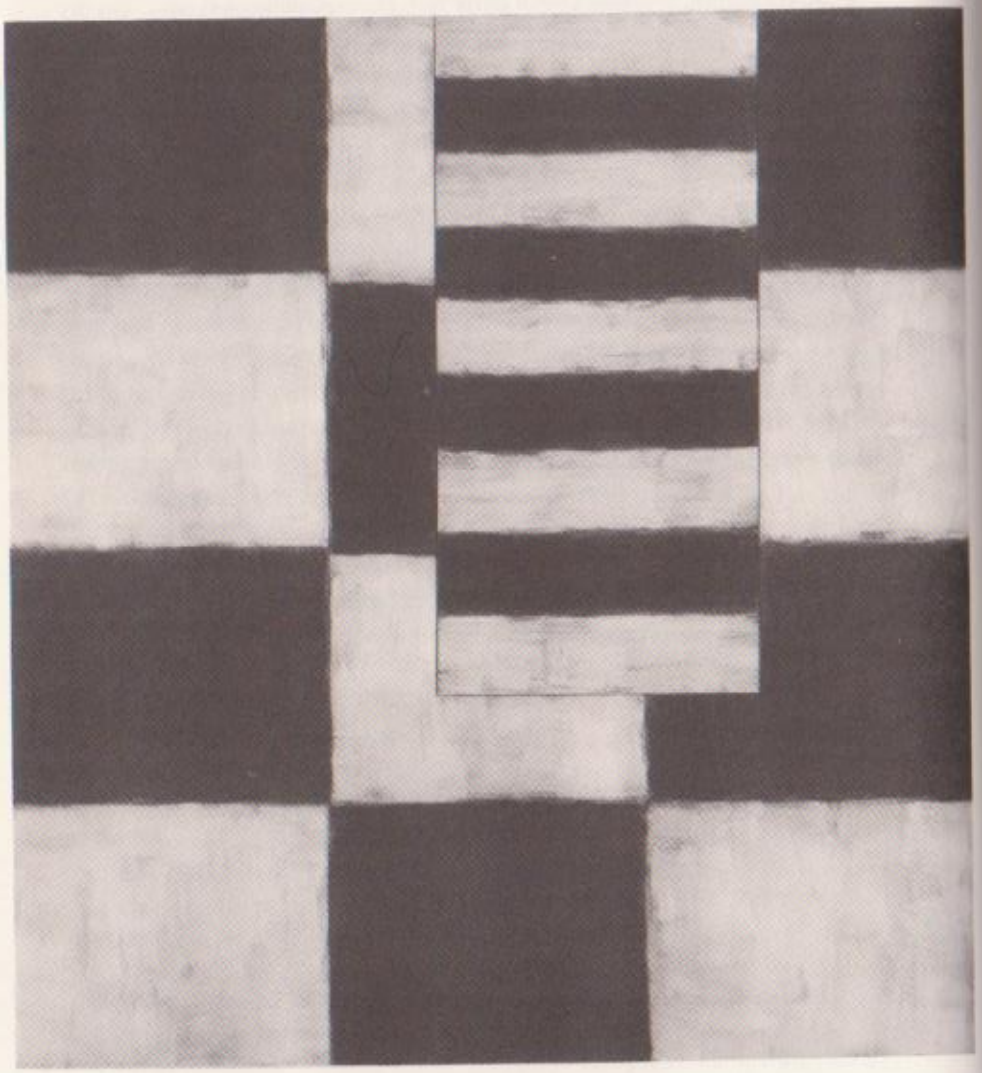
which signaled profound social and political shifts and which achieved profound philosophical transformations in the concept of art. It really proclaimed the twentieth century, which had languished for so long a time—sixty-four years—in the field of the nineteenth century, as we can see in the *vergangene Zukunft* I began with. One by one the terrible ideas of the nineteenth century have been exhausting themselves, though many of the nineteenth-century institutions of repression remain. What will the twentieth century be like once it gets under way? I would like to see an image by Barbara Kruger that says, "We don't need another narrative."

One possible advantage of seeing art in the widest context we can manage is, at least in the present case, that it helps us with a rather narrow problem of differentiating between Duchamp's ready-mades and such pop works as Warhol's *Brillo Box*. Whatever he achieved, Duchamp was not celebrating the ordinary. He was, perhaps, diminishing the aesthetic and testing the boundaries of art. There really is, in history, no such thing as having done something before. That there is an outward resemblance between Duchamp and pop is one of the things it is the achievement of pop to help us see through. The resemblances are far less striking than those between *Brillo Box* and ordinary Brillo cartons. What makes the difference between Duchamp and Warhol is similarly far less difficult to state than what is the difference between art and reality. Situating pop in its deep cultural moment helps show us how different its causes were than those that drove Duchamp half a century earlier.

NOTES

1. Thomas Eakins, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), 20.
2. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 251.
3. Ibid., 252.
4. Ibid., 469.
5. Ibid., 567.
6. *Willem de Kooning Paintings* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1994), 131.
7. Levin, *Edward Hopper*, 549.
8. Arthur C. Danto, "The Art World," *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–84. This was my first philosophical publication on art as well, and remained so until, with a few minor exceptions, the appearance of my *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

9. Lawrence Alloway, "The Development of British Pop," in Lucy R. Lippard, *Pop Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 29–30.
10. Ibid., 27.
11. J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 130.
12. Newt Gingrich, *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 29.



HOMO DUPLEX (1993) BY SEAN SCULLY. 108" by 90". OIL/LINEN. COURTESY: MARY BOONE GALLERY, NEW YORK.
PHOTOGRAPH © DOROTHY ZEIDMAN.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ CHAPTER EIGHT

Painting, Politics, and Post-Historical Art

IT IS POSSIBLE to place alongside Clement Greenberg's lamentation that nothing had happened in art in the last thirty years—that never in its history had art moved so slowly—a deeply alternative interpretation. This would be that art was not moving slowly but that the very concept of history in which it moved slowly or rapidly had itself vanished from the art world, and that we were now living in what I have been calling "post-historical" times. Greenberg tacitly subscribed to a developmental progressive view of history, which had indeed been the way that art had been conceived since Vasari at least—as a narrative of progress in which gains and breakthroughs were made in the advancement of art's goals. The goals had changed under modernism, but the great narrative Greenberg proposed remained developmental and progressive, and in 1964 he saw color-field abstraction as the next step toward purifying painting. But—pop!—the train of art history was blown off the tracks and has been awaiting repair for thirty years. When on that muggy August afternoon in 1992 someone asked him whether he saw any hope at all, he answered that, well, he had thought for a long time that Jules Olitski was our best painter. The implication was that it was painting that would finally save art, get the train back on its tracks, and move to the next station—we would know we had arrived when we had arrived—in the great progressive advance of modernism.

The alternative view would be that rather than a transit interrupted, art, construed historically, had reached the end of the line because it had moved onto a different plane of consciousness. That would be the plane of philosophy, which, because of its cognitive nature, admits of a progressive developmental narrative which ideally converges on a philosophically adequate definition of art. At the level of artistic practice, however, it was no longer an historical imperative to extend the tracks into the aesthetic unknown. In the post-historical phase, there are countless

directions for art making to take, none more privileged, historically at least, than the rest. And part of what that meant was that painting, since no longer the chief vehicle of historical development, was now but one medium in the open disjunction of media and practices that defined the art world, which included installation, performance, video, computer, and various modalities of mixed media, not to mention earthworks, body art, what I call "object art," and a great deal of art that had earlier been invidiously stigmatized as craft. That painting was no longer the "key" did not mean that something else was to take over from it, for in truth by the early 1990s the visual arts in the vastly widened sense that term now took, no longer had the sort of structure that made a developmental history interestingly thinkable or even critically important. Once we move to some sector of the visual arts other than painting and possibly sculpture, we encounter practices that can doubtless be refined upon, but where the potentialities are lacking for a progressive development of the kind painting had so readily lent itself to over the centuries, in its first phase as the project of achieving increasingly adequate representations of the world, and, in its modernist phase, increasingly adequate attainments of its pure state. The final phase—the philosophical phase—was now to find an increasingly adequate definition of itself, but this, I am claiming, is a philosophical rather than an artistic task. It was as if a great river had now resolved itself into a network of tributaries. And it was the lack of a single current that Greenberg read as the absence of anything happening at all. Or rather, he read all the tributaries as variations of the same theme—what he called "novelty art."

It is possible that Greenberg's narrative of the internal drive toward the essence of art is in fact more widely exemplified than one might have supposed. In his marvelous essay "Style and Medium in Motion Pictures," Panofsky writes the following of Keaton's *The Navigator* of 1924 and Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* of 1925:

> The evolution from the jerky beginnings to this grand climax offers the fascinating spectacle of a new artistic medium gradually becoming conscious of its legitimate, that is, exclusive possibilities and limitations—a spectacle not unlike the development of the mosaic, which started out with transposing illusionistic genre pictures into a more durable material and culminated in the hieratic supernaturalism of Ravenna; or the development of line engraving, which started out as a cheap and handy substitute for book illumination and culminated in the purely "graphic" style of Dürer.[1]

Still, it is interesting to see how the "is" of historical development gets transformed into the "ought" of medium criticism. The modernist idea that art consists in fidelity to a medium's essential features offered a very powerful critical position in arts other than painting. Thus when video began to emerge as an art form, it inevitably developed a purist critical agenda in which works were castigated for not being "video" enough. Artists sought to expunge from their films or tapes whatever was not essential to the medium, new as it was, until a time came when such purism no longer seemed important. By the same token, in the crafts, especially in the so-called first generation of studio furniture makers after World War II, the effort was to let the materials speak for themselves—to emphasize the woodness of the wood, for example, or to thematize the repertoire of joinery that marks the woodworker as craftsperson. When this stopped being important, when craftspersons stopped caring for purity—or even began to attack purity as in a celebrated work by Garry Knox Bennett where, after building a prize confection in impeccably joined and veneered woods, he hammered in a sixteen penny nail, bent it, and left the hammer marks—and began to use whatever means lent themselves to their expressive purposes, even using the illusionist techniques of painting, as in the clever and enchanting cabinetry of John Cedarquist, the grip of the Greenbergian paradigm had clearly weakened. Postmodernism, an authentic style which has emerged within the post-historical period was generally and defiantly characterized by an indifference to the kind of purity Greenberg saw as the goal of an historical development. When there was no such goal, the narratives of modernism had ended, even for painting.

But the power of Greenberg's vision is nowhere better testified to than through the radical critiques of painting itself which began to develop in the 1980s. Ironically, these critiques were more or less based on the Greenbergian account, though advanced by critics for whom Greenberg was anathema. They took it for granted that the production of pure painting was the goal of history, that it had been reached, and hence that there was nothing left for painting to do. Painting had died through its own historical self-fulfillment. Here is a not uncharacteristic statement by one advanced critic, Douglas Crimp, in an essay on French painter Daniel Buren:

> "From today painting is dead." It is now [1981] nearly a century and a half since Paul Delaroche is said to have pronounced that sentence in the face of the overwhelming evidence of Daguerre's invention. But even though

> the death warrant has been periodically reissued throughout the era of modernism, no one seems to have been entirely willing to execute it; life on death row lingered to longevity. But during the 1960s, painting's terminal condition finally seemed impossible to ignore. The symptoms were everywhere: in the work of painters themselves, all of whom seemed to be reiterating Ad Reinhardt's claim that he was "just making the last paintings anyone could make" or allowing their paintings to be contaminated with photographic images; in minimal sculpture, which provided a definitive rupture with painting's unavoidable tie to a centuries-old idealism; in all those other mediums to which artists turned as, one after another, they abandoned painting. . . . [Daniel Buren] knows only too well that when his stripes are seen as painting, painting will be understood as the "pure idiocy" that it is. At the moment when Buren's work becomes visible, the code of painting will have been abolished and Buren's repetitions can stop: the end of painting will finally have been acknowledged.[2]

There is all the difference in the world, of course, between Paul Delaroche and Douglas Crimp finding in photography the end of painting. In 1839, Delaroche was referring to the mimetic ambitions of painting and felt that if all the representational skills a painter had to master could now be built into a mechanism that would produce as creditable an imitation as a master painter could, there could be little point in learning to paint. Of course, there is an art to photography as well, but Delaroche had in mind the bare achievement of an image on a surface—painting was clearly still defined in terms of mimesis—which was now built into the photographic apparatus, and no longer required the hand and eye of the painter. Crimp, a political radical, almost certainly had in mind the class associations of painting, the institutional implications of the museum of fine arts, and Walter Benjamin's influential distinction between artworks possessed of an aura and artworks achieved by means of "mechanical reproduction." His argument is political in a way that, so far as I know, Delaroche's could not have been. It is political in a way that almost all proclamations of the end of painting—specifically, the end of easel painting—have been in this century. The Berlin dadaists, the Moscow committees charged with determining the role of art in a communist society, the Mexican muralists (Siqueros called the easel painting "the fascism of art")[3] have all been politically driven in their denunciations of painting. Duchamp's contemptuous characterization of "olfactory artists"—artists in love with the smell of paint—would be an exception, just because it is difficult to ascribe a political agenda to Duchamp at all. But Dali, possibly

in a gesture of aggravated surrealism, declared himself ready to kill painting off: "Art in its traditional sense, is out of place in our age, there is no reason for it to exist, it has become something grotesque. The new intelligentsia takes pleasure in killing it off completely."[4] Each of these anti-painting postures saw painting as belonging to a now discredited form of life, to be replaced with photomontage, photography, "art into life," mural painting, conceptual art, or whatever it was other than painting that Dali thought he was doing, and the like. Crimp himself was managing editor of the influential journal *October*, which, not untypically of American intellectual publication (*The Partisan Review* is the paradigm), combined a radical critique of contemporary culture with an often elitist attitude toward art. The difference in the case of *October* is that the art it supported presupposes institutional frames that oppose those which define the consumption of art in "late capitalist" society. A society in which these alternative institutional frames were in fact the defining ones for art might on the whole be morally preferable to one whose institutions were made to order for painting: galleries, collections, museums, and art publications which serve as advertising venues for the shows reviewed in them. Even Greenberg, as we saw, expressed reservations about painting in a widely discussed 1948 essay on the crisis of the easel painting, which he felt was in process of dissolving itself, and in so doing "seems to answer to something deep-seated in contemporary sensibility":

> This very uniformity, this dissolution of the picture into sheer texture, sheer sensation, into the accumulation of similar units of sensation . . . corresponds perhaps to the feeling that all hierarchical distinctions have been exhausted, that no area or order of experience is either intrinsically or relatively superior to any other. It may speak for a monist naturalism that takes all the world for granted and for which there are no longer either first or last things.[5]

Someone who subscribed to this view of painting and its social presuppositions might find a certain confirmation of it in the tremendous upsurge of painting in the early 1980s, just when, ironically, Douglas Crimp was declaring the end of painting. At the onset of the Reagan years and their total endorsement of capitalist values, a vast quantity of large easel paintings appeared that seemed almost calibrated to the large amounts of disposable capital that fell into large numbers of hands. Ownership of art seemed an imperative of that form of life, all the more so in that a strong secondary market virtually guaranteed that in enhancing one's life-style with art, one was also making a shrewd investment: the art world was the

Reagan philosophy enacted in high culture. The art was all at once there for those who wanted to "get in on the ground floor," either because they had (to change the metaphor) "missed the boat" with abstract expressionism, which was no longer priced within reach, or because they were not around when it was possible to buy at absurdly low prices what was literally worth a fortune today. It did not greatly matter that someone might have undertaken to criticize the values of capitalism in his or her paintings: the mere fact that they were *paintings* implied endorsement of the institutions of the society criticized, or even condemned, in their content. Just wanting to express oneself as an artist in paint could have been perceived as inherently compromising.

My own response to neo-expressionism was extremely skeptical. I did not believe that it was the repetition of an earlier moment in American art, or that history was back on track in the sense that the history of art and the history of painting were identical. My experience of those heady shows of Julian Schnabel and David Salle in Soho in 1981 was, as I have elsewhere written, that they were "not what was supposed to happen next." And that raised the question of what was to happen next. The answer to that question, as I came to see it, was that nothing was *supposed* to happen next because the narrative in which next stages were mandated had come to an end with what I have been calling "the end of art." That narrative ended when the philosophical nature of art attained a certain degree of consciousness. Art after the end of art could of course comprise painting, but the painting in question was not driving the narrative forward. The narrative, rather, was finished. There was no better reason, internal to the history of art for there to be painting, than for there to be art in any other form. Art had attained narrative closure, and what was now being produced belonged to the post-historical age.

There is a marked difference between a declaration in 1981 that painting was dead and earlier declarations to the same effect in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1981 there was, if one cared to see it a certain way, evidence that painting had nowhere further to go, that the all-black paintings of Reinhardt, the all-white paintings of Robert Ryman, or the sullen stripes of Daniel Buren, marked terminal stages of internal exhaustion. While one could, if one wanted to be a painter, content oneself with repeating these solutions, or making marginal variations, there remained a serious question of why one would want to. There were a comfortable number of variables—size, hue, surface texture, edge, even shape—with which to experiment, but this had to be done without the hope or expectation of

an historical breakthrough. Monochrome painting has its pleasures and victories, within the materialist aesthetic of the modernist narrative, but refining on the monochrome would correspond to a kind of wiping up operation in science, when, for example, one might fiddle with new data to get the orbit of the Moon down right. So conceived, science might be neverending, but its victories would have been achieved. And, in painting at least, it might seem that, in Hegel's terms once more, "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past." Moreover, the basis for a philosophical solution to the problem of art had been established, and was no longer something for artists to seek. That had passed, at last, into the hands of philosophers themselves. So it was a fairly bleak picture for artists, with only the modernist aesthetic to go on. Only if one believed modernism itself was past could one begin to cast about for something else to do. I suppose neo-expressionist painting was one answer. Since that narrative had ended, why not, forgetting about the economic account, simply use painting as a means for self expression? With no narrative to continue, why *not* expression? Under the imperatives of the modernist narrative, expression—for which Greenberg had a singular distaste—was in effect forbidden. Now it was permitted. It was as though a deep revolution in the structure of what philosophers call *deontic modalities* had taken place. I want to explain how this happened, but I first want to offer an analogy.

Professional philosophers of my generation lived through just such a revolution, especially those of us trained in the major American universities. The philosophy departments had been hospitable to a number of refugee philosophers in the war years, whose philosophy, let alone whose race in many cases, was radically unacceptable to fascism. They were logical positivists or logical empiricists, and it was their view that in a certain sense philosophy as it had been known down the centuries had come to an end. It was time that it was replaced by something intellectually responsible, namely, science. The positivists had a very clear idea of what science amounted to. In their view, and in marked contrast to philosophy, something was scientific if it was verifiable through sense experience (i.e., observation) or, to cite an influential variant, if it was falsifiable that way. For reasons somewhat too abstruse to go into here, it was their consensus that the meaning of a proposition consists in the conditions of its verifiability, and hence if a proposition happens to have no verifiable consequences, it is meaningless or, as they bluntly said, was nonsense. And, as I had occasion to say in my first chapter, that meant that

metaphysics was nonsense. The thought was that the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness meant—and it sounds marvelous in German—*die Uberwindung der Metaphysik*. And that is what we were taught.

This gave philosophers very narrow options. They could leave philosophy and go into science—hence do something meaningful in all senses of the term—or they could do what possible philosophical work remained to do, namely, the logical clarification of the language of science. Friends of my intellectual youth who studied, for example, with Professor Paul Marhenke in Berkeley were urged to leave philosophy and do something honest. Wittgenstein himself urged this on those who got close to him, and he in fact tried to get a position as an industrial laborer in the Soviet Union. The rest of us worried about dispositional predicates, bridge definitions, counterfactual conditionals, reduction, axiomatization, and lawlikeness. Like the stripe painter who might have wondered if painting stripes was why she went into art, young philosophers may very well have wondered if such scrutiny of minute logical detail was what they wanted from the philosophical life. But there was the immense prestige of their teachers, of mathematical logic, and then all the great challenges the verifiability criterion apparently presented.

That criterion itself, however, faced certain challenges, not from the muddled metaphysicians who were disenfranchised by it but by the very thinkers whose agenda it defined. They sought for a rigorous formulation, and the moment they did so, the criterion began to spring leaks. A number of exceedingly sharp formulations of the seemingly lethal logical weapon demonstrated that the moment one makes the principle tight enough to exclude as nonsense the philosophy the positivists sought to demolish, the principle forthwith excluded a lot of the science they were anxious to put forward as the very paradigm of meaningfulness. And when it was loosened up to admit the latter, nonsense kept gushing in. It became a challenge to fix the criterion up to withstand these linked pressures, but in the end no one found out how. For a time, it stood as a kind of logical scarecrow, frightening away the timid crows of speculation, but bit by bit it withered on its cross. The positivists continued to insist upon it as if it were true and fatal, but finally, except as a stratagem of intimidation, it stopped being interesting. Still, philosophy proceeded as if it were true.

I have the most vivid recollection of an article on free will appearing in the British journal *Mind*, in which the author began by saying, in effect, that since no one knew how to fix up the verifiability criterion, it could no longer forbid metaphysics. So where, he wanted to know, were the

metaphysicians? And it was all at once clear to me that the criterion had died, though people were acting as if it were still alive and dangerous. There was not exactly dancing in the street, but there began to be metaphysics in the professional journals. Peter Strawson published his crucial book *Individuals*, which was a study in what he termed "descriptive metaphysics." And one by one all the old problems returned. Philosophers still wrote on them as if they were doing symbolic logic: articles bristled with displayed formulae. But these more or less were emblems of philosophical legitimacy on the face of essays which for the most part could have been written in plain English. In the early 1960s something like this happened in art: it became obligatory, however subversive of abstract expressionism one meant one's work to be, that it be dribbled and dripped over with paint. The gym shoes and ladies' panties in Claes Oldenberg's store were thick with dripped paint, which was as inconsistent with the spirit of his works as could be imagined. Warhol's first comic strip panels proclaimed the seriousness of their artistic intentions by smears and runs of paint. It took three years, more or less, for art to outgrow this need for a kind of protective pigmentation. Philosophical prose has not recovered to this day, but that, in my view, is a function of real institutional pressures: the candidate for tenure must establish his or her logical manhood in order to be taken as a serious philosopher, and cannot, for fear of being thought soft, give up the purely ornamental formalisms after tenure is attained.

Verificationism in philosophy was very like modernism in artistic theory, forbidding certain things, constraining acceptable artistic practice in acceptable channels, and defining the way critical practice was to be structured. Criticism on Greenbergian principles, as I suggested earlier, survived even when artistic practice began, in the middle to late sixties, to slip away from it. As late as 1978, Douglas Crimp published his first essay on photography, "Positive/Negative," in which, he confesses in the preface to his 1993 book, *On the Ruins of the Museum*, "I still wanted to discriminate between a 'legitimately' modernist photographic practice and an 'illegitimate' presumption that photography is, as a whole, a modernist aesthetic medium."[6] He argued, on precisely modernist grounds, that certain photographs of Degas were about "photography itself," as modernist painting is about painting. "The very notion—'photography itself'—would later seem preposterous to me," he adds in a parenthesis. His thoughts about painting, the museum, and photography are connected. To think of photography in modernist terms is to think of the production of a self-conscious photograph as destined for inclusion in a

museum's cabinet of photographic art. The photograph would be like a painting, both enfranchised by the same critical theories. But Benjamin liberated him to think about photographs in terms of mechanical reproduction, and hence as capable of existing in as large a number as could be required, which is at odds with the artificially restricted edition that goes with the concept of the museum. His own book is illustrated with the photographs of Louise Lawlor, mechanically reproduced, and there is no invidious distinction between "originals" and "copies" to make the photograph in the book any less artistically valuable than the photograph in the museum. Since photography as mechanical has replaced painting, the museum has lost its point. Crimp might, upon reflection, reach the conclusion that it was not painting versus photography, as he argues in the essay on "The End of Painting," but modernism, whatever the subject, versus another form of criticism, call it postmodernist if you choose, Crimp's criticism being one example. The emergence of photography is seen as an attack on the museum construed as a bastion of a certain kind of politics.

But modernist critical practice was out of phase with what was happening in the art world itself in the late sixties and through the 1970s. It remained the basis for most critical practice, especially on the part of the curatoriat, and the art-history professoriat as well, to the degree that it descended to criticism. It became the language of the museum panel, the catalog essay, the article in the art periodical. It was a daunting paradigm, and it was the counterpart in discourse to the "broadening of taste" which reduced art of all cultures and times to its formalist skeleton, and thus, as I phrased it, transformed every museum into a Museum of Modern Art, whatever that museum's contents. It was the staple of the docent's gallery talk and the art appreciation course—and it was replaced, not totally but massively, by the postmodernist discourse that was imported from Paris in the late seventies, in the texts of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Lacan, and of the French feminists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. That is the discourse Crimp internalizes, and it came to be lingua artspeak everywhere. Like modernist discourse, it applied to everything, so that there was room for deconstructive and "archeological"—in Foucault's sense—discussion of art of every period. It was not, unlike modernist discourse, generated out of a revolution in art. But it did seem to fit art after the end of art to a singular degree. And, inevitably, it got taken up by artists themselves, who were not especially equipped, philosophically, to control the new ways of thinking but to whom it sounded as if it accounted

for what they had stumbled into in their defections from modernism. And it suited to perfection the pathologies of self-pity to which the artistic, or perhaps the creative personality is subject in every clime. There remains a strong current of modernism in criticism, especially in that of journalists, like Hilton Kramer or Robert Hughes or Barbara Rose. Still, however strident and however influential their voices were, the art world of the 1980s spoke a form of broken French, based on the translations of murky texts written in what had until then been regarded as a language inherently lucid: it is worth observing that the texts were *written* in broken French!

I want now to register the way in which artists turned away from art as defined by modernist criteria in the late sixties and through the seventies, as if through their conduct they acknowledged that the tremendous narrative of modernism was over, even though they had no other narrative to put in its place. Nor did a new master narrative emerge in the later part of this era, when artists began to sense a certain relevance to what they were doing in the postmodernist texts that did fill the gap left by what was perceived as the increasingly irrelevance to their projects of modernist art criticism. Indeed, it was a theme of postmodernism, according especially to Lyotard, that there were no more master narratives to be had. The deconstructive spirit saw theories less in terms of truth or falsity than in terms of power and oppression, and since it became the standard question to raise as to who tended to benefit from a theory being accepted, and who was oppressed by it, those very questions very naturally were extended to modernism itself. Leftist critics took the view that modernism, which assumed that painting and sculpture were the vehicles of art-historical development, in fact was a theory calculated to entrench privilege by entrenching the institutions which painting and sculpture presupposed—the museum preeminently (with the sculpture park as a variant), the gallery, the collection, the dealer, the auction house, the connoisseur. The artist was inevitably co-opted, if he or she wanted to succeed, into producing work which reenforced these largely exclusionary institutions. And the museums in turn, subsidized by corporate funding, acted as conservative agents for the status quo. But this then meant that artists who worked "outside the system" could regard themselves as agents for social change and even for revolution, no longer imagined as manning the barricades and heaving paving stones and overturning cars, but as making art which, to use a term which came into favored use, *subverted* the institutional status quo by circumventing the institutions deconstruction showed to be oppressive. Painting itself came

to be represented as the art form par excellence of the group empowered by the institutions in question, and hence, increasingly and inevitably as politically incorrect, and museums came to be stigmatized as repositories of oppressive objects which had little to say to the oppressed themselves. Painting, in brief, became obliquely politicized, and in an odd way, the purer its aspiration, the more political it seemed. What did the allover white painting have to do with women, African-Americans, gays, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and such other minorities as there might be? The all-white painting seemed almost to flaunt the power of the white male artist! It fits this picture precisely that in the most political of recent major exhibitions, the 1993 Whitney Biennial, only seven painters were included. (It says something about political reconciliation that the 1995 Biennial had twenty-seven painters in it.)

The museum, at least in the form we know it, is not a very old institution, and at its inception, in the Musée Napoleon—later the Louvre—its agenda was political in every way. Its intention was to display the works Napoleon brought back as trophies from his conquests, and, in admitting common people to the place of previous privilege—the palace of kings—to give them the sense that in possessing these paintings, they were now the kings of the land, kingship being partially defined in terms of owning a collection of great art. The Altes Museum of Karl Friedrich Schinkel in Berlin was designed in part to receive back the works stolen by Napoleon, and hence to proclaim Prussian might and French defeat, and to give a sense of national identity to the Germans. Most of the great nineteenth-century museums in Europe had parallel missions, and I think it fair to say that the impulse to build museums on the part of newly independent nations today, and to press for the return of "cultural property," has similar motives. The United States, as may be inferred from the lateness with which our government took on the obligations of patronage in the form of the National Endowment for the Arts, and from the clear discomfort our representatives have in keeping it from going under, has never especially identified the national character with art. Our National Gallery has none of the nationalistic connotations of London's National Gallery, which was built under the same guiding values as those of the Altes Museum—as a temple to victory.

The American museum has always seen itself as primarily educational and, so to say, spiritual—a temple of beauty rather than of power. And this relatively modest role of the American Museum is what makes the deconstructionist attack on the museum as an institution of oppression sound so barbaric to those who have always thought of the museum in

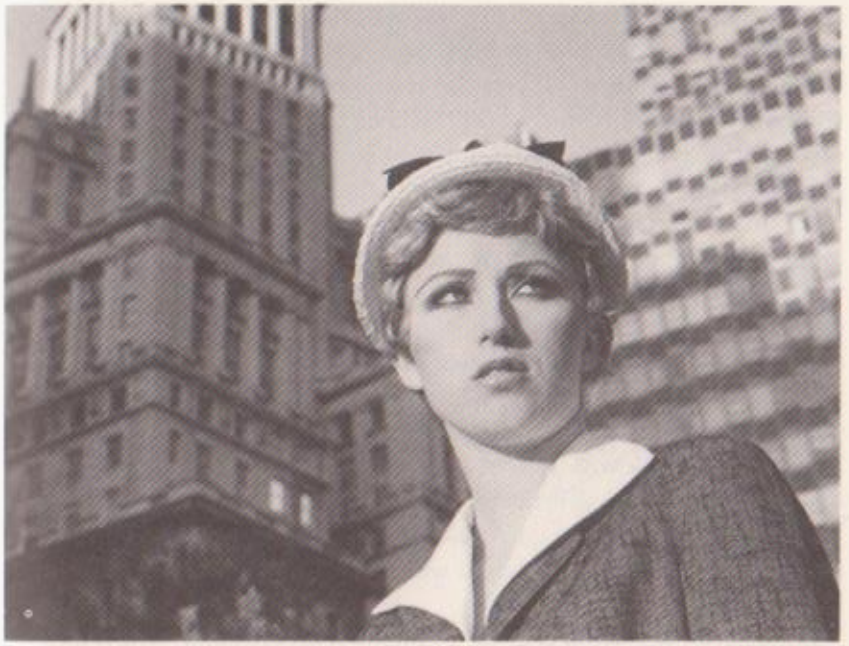
the most exalted of terms. But in fact no good clear alternative to the museum has as yet been conceived. And a good many artists who fall under the official deconstructionist category as oppressed sometimes view exclusion from the museum as one form of oppression: their agenda is not to bypass, let alone dissolve, the museum. They want to gain entry. The somewhat paradoxical character of the Guerilla Girls is illustrative of the attitude. The group has been exceedingly radical in its means and in its spirit. It is genuinely collaborative, to the point that the anonymity of its members is a fiercely held secret: appearing in gorilla masks is a metaphor for that. And the art of this superordinate entity is certainly a form of direct action: its members plaster the walls of Soho with brilliant, biting posters. But the message of the posters is that not enough women are represented in museums, in major shows, in important galleries. So it envisages artistic success in the traditional, let us say, using their concept, white male terms. Its means are radical and deconstructive, but its goals are altogether conservative.

I want now to return to my own narrative. In my view, the deconstructionist account, even if true, does not go the heart of the matter—to what I want to think of as the deep structure of art history in the contemporary era. The deep structure, as I see it, is a kind of unprecedented pluralism, understood precisely in terms of the open disjunction of media which at once served a corresponding disjunction of artistic motivations and blocked the possibility of a further developmental progressive narrative of the kind exemplified by Vasari's or by Greenberg's. There was no favored vehicle for development any longer, and that seems to me to be due to the explicit sense that painting had gone as far as it could, and in a way that the philosophical nature of art was at last understood. So artists were liberated to go their diverse ways. Jenny Holzer, with her characteristic wryness, said that, when a student at Rhode Island School of Design, she grew unhappy with "third generation stripe paintings" she was producing, though she was pretty good at them, and said she wanted to get some identifiable content into her paintings. Robert Colescott accepted the modernist narrative under which painting culminates in the all white painting, but he realized that that had been done by Robert Ryman and the story was over, liberating him to undertake a program there was no room for in modernism, namely, as he put it, to "put blacks into art history." I surmise that the true hero of the post-historical artist had to have been Phillip Guston, who abandoned his beautiful, shimmering abstractions to take up a form of political cartooning that for some was intoxicating though for many was a betrayal. And one way of reading this

narrative would be that it all at once stopped seeming important to artists to work under the auspices of a narrative which at most permitted the most minute increments of progress under its auspices. Recall Hegel's powerful statement regarding the end of art. Not only is "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past," but art "has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our *ideas* instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality." Now, Hegel said, and he was right, art had "invited us to intellectual contemplation," specifically about its own nature, whether this contemplation was in the form of art in a self-referential and exemplary role, or in the form of actual philosophy. The artists of the late sixties and the seventies felt that having reached this point, it was time to turn back, not to outworn styles, but to precisely "genuine truth and life." So cartoons became an available means for Colescott, and a hybrid of high graphics and poetry became the medium for Jenny Holzer, and Cindy Sherman found in the working photograph a set of associations rich enough in their role as film stills to serve as a fulcrum for raising the deepest questions of what it meant to be a woman in America in the late twentieth century. None of this has much of anything to do with the deconstructionist account. Rather it has to do with the structural pluralism that marks the end of art—a Babel of unconverging artistic conversations.

My own sense of an ending suggests that it was the remarkable disjunctiveness of artistic activity across the entire sector that provided evidence that the Greenbergian narrative was over, and that art had entered what one might call a postnarrative stage. The disjunctiveness became internalized in works of art which also might have included painting. Where Crimp sees evidence for the "death of painting" in painters allowing their work to be "contaminated with photography," I see instead the end of the exclusivity of pure painting as the vehicle of art history. And Ryman's work takes on a very different meaning depending upon whether one sees it as the last stage of the modernist narrative, which after all had painting as its standard-bearer, or as one of the forms painting began to take in the postnarrative era when its peers were not paintings of other sorts, but performances and installations and of course photographs and earthworks and airports and fiberworks and conceptual structures of every stripe and order. The postnarrative era offers an immense menu of artistic choices, and in no sense precludes an artist from choosing as many of these as he or she cares to.

Within the hospitable and elastic disjunction, certainly there is room for painting and even for abstract or for monochrome painting. To say



UNTITLED FILM STILL (1978) BY CINDY SHERMAN. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK.

that painting is dead, in the faintly apocalyptic cadences of deconstruction, is not so much to contest modernism as to accept its progressive and developmental narrative, and to say in effect that since that narrative is over with, there is nothing for painting to be—as if, unless it fell under the narrative, it could not really exist. But as Phillip Guston demonstrated, painting, liberated from modernism, has as many functions and can come in as many styles as there are imaginable ends for painting to serve—including, for those interested in it, just the making of beautiful objects or the making of objects which draw out the attenuated threads of a materialist aesthetics in the manner, say, of Robert Ryman.

Abstraction was the meaning of history, considered as a process, in the narrative of modernism: it was a necessity. In post-historical art it is but a possibility, something one can do if one cares to do it. So it is possible to infuse abstract paintings, even paintings of stripes, with the deepest moral and personal meanings, if one is Sean Scully. And it is possible, though an abstractionist, to set up internal references and allusions to distant moments in art history—to baroque and Mannerist painting, for example, if one is David Reed. And Reed can use illusionary space though

not a realist, and Scully can use real space though not a sculptor. And recently, as I discuss in the preface, Reed has used the format of an installation to make plain to viewers the relationship in which he hopes they will come to stand to his works. Neither of these artists consider aesthetic purity a relevant ideal. It might be a relevant ideal for Robert Mangold, for whom surface and shape are themes almost sufficient to constitute him as what one might, somewhat playfully, call neomodernist. But in his work there is so much wit, so much subversion of geometry, that the mishaps of his forms, aspiring to be pure, constitute, within their rarified repertoire of possibilities, something at once tragic and comic. A drawn circle whose circumference does not perfectly meet itself is as tragic a failure as circlehood allows—but it is also as comical as it is possible to expect from circles, which are not one's ordinary candidates for the status of clowns. I do not expect any of these marvelous painters to "save us" the way Greenberg expected Olitski to do, but that is not a judgment of comparative quality. It follows from the fact that we are not in the plight Greenberg supposed we were, from which historical rescue is wanted.

A pluralistic art world calls for a pluralistic art criticism, which means, in my view, a criticism which is not dependent upon an exclusionary historical narrative, and which takes each work up on its own terms, in terms of its causes, its meanings, its references, and how these are materially embodied and how they are to be understood. I want now, against the background of an interesting failure in my own thought, to try to show how art even at its least prepossessing is to be thought about critically. I will deal with monochrome painting misread as the end of painting in our time. And after that I will return to the museum as a politically anathematized institution.

NOTES

1. Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," in *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 108.

2. Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambidge: MIT Press, 1993), 90–91, 105.

3. "To hear him talk, the *caballete* (easel) is the fascism of art, this monstrous little square of besmirched canvas, pullulating under the skin of rotting varnish, fit prey for those canny userers, the speculating picture dealers of the rue de la Boetie and Fifty-seventh Street" (Lincoln Kirstein, *By With To & From: A Lincoln Kirstein Reader*, ed. Nicholas Jenkins [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991], 237).

4. "According to Joan Miró, he declared himself ready to kill off painting" (Felix Fanes, "The First Image: Dali and his Critics: 1919–1929," in *Salvador Dali: The Early Years* [London: South Bank Centre, 1994], 94).

5. Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4:224.

6. Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 2.