M/E/A/N/I/N/G #13

Contents

3 A History of Art Stewart Buettner
6 Working the Park Curtis Mitchell
14 The Comfy Chair Jo Anna Isaak
20 Course Proposal Mira Schor
24 Those Little White Lies Daryl Chin
31 Media Baptisms David Reed
34 Transactional Space Jordan Crandall
42 Book Reviews by
Susan Bee, Steven O'Leary Harvey, Johanna Drucker,
Barry Schwabsky, Robert C. Morgan
55 Contributors
A HISTORY OF ART

STEWART BUETTNER

One of the principal concerns of aesthetics in the twentieth century has been to provide an adequate definition for the word 'art.' That short word has gone through considerable change from the time of the first dictionaries (seventeenth century) in which the word did not even appear. When 'art' was initially defined in English in the eighteenth century, it bore a definition far different than the one we associate with it today. In "A History of "Art" I have traced that evolution from the earliest English language dictionary to the 1988 edition of Webster's New World Dictionary, in which "creative work or its principles; making or doing things that display form, beauty..." is only the fifth definition.—Stewart Buettner

Arrogate, to claim or challenge.
Arrogant, proud, presumptuous.
Artifice, skill, subtiltie, or a cunning piece of worke.
Artificer, handicrafts man.

Robert Cawdry, A Table Alphabetical, 1604

Arrogate. Proudly to challenge to himself more honour than is due.

Artemisean moneth. The moneth of May.

Arteries. Hollow sinewes or veines, wherein the spirits of life doe walke.

Arsenal, (French) a kinde of Cittadel, where Armour and Ammunition is laid up.

Arsenick, a mineral, called Orpiment, in English Rats-bane.

Art (s. from the Lat. ars art) A set of rules, the knowledge of certain rules, an acquirement, skill, cunning, a science, a trade.

Art. n.f. [arte, Fr. ars, Lat.] 1. The power of doing something not taught by nature and instinct; as, to walk is natural, to dance is an art. 2. A science; as, the liberal arts. 3. A trade. 4. Artfulness; skill; dexterity. 5. Speculation.

Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language, London, 1755
Art. s [art, Fr. ars Lat.] an abstract or metaphysical term, implying a collection of certain rules from observation and experience, by which anything may be performed, or any end obtained; distinguished from science by its object. If the object be attained by the application of rules, or require practice, then it is art; but if contemplated only with respect to its different appearances, the collection of observations relative thereto is a science. A trade; cunning; artfulness; speculation. We have likewise the division of arts into liberal and mechanic. The liberal arts are those which consist in the application or exercise of the mind; the mechanic, those which consist in the exercise of the body or hand, and make use of machines to attain their ends. 

Barclay's New Universal Dictionary, London, 1835

Art. Second person, indic. mode, pres. tense, of the substantive verb to be. 1. Employment of means to accomplish some desired end. 2. A system of rules. 3. Acquired power of performing certain actions. 4. Cunning; artifice.

Noah Webster, A Dictionary of the English Language, 1867

Art (art), n. [P. Art, L. Ars, Artis, orig., skill in joining or fitting; prob. akin to E. Arm, articular, article.]

1. The employment of means to accomplish some desired end; the adaptation of things in the natural world to the uses of life; the application of knowledge or power to practical purposes. 2. A system of rules serving to facilitate the performance of certain actions; a system of principles and rules for attaining a desired end; method of doing well some special work; often contrasted with science or speculative principles; as, the art of building or engraving; the art of war; the art of navigation.

3. The systematic application of knowledge or skill in effecting a desired result. Also, an occupation or business requiring such knowledge or skill.

4. The application of skill to the production of the beautiful by imitation or design; or an occupation in which skill is so employed, as in painting and sculpture; one of the fine arts; as, he prefers art to literature.

5. pl. Those branches of learning which are taught in the academical course of college; as, master of arts.

6. Learning; study; applied knowledge, science, or letters. [Archaic]

7. Skill, dexterity, or the power of performing certain actions, acquired by experience, study, or observation; knack; as, a man has the art of managing his business to advantage.

8. Skillful plan; device.

9. Cunning, artifice; craft.

10. The black art; magic. [Obs]

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1951

Art (art), n. [ME. <OFr. arte; L. art (gen. artis), art<IE base *ar-, to join, fit together=Arm, Articulate, Ratio, 1. the human ability to make things; creativity of man as distinguished from the world of nature 2. skill; craftsmanship 3. any specific skill or its application [the art of making friends] 4. any craft, trade or profession, or its principles [the cobbler's art; the physician's art] 5. creative work or its principles; making or doing of things that display form, beauty, and unusual perception; art includes painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature, drama, the dance, etc.; see also fine art 6. any branch of creative work, esp. painting, drawing, or work in any other graphic or plastic medium 7. products of creative work; paintings, statues, etc. 8. pictorial and decorative material accompanying the text in a newspaper, magazine or advertising layout 9. a) [Archaic] learning b) a branch of learning c) [pl.] the liberal arts (literature, music, philosophy, etc.) as distinguished from the sciences 10. artful behavior; cunning 11. sly or cunning trick, wise: usually in pl. 1. of or for works of art or artists [art gallery, art colony] 2. produced with an especially artistic technique, or exhibiting such productions [art movie, art theater]

sgn—art; the word of widest application in this group, denotes in its broadest sense merely the ability to make something or to execute a plan; skill implies expertise or great proficiency in doing something; artifice implies skill used as a means of trickery or deception; craft implies ingenuity in execution, sometimes even suggesting trickery or deception; in another sense, craft is distinguished from art in its application of a lesser skill involving little or no creative thought.

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1988
Mainstream culture is a quorum of persons agreeing on how to manage the abject. Everyone produces it. No one can avoid it. Culture defines it. The country has the wilderness. The suburb has the shopping mall. The city has the park.

Those who live in the country see the abject as recyclable, entering the cycle of decay and rejuvenation which is the wilderness. The wilderness comports abjection, absorbing it into a seamless amalgam of utter loss of potential and utter realization. The suburbs have created an ingenious institution for the centralized control, dissipation, and sublimation of the expansive facets of abjection (despair, paralysis, hopelessness). The shopping mall replaces the compost of the wilderness with a dispose-all, affording a clean vision of rationality and progress. The city park was intended originally to assuage periodic pining for wilderness, and thus evolved to its present state as a landfill for recalcitrant abjection, as a receptacle for the morally disfranchised and for the addicts of the picturesque. The dispose-all is now a pail.

Feb. 1990. Upon invitation by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC), I submit a proposal for Petrosino Park consisting simply of: a carpeted floor, five sofas covered with heavy-duty plastic slipcovers positioned between the six existing planters, which would be filled with flowering plants. It was to be a comfortable environment for anyone who wanted to use the park — providing places to sit as well as transforming what looked to be completely barren planters into fully realized locations for “beauty.”

Petrosino Park is a city park in downtown Manhattan. It’s triangular and small. There are six indestructible planters filled with dirt and whatever else has been thrown into them. The floor is asphalt, distinguished from the street by a seven-foot-high, cast iron fence. The asphalt is strewn with dogshit, and the only persons seen near the park are a few homeless. They are virtually always outside only the fence, leaning against it. No signs of makeshift bedding are inside the park.

Seven-foot-high, cast iron fence. The asphalt is strewn with dogshit, and the only fence, leaning against it. No signs of makeshift bedding are inside the park. 

I’ll wake them long enough to clean the couches.” She gives a 15-minute lecture on how I would be risking my health by confronting the homeless on the couches. “Some have knives!” X says out of frustration: “Here’s the number of Y in the Parks Dept. Talk to her because LMCC is out of it now.”

Y: “We don’t have a problem with the homeless so much as the filth and vermin your piece will cause.”

“But I’ll maintain it as much as it needs it...I’ll rinse it down with Clorox. Since the sofas have slipcovers, that is all it needs.”

“But what about the vermin?”

“Nothing lives in Clorox.”

“Well, I’ll check into it and call you back next week...Oh yes, they rejected it again.”

“What in the proposal do they have a problem with?”

“The sofas.”

“What is the difference with park benches?”

“The fabric.”

“So if I took the fabric off the sofas would there be no problem?”

“Correct.”

Comfort was seen as a magnet for unwanted elements: the vermin, the homeless—that which manifests the abject. In response, I incorporated an element of abjection into the piece. This served the dual purpose of creating less comfort (reflecting the institutional awareness of abjection as a threat) while manifesting that abjection which would have invaded the piece anyway.

Dec. 1990. Second proposal: The same carpet, the sofas stripped of fabric. Because of the stripped sofas, the planters no longer have flowering plants, but are covered in asphalt. The main reservation now is that the asphalt does not leach into the soil, because of the plant life there. I say I’ll line them with plastic before installing the asphalt. This proposal passes.

Considering the simple, if not simplistic, relation of the piece to the site, it seemed in character to quietly install and let whatever effect the piece might have take its course. The identity of the piece was coincident with the site, not with myself. Its infringement on the environment was to be soft.

Feb. 20, 1991. The morning of the opening: I arrive to find one planter has had the asphalt removed and am told to call LMCC: “Miriam Friedlander’s (a councilwoman) phone was ringing off the hook yesterday about the asphalt in the planters. The Parks Dept. demands you remove the asphalt.”

“But I have a permit for it.”

“I know, but it turns out there are crocus bulbs and tulip bulbs in those planters and some residents are upset that they might be damaged. The Parks Dept. wasn’t aware of this.”

“It says in my permit that there is an awareness of plants in the...
planters. This was the reason for lining the asphalt with plastic."  
"Don't make any decisions yet. Tomorrow morning we'll call and talk with them."

Feb. 21...LMCC: "Sit down, because someone, we think the neighbors, has overturned all the planters, dumping the dirt onto the carpet. The Parks Dept. came this morning and shovelled it back in, but it's a mess."

In a city park, you can see the flowers. You want to see the flowers. They stand for a beauty and purity long since diminished in our lives. They stand for a hope springing annually, a rare escape from the present, a reverie in the drudgery. Their beauty is from long ago and far away. Their beauty is serviceable. They are of the present. They make one forget the beauty and purity of the present. They deny the abject, as they comfort the pathetic.

"Hope springing annually, a rare escape from the present, a reverie in the drudgery."

They make one forget the pain and anger of the present. They make one forget the beauty and purity of the present. They deny the abject, as they comfort the pathetic.

Feb. 22...I call Z (at the Parks Dept.): "You have to talk to the horticulturalist before you put more asphalt on."

I call the horticulturalist:

"The roots of the bulbs are so fragile that to transplant them at this time of year would ruin them. Also, the tar is such a toxin to the bulbs, it will kill them."

"Well then we aren't talking about live bulbs anymore because the planters were tipped over and then the dirt shovelled back into them."

"If it's true, the bulbs have certainly been severely traumatized...what is your solution?"

"My solution is to level off the dirt and cover it in asphalt. Since the bulbs are dead now, this would make sense, right?"

"Yes, you are right, I see no problem with that."

Z calls back to ask me to meet both him and the horticulturalist at the site. A lecture ensues about how I should listen to the constituents:

"But some constituents have told me how much they like the piece. The homeless thank me for it every day I'm here. The super from across the street says from now on he will defend it. A photographer came by and loved it. So tell me, which constituents do I choose."

"You choose the constituents who have been here the longest."

"You mean to say that the longer your lease is, the more representation you have?"

"Well, yes..."

A long discussion ensues in which I mention again that if asphalt is already in the dirt, a little more wouldn't hurt. "So then I can use new asphalt?"

"Yes."

In a city park, you can see dirt, destruction, and bums. You don't want to see them, and avert your gaze. They stand for abjection, hopelessness, despair—there but for the grace... They provoke fear, sadness, and feelings of loss. But they are our Nature, a distillation of our lives blooming in our midst. They are a daily reminder of a manifest sublime. We need not avert.

Feb. 22...A homeless man comes up to me to let me know how much he appreciates the piece. The second homeless man says that he and his friends will do everything possible to stop any further problems with the piece.

Feb. 23...I go to the site to even off the dirt that was shovelled into the planters, and to again sprinkle asphalt over the dirt. A neighbor comes by:

"What the fuck are you putting that stuff in there again for? I'm a painter who went to art school and this is disgusting, killing these plants."

"I spoke to a horticulturalist and it will not kill the plants any more than tipping the planters has already done."

"Bullshit, and if you do that, there will be problems again."

"You mean you know who did it?"

"Yes, and it will happen again, you son-of-a-bitch."

Five seconds later, another neighbor comes by: "What was that guy just saying?"

I tell him.

"He better watch out. If anyone tries to mess with these planters again, there's gonna be trouble. I'm on your side."

The sublime is not popular. It is not the future—that haven of personality, self-conceit, and possibility. It discounts the future as a worthless and impossible construct of human agency. It is not the past—where memory loss, refusal, sentimentality, nostalgia, in essence where revisionism creates an opaque fiction. It is the present, the real present: a purely spatial force crippling time at every moment. It galls.

Feb. 25...All the couches are gone, as well as the chain used to lock them to the iron fence. A boltcutter was needed to do this. Given the threat I received from an irate neighbor, there's not much doubt that this was an organized effort to get my piece out of the park.

LMCC(X): "Now I gather you don't want to do anything more? We don't want to send out another press release unless this is the end of the piece."

The sublime is not unattainable, but inescapable. It is everywhere, omniscient and all powerful, swallowing everything in its path. Everything lies in its path. It affects all events, either by direct influence or by provoking, through fear or disgust, a reactive impulse.

The sublime consists of a major dose of entropy, with the picturesque as
only a condiment. Take another look at Central Park. In his writings about Central Park, with welcome sanity, Robert Smithson understood that Nature includes the manmade, but he did not foreground abjection as our major contribution.

What Robert Smithson never resolved was the conflict between his redefinition of the picturesque and his advocacy of entropy. Smithson sees the picturesque as a contest between good and evil, a clash of titans: smoothness, gentleness, and delicacy versus terror, solitude, and vastness. To confine it as such is to edit existence into a board game of Christian dualism. In actuality there is a larger force at work which during the course of time becomes major: entropy, fatigue, abjection, and rest. All wars end this way, everything does. The picturesque may be a dialectic, but it is a dialectic fueled by entropy. Abjection is the purest distillation of the sublime.

March 5...Been by almost every day since the 26th. Not once have I seen the six homeless I had seen constantly before that incident.

March 6...I see the resident who verbally defended the piece after it was threatened.

"Do you know what happened with the couches?"

"No, I didn't see anything, but a friend of mine did. He saw three people taking the couches, and said something to them. They said: 'It's all right, we're from the City.'"

"The guy in the diner next door, when asked if he saw any truck stop that night, said: 'Only the City truck.'"

March 11...I call Z (Parks Dept.).

"There are some residents who think it's the City that took the couches out."

"What department."

"I didn't ask."

"The asphalt is off now? He (A: the head of the Horticulture Dept.) said he was going to remove it last Sunday."

"Oh Jesus, I have a permit for this!"

"No, no, you do have a permit, but we're just asking you to modify the installation."

"If he's already taken out the asphalt, that's not asking to modify, that's terminating."

The symptoms of the sublime are wondrous. Dirt becomes revered, real evidence of the unity of all things. Drive dissipates without the need for clarity, power, communication, wholeness. Without wholeness one gains an individuality, paradoxically, for disparateness can never be prescribed. Bedlam becomes benign, as one feels the full comfort and inexorability of entropy. The chair Henri Matisse and John Lennon both aspired to synesthetically construct becomes superfluous. Abjection lodges itself in one's heart, quelling an endless cycle of desire and repulsion.

March 11...A: "What replacement can we get for the asphalt?"

The asphalt is out of the question.

"There is no replacement. I talked to the horticulturalist about this."

"Right, I'm the head horticulturalist here."

"I talked to a guy named ..."

"Yes, and he was let go because of his decision on this thing."

"He was let go because of this?"

"Yes, that is correct. It's a park and volunteers actually spent quite a few hours planting the crocuses and the daffodils in that park. To actually asphalt it over I don't think was the most sensitive thing you could have done.... I mean the volunteers actually do want to see the crocuses that they plant bloom. What in essence is going to happen is we're going to dig out all the soil and replace it. Do you realize how much work that is?"

"Yes I do, consequently what's wrong with redoing the soil after my piece is down?"

"I don't think this is negotiable. Long silence. 'I think you've missed the whole point. It's not enough that we have so little green, so few flowers. I mean for someone to actually put asphalt.... The planters are going tomorrow. I'll personally take out each of the planters and load them in my truck. You're welcome to watch me do it.'"

Monumentality is antiquated. All monuments are tragic, representing ill-fated attempts to conquer the inexorable effects of time. We have malls. They define our present. They pay no attention to the future. To consider the future in a positive sense is to claim undue power over the present, to claim human agency as capable of producing abjuration. This is narcissistic and myopic, eradicates a real, presently existing sublime in favor of a personalized editorial on an illusory future. Shopping malls care not a wit for tomorrow.

March 11...A: "I just don't think you've realized the importance of that park to the people in that community. I'm actually there during volunteers (sic) when the girl scouts and the neighborhood were involved in planting them."

"If everybody's so concerned about this park, why is it nobody uses it, except to have their dog shit in it?"

"Really disagree. If you take a look at the corner of that park (a corner outside the iron gate), it actually won the Molly Parness Award for City Beautification in 1988. I think what you've done is a very sad commentary. I'll be there tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. and you're more than welcome to join me."

Shopping malls are heroic, evading through sheer velocity the warm womb of the sublime. Every last drop of energy is needed for the perpetual flight. Malls have ingeniously discovered the functional and the generic as best suited for a streamlined design. They humbly understate themselves in honest acceptance of the fallacy of personality. Functional and generic have no personality, and therefore are less vulnerable to the sublime. They provide the best vehicle discovered thus far for assisting the product, the mall's reason for being, in its evasion of the sublime.
March 12: A: "So the options are these: either we put in very black soil or we start from ground one. That's all I can offer you. I don't know what (the first horticulturalist) told you, but since he's no longer with us."

"He really got fired because of what he told me?"

"Yes, if you don't believe me call our offices to find out. You don't do it. It sets a bad precedent. The asphalt has made these bulbs coming up look really crappy. What am I supposed to tell the volunteers when they say, hey, we spent a whole afternoon here with the brownies or girl scouts or whatever the heck the group is who's doing it? What am I supposed to tell the kids when they're not coming up? Do you know how hard it is to find replacement bulbs this time of year? What am I supposed to tell them?"

"Tell them the planters were kicked over."

"OK, that's it. These crocuses look terrible. As it stands now, we'll take out the dirt and start from scratch."

Bloomingdale's closed yesterday in a small town in New Jersey. The town was visibly shaken. It was a part of their life. One woman interviewed waxed poetic over the first year it opened. She strolled her baby through the aisles. Her baby is now in college. Bloomingdale's helped give her life meaning. Not through pedagogy; through relief. Relief from the sublime. Bloomingdale's for this woman was a bastion against the sublime.

In March, over the first year it opened. She strolled her baby through the aisles. Her baby is now in college. Bloomingdale's helped give her life meaning. Not through pedagogy; through relief. Relief from the sublime. Bloomingdale's for this woman was a bastion against the sublime.

March 12. A: "If we move the planters on the outside (of the park), will that be acceptable to you?"

"Yeah, if you do that it might be fine."

"Fine, that's one way of compromising. Let's see what they say at the office. As I say, this is to be used by all. We're not going to please everyone. We never have."

"It's that nobody cares about the inside of this park, except for a couple of crocuses here and there. I've been by here for six months, nobody's on the inside, and I walk in here and all I see is dogshit."

"It's not a perfect world.... I have a proposition. Would you like to redo it again but using ivy, using topiary. Wrapping the couches in ivy?"

"Wrapping the couches in ivy???

"Yes, wrapping the couches in ivy. We actually start pruning ivy this time of year and could get you some ivy."

"That's not what I do."

"OK, but there would still be hope for us, more homey, with the sofas with ivy."

Humans love time. It gives them a sense of continuity, of possibility, and of worth. It provides hope. Humans need hope.

March 14. A: "On the western side it won't be that much of a problem (to move the planters outside the park), but the asphalt does go, and gets replaced with dark soil."

"Right."

"Let me call the district, and see if they can get some dollies and move them out."

So this woman who's been going to Bloomingdale's all her children's life is distraught. The sublime is everywhere, seeping into her life through the dirt on her floors, the aging paint on her walls, the weakening functionality of her appliances, the depreciation of her car, her house, her memories, her youth, her life. To avoid being engulfed she would go to the mall and buy a few products or not. These holy products, originating in the sanctuary from the sublime, exude an aura of hope, of personality, of agency. In time, the aura would erode, and the sanctuary would be visited anew. Sometimes nothing would be purchased. Solely a walk through the valley would overshadow the inexorable, creating an immaterial aura, more ephemeral but no less capable of stemming the flood of the sublime.

April 4. Neither the planters, nor any other part of the park has been touched by the City or the neighborhood.

Boredom is underrated. It is an emotional symptom of the presence of the abject. Viewed mechanically, it would be a valuable state: we certainly do not waste a lot of energy when we are bored, and we are not persuaded into any illogical states of desire. We just sit. When we are bored we lack agency, the power to act or react. Instead of the will to participate in the process of desire, we possess the will-lessness of a more encompassing process: entropy. This abjection provides a glimpse of the deterministic universe, which is more long-lived, more primal, and the soil from which grew the process of desire. Boredom is a grand condition privileging those who do not flee from it with some strange fruit: in itself tasteless, but providing enhancement to everything ingested.

April 20. Still nothing has been touched. The carpet is there, dirtier than ever. The homeless are sleeping there. The planters are still inside the park, absolutely packed with flowers despite the asphalt, which is still there. I have heard nothing more from the Parks Dept. or from LMCC.

Notes

2. Matisse: "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which might be for every mental worker, be he businessman or writer, like an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue." Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Matisse—His Art and His Public (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), p. 122. John Lennon, in explaining his affection for the blues, likened it to a rocking chair in which one could be cradled.
Art is customarily thought of as a comforting form of relaxation, a kind of reward or bonus a prosperous society is able to afford its members. The enjoyment of art is a sign of affluence; it belongs to the good life; at once relaxing and at the same time a means of self-improvement, part of what it means to be cultivated. For Matisse, the ability to provide relaxation was the very function of art; his most famous statement about art is that it should have the qualities of a comfortable chair: “What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be for every mental worker, be he businessman or writer, like an appeasing influence, like a mental soothe, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue.”

Matisse’s concept of art reminds me of the skit by the British comedy team Monty Python in which the most dreaded sentence the Spanish Inquisition can inflict upon its victims is not the rack or the screw, but a long stretch in “the comfy chair.” The condemned wretch is dragged from the court yelling “No! No! Not the comfy chair!” Recently, contemporary feminist artists have been calling into question the nature of the comfort to be had from the “comfortable chair” notion of culture, revealing that for some this is the site of acute discomfort.

Grove, as might be expected from his philosophy of art, painted many comfortable chairs. The poet Louis Aragon, a close friend of Matisse, once wondered whether there wasn’t more variety and expression in the armchairs Matisse painted than in the women. Janet Hobhouse feels that none of Matisse’s figures is “half so intensely sensuous or so tenderly, passionately comprehended as certain ecstatic objects in paintings such as The Rocco Armchair.”

The contemporary artist Kathy Grove reproduces an armchair Matisse painted in 1920. The original painting, now hanging in the Metropolitan Museum, is not called Armchair with Green Stripe, but instead is entitled Odalisque. In spite of the praise Matisse’s armchairs have garnered all on their own merit, this armchair had an occupant. When she re-photographed Matisse’s painting, Grove removed Henriette Darricarrere whose semi-nude body with rosy nipples peeping through a transparent harem blouse served as a kind of garnish to one of Matisse’s favorite armchairs. In her photographic sequence The Other Series, Kathy Grove re-photographs some of the canonical paintings of Western culture and airbrushes out the armchairs. In her photographic sequence Henriette, there is nothing at stake, and vacated—without the play of desire that the image of woman provides, representation is no longer anything but a gigantic pantomime. Without the bare-breasted woman—who-does-not-exist. The image of the body of woman has served historically as symbol of plentitude, of man’s link with nature, his hold upon the material world and simultaneously it has functioned as a cover-up, a fetish concealing a void, allaying his fears, his sense of lack. Woman as sign is the site of a structuring absence—designating nothing, nothing, that is, no presence. But take away this irreducible aterity and the whole structure of representation collapses like a house of cards. Like removing the null set in a series of integers, all the other signs may look the same but they lose their former significance. With the repressed space vacated—without the play of desire that the image of woman provides, representation is no longer anything but a gigantic pantomime. Without the bare-breasted Henriette, there is nothing at stake, and “We know that, for want of a stake, representation is not worth anything.”

Absent, Henriette is more intriguing than when she was present. After her disappearance we wonder about her—how did she come to be in that armchair in the first place, why was she dressed as a harem girl, why this particular masquerade, why were there so many girls like her posing as odalisques at the time, where did she go when she lost her job as Matisse’s model? We know that by the time this picture was painted Henriette’s time in the armchair was almost up. In 1927 the occupant was changed to the dark-skinned, dark-haired, full-breasted Lisette, chosen as Matisse explained, because “she brought the Orient closer to him again.”

The nostalgia for a lost Orient was to become a major obsession in Matisse’s life. Matisse visited Morocco in the winter of 1912. He went for the warmth, for the light, for the brilliant colors, for the exoticism, for the sensuality, and as Delacroix had done eighty years earlier, to gather inspiration from the Orient and its art. When Delacroix went it was as part of a diplomatic mission to expand French influence in North Africa; Matisse went when it was understood that Morocco had
from Paris. The odalisques were the abundant fruits all at once of a light heartedness. I needed to have a respite, to let myself go and relax, to forget all the worries far in his own country, he could play out all the psychosexual phantasms in the Western myth of the Oriental Pasha while he painted hundreds of odalisques. Encountering the Orient as he wished it had been. In the comfort of a hotel room, the goldfish in the bowl, the view from his window which overlooked not a mosque, but an English church. He painted the door to the Casbah, suggestively shaped like a large keyhole. If this journey was an attempt to encounter another culture, it was hampered by the very means of approach, for the act of figuring itself is against Islamic holy law. No Moslem would pose for him. Finally, Matisse had what Delacroix had done—he sought out prostitutes and Jews for models. His excursions through the brothels will become romantically mis-remembered later, but at the time Matisse warned his friend Charles Camoin, "Be careful, we have to go there like doctors making a house call." The paintings he did of a young prostitute called Zorah reflect this clinical distance; they are reserved, even austere. She is not veiled but every other part of her body from head to toe is cloaked in a large caftan; even her hair is covered with a scarf. She poses rigidly, standing straight and frontal, or kneeling in a quasi-religious pose on a prayer rug, hands folded protectively in front of her. While these are among Matisse's finest paintings, there is a remoteness to all of the Moroccan paintings—they are a record of a culture not encountered, but viewed from a distance, through a window, through a keyhole—a people and a place flattened into caricature by the force of European stereotypes.

The difficulty in procuring models was only one problem. Even though France and Germany had parcelled off North Africa to their mutual satisfaction, the Moroccans did not acquiesce to French rule as easily as had been expected. Matisse's reclusiveness may have been partly due to his sensitivity to the growing hostility towards the colonial French. He wrote a friend on the first of April 1912 that he had been planning a trip to Fez, but had cancelled it as the situation was growing dangerous. Matisse left Morocco just three days before the infamous Fez massacre, in which the entire European population of Fez was murdered and their mutilated bodies hung outside the wall of the Sultan's Palace.

Matisse found that Nice on the sunny Mediterranean could provide the warmth, the light, the luxurious foliage, and the sense of voluptuous sensuality he had desired from the Orient without the strain of an actual encounter with a foreign culture. In Nice, he achieved a kind of tourist sublime. With an abundance of souvenirs from Morocco: Moorish screens, rugs and textiles, turbans, hookah pipes and harems pant, and most importantly, a plentiful supply of girls, he recreated his encounter with the Orient as he wished it had been. In the comfort of a hotel room in his own country, he could play out all the psychosexual phantasms in the Western myth of the Oriental Pasha while he painted hundreds of odalisques. "Yes, I needed to have a respite, to let myself go and relax, to forget all the worries far from Paris. The odalisques were the abundant fruits all at once of a light heartedness, of a beautiful living dream, and of something I experienced almost existentially day and night, under the enchantment of that climate." For over twenty years Matisse painted the interior of this imaginary harem of voluptuous slave girls, nude or semi-nude, their bodies ornamented in bangles, scarves, turbans or see-through harems pant, veils, or belly dancing skirts. They pose singly, or in interwining pairs, they arch their backs, they raise their arms to expose their breasts, or recline passively awaiting the whim of the owner/artist. Matisse became known as the Sultan of the Riviera. As if speaking from inside this role, Matisse told a friend, "I often keep these girls several years until I have exhausted their interest."

While indulging in such fantasy, Matisse insisted he was working from reality, "I do odalisques in order to do nudes. But how does one do the nude without being artificial? Because I know that they exist. I was in Morocco. I have seen them." As for odalisques," he repeated later, "I had seen them in Morocco, and so was able to put them in my pictures back in France without playing make-believe." Matisse had always claimed to be firmly committed to reality as the source of his pictorial investigations, but the claims he made for the odalisques were of a different nature. These were claims to an ethnographic authenticity, to an intimacy gained in, and over an observed society. Matisse may have visited the ghettos of Tangier where the wretchedly poor sold many things to the European tourists, including themselves, but he did not see a harem. Contrary to European fantasies of slavery, of total control without moral responsibility, "harem" means "the sacred." It is the most protected place in the Islamic home, the site of the feminine sacred.

In wealthy Moroccan homes there is usually a large, open-air courtyard enclosed on all four sides by buildings that serve as working and living areas for the members of an extended family. Men who are not members of the family, or closely associated with the family, do not enter this area. If, in his brief stay in Morocco, Matisse had managed to get to know a Moroccan well enough to be invited to his home, he would be entertained in the outer rooms of the compound and would not encounter any women. Even food prepared by women would be taken by the men of the family to the outer areas where the guests were served. However, the chances of a Moroccan, wealthy enough to have a harem, inviting a French tourist to his home were as slim as the chances of a French bourgeois inviting a foreigner to his Parisian home. In all likelihood, what Matisse actually saw of a harem was what any tourist would see—the high outer walls of the compound.

Still, Matisse was correct in claiming he had not fantasized these harem scenes, he had seen them, but Matisse was confusing what he had seen in paintings and photographs with what he had seen in Morocco. Far from indulging in too much fantasy, Matisse was drawing upon and duplicating a stereotype that by this time had deeply saturated French culture through the formulaic conventionality of harem iconography derived from Delacroix's many romantic harem scenes, from Ingres' Turkish Bathers and from Renoir's Odalisques as well as the mass production of colonial postcards which reached their peak of popularity in 1830 with the celebration of the centennial of the French conquest of Algeria. Just like Matisse's harem scenes, the majority of these "documentary" photographs were staged in the artist's studio with models who perform exotic rituals in costumes and jewelry provided by the picture-taking impresario.
Most art historians mark the move to Nice in 1917 as the end of Matisse's pictorial experimentation. After having been the leader of the avant-garde his work was now thought of as unambitious, reactionary even. Yet, this period also marked a change in Matisse's relationship to the public—he became very popular. Alfred Barr attributes the increase in "popularity and the commercial value" of Matisse's art of the Nice period to his "growing traditionalism and charm."18 This is probably true, but it does raise some questions about what constitutes the "charm" of this tradition. In a letter written to his son from Nice in September of 1940 Matisse talks about what was motivating his artistic production:

I'm trying to stay wrapped up in my work. Before coming here I had planned on painting flowers and fruit—I even placed several arrangements of them around my studio—but this vague state of uncertainty we are still plunged into (for this country can be occupied under the slightest pretext) means that I am unable to bring myself, or perhaps am afraid, to start working en tête à tête with objects that I have to breathe life into and fill with my own feeling. So I've arranged with an agency for film extras to send me their prettiest girls. The ones I don't use, I pay off with 10 francs. Thanks to this system I have three or four young and pretty models. I have them pose in shifts, for sketching, three hours in the morning, three hours in the afternoon. And this keeps me in the studio..."

What was disturbing Matisse's concentration was the German occupation of France. Matisse's wife, Amelia, from whom he was legally separated the year before, and his daughter were both working for the Resistance. When critics claim that Matisse brought comfort and refreshment to listless and exhausted men, there was more than personal ennui at stake here. Matisse had begun the odalisques right after the First World War, when France began an immense compensatory undertaking for the loss of French power during the first German occupation. Matisse's harem paintings were part of a very fashionable colonial discourse in which the erotic management of human subjects in cultural production thinly disguises a desire for control of human subjects, territory, and property.

The odalisques, in turn, provided Matisse with an abundance of commissions, particularly from the wealthy Riviera market. The odalique also brought Matisse his first official recognition: in 1921 when Matisse was fifty-one the French government purchased its first painting from him—the Odalisque with Red Trousers. The choice was remarkable because it became obvious that the desire to assert French colonial power had extended to the acquisition policy of museums. This painting was chosen because the subject matter was compatible with the official policy of a number of exhibitions taking place at the time, exhibitions specifically designed to give French citizens a "colonial conscience."19 It is clear that neither the French bourgeoisie nor the French government would have been interested in these paintings if they were a series of armchairs. The presence of Henriette, or Laurette, or Lisette, or Antoinette, or Jeanette, or Monique, or all of their many successors provided comfort of a different nature than that provided by an armchair.

What happened to the missing Henriette? She was just one of thousands of easily disposable pretty, but poor young women in France between the wars who eked out a subsistence through menial labor, modeling, or prostitution. Ironically...
Can a cure be found for P.I.S.—Painting Illiteracy Syndrome—which would also help alleviate P.D.S.—Painting Deprivation Syndrome (suffered by those who don’t get their recommended daily allowance of painting)?

A very bright young art critic recently explained to me why painters today have a basic problem of reception for their work: the most intelligent of her generation of art critics, she said, do not understand painting, they don’t know how to read it, don’t understand color, and so on. This admission, at least honest and made in the spirit of trying to develop such an understanding, did not come as a surprise but, rather, confirmed what any practicing painter might already suspect from personal experience.

Certainly, as all writers about art, these bright young critics are interested in any art works only in so far as they serve their own particular agenda—be it feminism, lesbian or gay male identity politics—and theoretical/ stylistic positions—such as appropriation or techno-culture. What is ultimately most important is how the art fits into what the writer wants to write. The same can be said of curators of shows such as The Whitney Biennial, whose current adherence to art that is “political,” “parody, populist, and anti-aesthetic (anti-metaphorical via form or materiality) is surely an indication of their desire to stake out the proper position for themselves. The importance of being perceived as having the right position only highlights the degree to which the actual qualities of the art objects are secondary to the art workers’ enterprise, which seems even more to be fashion when the art is political—to the detriment of the political and artistic constituencies at issue, just as painting was fashion before it, to the detriment of painting.

So how could one attempt to educate to painting critics, curators, and those young painters whose work they espouse (many of whom similarly may have no better understanding of “painting”)? Perhaps re-educate is more like it, not to say de-program, because, of course, they are very educated in other aspects of cultural studies. P.I.S. is so resistant because its sufferers are possessed of so much knowledge of what seems to be the same material. They know their art history—as a construct. When faced with a painting, they access their data on its socio-political valence. Even a Dada collage, such as Max Ernst’s tiny The Preparation of Bone Glue (1921)—of a woman, lying on a sofa, dressed in the coils of a scientific contraption, and threatened by the large head of a screw-driver—might elicit the Benjaminian or Brechtian meaning of collage as the only visual means to express the dissociative mechanisms of twentieth-century capitalism, or the Sadean sexuality of surgically remodelled femininity. But can the delicacy of the manufacture (not just the facture) of the little slip of paper on which you cannot see the cut marks access other meanings? For, in such a work, meaning is carried not just in the image content (iconography) or in the deconstruction of linear logic (collage) but also in the tenderly seamless totality of the work whose poetic tendencies lead away from the idea of collage as a cog in the wheel moving art history inexorably towards entropy to it as a thing made by a person with a variety of contradictory ideas and values, which may include a love of craft or even a nostalgia for just what is being critically deconstructed. One can only imagine how hard it is for the P.I.S. generation to make the transition, in the current exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art of Max Ernst’s works from 1919 to 1927, from the rooms of photo-collages to the subsequent paintings in which similar de- and re-constructions return to oil paint, with some paintings’ sources in early Renaissance painting and even folk art, as in the brilliantly colored oil on plaster The Birds Cannot Disappear (1923), of a bird struggling not to drown in a smooth blue green sea.

The intractability of P.I.S. is above all based in hostility to much of the conceptual and sensual underpinnings of painting, inculcated by avant-garde art education of the past decade. Aversion therapy has been practiced. Although available for superficial historical knowledge, image readability and critique, in a sense painting is never seen.

Reeducation to perceive painting must be equally persistent. Since one is dealing with a type of blindness I would suggest a kind of braille in which paintings are actually to be touched. Against the formalist imperative to see a painting from a safe distance, as a self-reflexive composition, a controlled disposition of space and iconography, marks of paint should not only fill the viewer’s field of vision but that optical process must be bolstered by the sense of touch.

Rather than step around Sue Williams’ plastic puddle of vomit at the 1993 Whitney Biennial, one might be immersed in the puddle of fatty multicolored marks that make up the painting face of a self-portrait by an aging Rembrandt, until the thought process which determined Rembrandt’s progress through to the final resolution of the painting would be imbricated in your mind (rather than whatever fixed role Rembrandt plays in your idea of art history). The sense of touch is important perhaps because it is at yet another remove from verbal language than the merely optical. And because, in the precise moment of actually painting, the painter, no matter how intellectual or conceptual, is engaged in a non-verbal activity. But if a Rembrandt isn’t at hand, then at least step up to Williams’ two paintings in the Biennial and note the difference between them: both carry overdetermined messages about rape and pornography, but in Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn? (1992), the images and text are drawn and painted in black line with a great deal of overlapping and blurring between white and cream back and fore-ground. The mobile interaction between figure/ground, the carelessly skillful drawing and lush marks of erasure, offer a level of amusement beyond the linguistic jokes more engaging than the effect of It’s A New Age (1992) in which tons of text and images are simply plunked down on a flat yellow ground.

Incidents of paint as the trace of thought are as important in non-objective paintings. The Mondrians in MoMA’s permanent collection, for example, are notable towards entropy to it as a thing made by a person with a variety of contradictory ideas and values, which may include a love of craft or even a nostalgia for just what is being critically deconstructed. One can only imagine how hard it is for the P.I.S. generation to make the transition, in the current exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art of Max Ernst’s works from 1919 to 1927, from the rooms of photo-collages to the subsequent paintings in which similar de- and re-constructions return to oil paint, with some paintings’ sources in early Renaissance painting and even folk art, as in the brilliantly colored oil on plaster The Birds Cannot Disappear (1923), of a bird struggling not to drown in a smooth blue green sea.

The intractability of P.I.S. is above all based in hostility to much of the conceptual and sensual underpinnings of painting, inculcated by avant-garde art education of the past decade. Aversion therapy has been practiced. Although available for superficial historical knowledge, image readability and critique, in a sense painting is never seen.

Reeducation to perceive painting must be equally persistent. Since one is dealing with a type of blindness I would suggest a kind of braille in which paintings are actually to be touched. Against the formalist imperative to see a painting from a safe distance, as a self-reflexive composition, a controlled disposition of space and iconography, marks of paint should not only fill the viewer’s field of vision but that optical process must be bolstered by the sense of touch.

Rather than step around Sue Williams’ plastic puddle of vomit at the 1993 Whitney Biennial, one might be immersed in the puddle of fatty multicolored marks that make up the painting face of a self-portrait by an aging Rembrandt, until the thought process which determined Rembrandt’s progress through to the final resolution of the painting would be imbricated in your mind (rather than whatever fixed role Rembrandt plays in your idea of art history). The sense of touch is important perhaps because it is at yet another remove from verbal language than the merely optical. And because, in the precise moment of actually painting, the painter, no matter how intellectual or conceptual, is engaged in a non-verbal activity. But if a Rembrandt isn’t at hand, then at least step up to Williams’ two paintings in the Biennial and note the difference between them: both carry overdetermined messages about rape and pornography, but in Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn? (1992), the images and text are drawn and painted in black line with a great deal of overlapping and blurring between white and cream back and fore-ground. The mobile interaction between figure/ground, the carelessly skillful drawing and lush marks of erasure, offer a level of amusement beyond the linguistic jokes more engaging than the effect of It’s A New Age (1992) in which tons of text and images are simply plunked down on a flat yellow ground.

Incidents of paint as the trace of thought are as important in non-objective paintings. The Mondrians in MoMA’s permanent collection, for example, are notable for the cracking of paint from age and for the little bristle-brush marks which were Mondrian’s tools in his efforts to eliminate the figure/ground relation. When seen up
close, not as reproductions flattened by photography, shaken from their catalogued positions as utopian modernism, the paintings are almost embarrassingly, nakedly—paintings. What may be a flaw if the painting is dismissed or even admired for its historicity is in fact the hook that keeps the viewer in the painting long enough to absorb the radicality of its struggle for figure/ground equivalence.

Because painting in the current Whitney Biennial is a vestigial activity represented by less than a handful of painters, it is as good a place as any to apply the educational practice of braille for the sighted. For one thing if "good" painting is suspect and unseen, then it might help to look at some bad painting just as closely. A comparison of representations of shit in works by Suzanne McClelland and Lari Pittman is instructive.

In McClelland’s Right (1992) turdy smears of brown terra-cotta are affixed to the canvas by crusted blobs of a shiny, waxy synthetic polymer. These seem additive rather than the residue of a process and they help locate the secret underpinnings of the painting in a kind of defanged late modernism. Take away the brown crusts and the pretense of involvement with language, and you’re looking at the vast emptiness of a later Helen Frankenthaler.

Now consider the curling brown piles of cascading shit which are important iconographic elements in Pittman’s immense and immensely detailed Untitled #1 (A Decorated Chronology of Insistence and Resignation), (1992-93). The painting insists on a physically close reading because simply from a technical point of view it’s hard to imagine how he does it at all. An incredible variety of images and delightful ornamentation compete for breathing room while each is rendered with demented precision. A red-rimmed asshole releases an elegantly curved, unified pile of shit painted in a flat brown which is elegantly highlighted by delicate hatching of light Naples yellow hair-thin brush-marks, in some spots tinged with crimson, all of this garlanded by swirling tiny, raised white dots and a decorative green leaf-like pattern. If touched these white dots would literally read as braille, while the dull blue and darker blue grey which form the background of large areas are covered with large, silent tear drops of the same color, in tiered relief. The controlled sequestering of painterliness on a ground as intricately detailed as The Unicorn Tapestries is but one method by which the painting speaks its iconography of “life, sex [and] death.” 1 It may speak of death but a celebratory love of painting is the metaphor of choice.

This course proposal does not call for a move away from cultural critique. Quite the contrary, the challenge is for the best and brightest young critics to hone their criticality of the appropriative, image and media-oriented, linguistically based work in which they are fluent while recognizing that the art-ness, the painting-ness of painting can be a viable language to speak current ideas, just as painters need to sharpen their focus on the real.

Can this re-training be successful? At times painting illiteracy seems intractable and the ultimate futility of The Wild Child’s education in Francois Truffaut’s movie comes to mind; in some scenes of that movie, such as when the doctor deliberately punishes his charge unjustly to test if he has a sense of justice, education seems like child-abuse, and in the end the child cannot be taught. On the other hand, forcing people into repeated and close encounters with painting’s inti-

mate details may achieve the non-linguistically based knowledge similar to a great baseball player’s understanding of the strike zone. Keith Hernandez’s father would pitch balls to him for hours in the playground, indicating which were strikes and which were balls, until the purely conceptual zone, an invisible cube of space, was a knowledge in the body.

All painting descriptions based on notes taken in the presence of the actual works or from memory of more than a single viewing, not from reproductions.

Notes
1. Lari Pittman, wall statement accompanying the paintings.
2. Keith Hernandez and Mike Bryan, If At First—a Season With The Mets, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986, p. 55: “After every one of the thousands of pitches he threw to me as a kid, he told me where it was, if there was any question at all. Outside, Keith. On the corner, too close to take with two strikes. On the corner but low. Just high. The importance of the strike zone was drilled into me. Drilled in.”
During the 1970s, many women artists used video and performance as a means to deal with formal issues of space and light. For instance, in a series of performances, Joan Jonas used the distortions of video feedback as a source of light to illuminate gestures and to intensify behavioral details. In the video installation Duchamp’s Grave (1977), Shigeko Kubota placed video monitors in a column, with a long mirror perpendicular to that column; the space was dark, and the only illumination came from the monitors (which showed Duchamp’s tombstone) and the reflections. In a series of videotapes, Nan Hoover recorded her body as she stood against windows or in doorways, with the images being barely visible shards of light. In 1981, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, a young artist from the San Francisco Bay area, gave a performance at the Queen’s Museum in New York, where she wore a white blindfold, as she enacted a series of ritual gestures; the “setting” consisted of video monitors which were covered with white paper lanterns, which provided the source of light. The idea of binding and tying was evoked, as was the idea of the difficulty of perception. Theresa Cha, who died in 1982, was developing her work in ways related to issues being dealt with in video and performance from that period of the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Yet now her work is being taken up by theorists and curators who have no interest in contextualizing Cha’s work in relation to other work, but are intent on considering the work as singular in political terms.

On the occasion of the symposium on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha held at The Whitney Museum of American Art in January 1993, it was apparent that her work and, more importantly, her life were being appropriated for ulterior purposes. Aspects of her life were being foregrounded, to provide an image of positive reinforcement to sociopolitical concerns. The issues of Cha’s aesthetic were dismissed, as this particular artist was converted into a post-modern producer of meaning; however, that meaning was being imposed on the work, wrested from the specificity of the original context to be placed as a symbol in current cultural constructs.

Obviously, no cultural product can be judged in a vacuum; the question is whether there is a rush to fill in the void, a rush which denies what the work actually is in order to validate the work in terms which are expedient, or whether the work can be judged in relation to its actual aesthetic. Cha’s video work and performances were a mixture of intuition and intense theorizing. Though issues such as “identity” (in specific reference to ethnicity) and “nationalism” (referring to her status as Korean-American) had some bearing on her work, these issues were certainly not the sum total of her work. Yet in the symposium, Cha was being used as a pawn on a chessboard advancing the notion of an ethnic woman artist, certainly reductivist in terms of her aesthetic. The emphasis was on “ethnic woman” and not on “artist.” Her work has been removed from the context of video work and performance at that time (1975–1982). One question which has been asked is how Cha’s work has influenced current Asian-American video work. In a significant sense, it hasn’t: until now, her video work was inaccessible, not available for viewing. The same can be said for the work of many video artists from the late 1970s–early 1980s. The lack of significant distribution and exhibition for video art has left the work of artists such as Tomiyo Sasaki, Shigeko Kubota, Nori Sato, and others with little currency. The concerns of that work, the interest in evanescence, in the limits of perception, in qualities of recorded light, were central to much video and performance of that period. However those concerns have been superceded by narrative and political concerns, which dominate video work at this time.

Currently, Cha’s work is being viewed in terms of interests in ethnicity and feminism. Of course, art should be able to sustain multiple interpretations, and Cha’s work does contain aspects which can be so interpreted, but simply to view the work in this way can be reductive. Though specific perspectives have the ability to generate insights into cultural production, politicizing artistic endeavor can have the effect of trivializing the work as art.

Considering the recent commemoration of Theresa Cha, it’s obvious that similar reinvestigation has not occurred for other Asian-American women who have been active in video and performance. For one reason, the formalist concerns which had been central to their aesthetics are not in current favor; for another, Cha left something which her contemporaries did not: texts, in particular, the anthology Apparatus (1980) and the autobiographical collage Dictée (1982). By stipulating “theory” as a component of her enterprise (Apparatus is an anthology which Cha edited, including texts by theorists such as Roland Barthes and Raymond Bellour, as well as a piece by Cha which was not an essay, but a collage of images and text, refiguring the methodology of Dictée), Cha asserted a critical stance in her work which has enabled commentators to explicate what is perceived to be her subject position. But that critical stance now has been distorted into a politicized stance. What is now being referred to as “theory” in academia is an admixture of deconstruction, post-structuralism, and Marxism. Theory presupposes the situation of culture as a socioeconomic construct. When theory is used critically, it replaces critical functioning as an aesthetic enterprise with critique as a political facilitator. The artwork becomes an object on which to hang sociological observations; the artwork becomes a Marxist Christmas tree on which are hung gaudy baubles of “late capitalism,” “the cultural industry,” “the society of consumption,” and other concepts.

The symposium on Theresa Cha was especially disturbing, coming when it did, because The Whitney Museum just had been involved in a similar case of obfuscation regarding an artist of color, and that was the recent retrospective of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Once again, a (dead) artist of color was being used to shore up the ruins of theoretical concerns which tended to mythologize the artist, in a way unrelated to the actual situation of the artist’s life and work. In the case of Basquiat, the idea of the artist as a “wild child,” as some sort of urban primitive artist, as an untutored genius, is totally erroneous. The fact that Basquiat came from a middle-class, professional black family, that he was going to art school when he was catapulted to fame, that he was not uneducated, was repeatedly ignored,
both by those eulogizing him in the catalogue, and by those who criticized the show severely. (Only Adam Gopnik in The New Yorker of November 9, 1992, seemed to be able to look at the retrospective with any sort of equanimity, and it was he who pointed out the mythologizing of Basquiat and how this process distorted the actual biographical facts.)

The idea of "the cultural industry" as a hegemonic system which must designate artists into specific definitions may seem an outgrowth of overreaching imaginations fed by conspiracy theories. Yet class, racial, and sexual distinctions do play a part in the criticism, historical consideration, and appreciation of art. In the past, I have written about such overt and covert omissions, how white artists are favored over artists of color, even when the artists begin with credentials which are equivalent. White artists are favored even when the non-white artists have the edge. Examples can be cited ad infinitum, and I don't think that would further the cause of opening discourse on the social inequities in the cultural field. We know that the cultural industry is involved in the perpetuation of the ideology of the societal matrix. The problem with the societal matrix in the United States is that it is unstable. Though there exists a class structure, and certainly an enforced racial hierarchy, there is a certain amount of fluidity within the structure. The insistence on the precepts of liberalism in academia at this time has been dubbed "political correctness", yet that correctness is within very strictly defined limits, as can be seen in the cases of Cha and Basquiat, where the work and the lives of these artists are distorted to slot them, politically, into predetermined (or overdetermined) categories.

In the past year, I have been asked to lecture on issues of cultural inequity, and I know that the reason for these requests from cultural organizations is my "status" (Asian-American); whether or not I am actually qualified isn't really an issue. When I lecture, I give examples which do not relate to issues of race, because I want to point out that what we know as "art history" (even recent art history) can be distorted by issues of class, fashionability, "access." One example I like to give concerns the history of "Happenings."

In all art historical accounts of Happenings, the emphasis is always on performance work by artists done from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. This is true, though some work by composers and choreographers from that period also can be classified as Happenings. The period of Happenings was very brief, and many of the artists who created Happenings did not continue to create performance work, artists such as Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Red Grooms; Allan Kaprow, who is credited with coining the term "Happenings" (even recent art history) can be distorted by issues of class, fashionability, "access." One example I like to give concerns the history of "Happenings."

In all art historical accounts of Happenings, the emphasis is always on performance work by artists done from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. This is true, though some work by composers and choreographers from that period also can be classified as Happenings. The period of Happenings was very brief, and many of the artists who created Happenings did not continue to create performance work, artists such as Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Red Grooms; Allan Kaprow, who is credited with coining the term "Happenings," and Robert Whitman were artists whose performance work continued in some form or other to the present. Robert Morris did performance work, which, because of the movement emphasis, he considered "dance," so did Robert Rauschenberg. However, many commentators have grouped those works with Happenings. Again, in the case of Morris and Rauschenberg, the actual period of activity was relatively brief. Nevertheless, their work was highly regarded, and, in the few written accounts of "performance," their work has received a great deal of attention. We know that there are inequities: the career of Carolee Schneemann, one of the few women artists credited with Happenings, did not meet the same trajectory as the men. Her "commercial potential" as an artist was never fully realized, unlike her male counterparts.

But a number of men are also omitted from all the accounts being written about Happenings and experimental dance from that period. And chief among them is Roberts Blossom, one of the most innovative artists from that period.

Working with his wife, Beverly Schmidt, who had been a dancer with Alwin Nikolais, the Schmidt-Blossom Company would prove to be genuinely influential. Jill Johnston wrote: "In 1963 Beverly Schmidt camouflage herself as she appeared in a red gown against a lush screen image of red flowers. That was the first film-stage piece by a choreographer that I can recall. Everyone was excited about it at the time." In terms of the work, Beverly Schmidt would conceive of the movement, and Roberts Blossom would handle the media components. With Robert Whitman, Blossom was one of the first to use large film projections as an integral part of the performance environment. Alwin Nikolais had used lighting effects, but Blossom pioneered in the use of film, where the filmed action would sometimes complement, sometimes augment, sometimes contradict the actual physical performance. Elaine Summers would continue to explore the usage of film as performance environment. A number of choreographers were so impressed with the work that they performed in some of the Schmidt-Blossom pieces; among these choreographers were Yvonne Rainer and Meredith Monk. By the late 1960s, Roberts Blossom and Beverly Schmidt-Blossom (who now performs under the name Beverly Blossom) were divorced; Beverly Blossom has continued to dance (she shared a concert with Jeannette Stoner at Dance Theater Workshop in New York City in January of 1993), but Roberts Blossom stopped creating performance works, and returned to his career in the theater. Roberts Blossom has become a respected and well-established character actor in theater, films, and television. (One of the last things he did was the final episode in the 1991-92 season of the television series Northern Exposure; he played the old man who tells the story of the founding of the town.)

Yet the Schmidt-Blossom Company has been omitted in almost all commentaries on Happenings and dance written since the mid-1970s. Why? It cannot be because the time span of the Schmidt-Blossom Company was brief: Grooms, Dine, Oldenburg, Rauschenberg, and Morris only worked in performance for a brief period. It cannot be because the work was classified as "dance"; Rauschenberg and Morris also classified their work as "dance." The "dance" of Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, and Simone Forti has been documented from that period. It cannot be because those writing about the work had no first-hand knowledge of the Schmidt-Blossom Company; most of those who have written about performance from that period (with notable exceptions such as Michael Kirby and Richard Kostelanetz) have no first-hand knowledge of many of the works from that period.

Barbara Moore, whose husband, the photographer Peter Moore, documented most of the avant-garde performance work of the period, has maintained that the work of the Schmidt-Blossom Company remains some of the most impressive dance-theater-multimedia work she has ever seen. Yet, when researchers come to look at the photo archives, they always ask for photographs and information on the performance work of Rainer, Rauschenberg, Morris, Oldenburg, Kaprow, Whitman, Monk, sometimes on the performance work of Schneemann, Dick Higgins, or Alison Knowles, but never on the performance work of Schmidt-Blossom and Blossom.
What's wrong with Roberts Blossom and Beverly Schmidt-Blossom? Why has their contribution to performance been so overlooked? It can't be because Beverly Schmidt-Blossom is a woman, because, in the dance field, the contribution of women has always been recognized. Roberts Blossom is a straight white male. What's wrong? Saying that possibly Roberts Blossom has been reticent about his work is not an answer; Robert Morris is someone who prefers not to discuss his performance work. Beverly Blossom has continued her dance work, and she is concerned about how the work is remembered.

What's wrong is that the history of Happenings and performance is being considered in relation to a specific hierarchy of the visual arts. The commercial success of the artists has become one of the criteria for their consideration as important in the history of Happenings and performance. The actual importance of the work, its influence and its aesthetic merit, are secondary to the social standing of the artist. In this account, Robert Rauschenberg, Red Grooms, and Jim Dine are of primary importance, while Roberts Blossom, a "mere" actor, is of no importance at all. Many of the people who have written about Happenings and performance in the past two decades have done so from a decidedly "biased" perspective, in which the "fine arts" are privileged; some of these writers include Roselle Goldberg, Sally Banes, and Barbara Haskell. Yvonne Rainer has written about this situation:

The history of The Judson Dance Theater has been similarly distorted, to emphasize the contribution of those who were "the tail" of Rauschenberg's comet (Bainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Deborah Hay); those who write about The Judson Dance Theater from this perspective also negate the contributions of the late James Waring (an important precursor, in whose company many of those people danced, including Rainer and Childs), Robert Ellis Dunn (his classes formed the basis for The Judson Dance Theater), and Sally Gross (in one catalogue about The Judson Dance Theater, every time Sally Gross appears in a photograph, she is listed as "unidentified").

Art history seems to be a Platonic activity: often the commentators have an image in their mind of the perfect person to whom to assign credit, and they will overlook, negate, omit those artists who do not fit the bill. The work itself becomes irrelevant to the "legend" of the artist, and that legend can be manipulated, as in the case of Basquiat. The manipulation of legend is a way of denying the work of art aesthetic value, and of denying the artist the specificity of his or her biography. The artist becomes a construct for the creation of the critical commentator.

At the same time that Basquiat retrospective was at The Whitney Museum, the Kieferfeld Perry Gallery had an exhibition of paintings by graffiti artists, including Futura 2000, Crash, Daze, Lee, and Lady Pink. The fact that these artists, many of whom genuinely were self-taught artists, have had a problematic relationship to the art world system is indicative of the class status being enforced. The case of Lady Fink is the most pertinent, because her career exposes the questionable visibility attendant upon the "alternative" art world. During the period when Colab, an almost legendary artists' collaborative active from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, was operative, much of the work produced by Jenny Holzer was done in collaboration with Lady Pink. Lady Pink's name is Sandra Cisneros; she is Latina, ergo, an artist of color. After the 1980 Times Square Show, the most publicized of the Colab "alternative" exhibitions, many of the artists were rapidly enveloped in the commercial gallery system, but what was obvious was that the commercial galleries would only deal with white artists. During the last half decade, Jenny Holzer has had a retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, been represented to the United States at the Venice Biennale, and, in general, been one of the most prominent of younger artists, while Lady Fink (until this year) was working an administrative job as the publicist for Franklin Furnace. There is no evidence of malice on the part of Jenny Holzer, she simply used the social system of the art world, as a woman artist, it can be said that she faced a degree of sexism to the extent that the art world is sexist, but as a white artist, she was favored over the artist of color. The fact that Holzer and Lady Fink were collaborators makes the discrepancy in these art world careers all the more pronounced.

One friend of mine, who was one of the founders of Colab, became very angry over the capitulation of other members of Colab to the hierarchical system of the art world. Her response was to break her ties with the art world for a number of years. If you are creating an alternative system, which is supposed to establish a more equitable situation where women and non-white artists of color can be exhibited along with white male artists, to capitulate to racial, sexual and class hierarchies is a betrayal. It is true that certain artists of color have used the "alternative" system to advance their careers. I know of Asian-American film and video artists who have exploited their ethnicity to receive grants from government agencies and foundations. They play up to the rhetoric of political correctness, trying to get an edge in this system, and in the process they alienate those artists who are tough enough to do so are ruthless in their manipulation of the only recourse they have.

In the legal system, part of liability has to do with intent; if an "accident" occurs, in order to collect damages you often have to prove that negligence or actual intent had been involved. Can it be claimed that the instances of omission, negation, and distortion which I have outlined were intentional? There really is no easy answer. It would be so easy to say, yes, it's all intentional, and there really are evil masterminds who have ideological designs on the configuration of our culture. Not even Fritz Lang's Dr. Mabuse could be that dastardly. With the commission of recent art history, should there be a simple assent to the hegemonic simplifications which are in the process of being established? Or should we assume that culture remains a process of continual exploration and critique, and should we consider
art part of the procedure of investigation into our culture? Should art history be part of the history of knowledge, or should we all give up and let art history become the myth of the ideologically determined "ruling classes"?

Notes

MEDIA BAPTISMS

DAVID REED

When I was in my early twenties I was drawn to the landscape of the Southwestern United States—the deserts and high plateaus of New Mexico, Arizona, and southern Utah. I was drawn by the emptiness of the vast spaces and the freedom which the space implied. I called the Grand Canyon "the home of American painting," recognizing that the unlocated space of Pollock's paintings matched the vastness of the canyon. I thought that through painting vast undefined space I could connect to what I loved in Pollock's and Newman's paintings; learn and grow. This didn't work out as I expected. I discovered there is a dark side to the freedom of that space: isolation and loneliness. In paintings the space can be vast, but how could I prevent it from also being self-contained?

I felt a strange sense of time in the desert. The landscape seemed biblical. It reminded me of landscapes in paintings by Piero and Raphael. The lone tree by a well near my shack seemed the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. On the Hopi reservation a friend showed me Max Ernst's studio. The desert also seemed internally familiar from the dreams of surrealism.

But these weren't the only ways that the desert seemed strangely familiar to me. I had several eerie experiences. They were similar to déjà vu experiences, but longer lasting and stronger. I recognized unfamiliar places and felt I had been there before, remembering events that I was sure had happened—a chase on horseback and a man falling from a horse, the discovery of a well, a wolf that seemed human.

Often I would paint views from my shack but sometimes I would drive out into the desert and choose another view. I had nailed a rough easel onto the side of my small Volkswagen. After painting one morning, to escape the sun, I went to a cave I had noticed nearby for lunch. Just inside the cave entrance there was a small spring of water running down the rock walls. I cupped my hands to drink, but before my hands were filled, I bent and drank directly from the stream. Looking out at the red scrub desert and mesas in the front of the cave, I had an uncanny sense of familiarity. The spring water was an unexpected pleasure. But why did it seem more than just that? After lunch and a nap I explored the back of the cave and found a flue, a crack in the mesa's walls, which I walked through into a small canyon cul-de-sac which also seemed familiar. Many years later I realized that I knew both the cave and the cul-de-sac from a movie, *The Searchers* by John Ford. Martin Pauley and Ethan Edwards take refuge in the cave. Martin fills his canteen under the same stream and drinks with the same gesture that I had made. Somehow my gesture recalled the film image. This recognition made me realize how much CinemaScope westerns had influenced how I thought about the space of the desert. The freedom and loneliness I saw in the space is the theme of west-
The hero is free in the landscape but he is an angry and isolated outsider and in the end always returns alone to the desert.

Film is especially good at conveying the experience of the uncanny. Stanley Cavell calls the uncanny the “normal experience of film.” In a movie the world can look perfectly ordinary, but as the camera lingers one knows that this world isn’t ordinary at all.

I realize now that the experience of the uncanny is what drew me to the desert to paint. Not Beauty. Not the Sublime. The category of experience that is explored in my paintings is the Fantastic, from Kafka, to Poe, to B-horror films.

- fear and loss of the self
- division and multiplication of personality
- collapse of the limit between subject and object, mind and matter
- transformation of time and space
- sexual desire in various forms
- biological transformations, especially across gender, from animal to human, or from human to machine

These themes are discussed in Tzvetan Todorov’s study, *The Fantastic, A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. He describes three requirements for the fantastic.

The first is an unresolved ambiguity between the supernatural and a rational explanation. In my paintings this involves an ambiguity between the physicality of the paintings and their illusionism. I want both qualities and I want neither to deny the other. The paint is very physical and the process direct, but the paint surface looks distanced like a photograph. The painted light can seem like light from film or video. This light, unlike the light in figurative painting, is not directional, but increases the intensity of all colors. The light is technological and not religious. It doesn’t come from above. I want to make this technological light human. I want a unified light in the painting, but I want to modify it, let it change from light to dark, change temperature and change hue. I want to make full color, technicolor paintings.

This ambiguity between physicality and illusion affects the sense of movement in the paintings. The gestures are frozen. But because we are used to seeing movement on film and video screens it’s easy to imagine a continuation of the movement as we can from a photographic still. I think of this jump of movement as a way to emotionally connect to the work.

The fantastic is a self-conscious genre. I like a sense of artificiality. I want the elements to be blunt and obvious, to not be balanced or composed. More and more I find I’m better off not thinking of space and composition but instead of filmic devices such as focus and camera movement. I try to make a screen of paint that has no definable space but which allows one to mutate in size and nature as one moves through it.

Todorov’s second requirement for the fantastic is an identification of the reader with the hero’s hesitation between interpretations. My entry into the uncanny, while drinking in the cave, was through a gesture. And gesture is the entry into my paintings, but it’s a peculiar entry. Most paintings have a tactile entry. But touch won’t get you into my paintings. The entry is eyes only. The gestures in the painting are ambiguous in meaning and obstacles put in the way of identification. But they can be identified with, and one’s body put into the light of the painting. I hope the obstacles ultimately cause more identification rather than less. Warhol’s paintings work in this way. The illusion of movement one can create and follow in a gesture can open the painting. That is why the paintings are in such extreme proportions vertically and horizontally. When you look at an isolated part of these extreme formats, the other parts which you see out of the corner of your eyes, seem to move, because peripheral vision is especially sensitive to movement. But when you look directly at the movement it stops, and peripheral movement starts again somewhere else.

Also the extreme format keeps one from easily putting together the whole of the painting. To make sense of the painting one must put the disparate parts together oneself. My paintings aren’t space but an artificial equivalent which is stressed and mutated. I want to take the unity of Pollock’s space, the unlocated hugeness of it, and crack it open. I try to control these leaks so they can connect the painting to the world outside itself.

Todorov’s third requirement for the fantastic is that the work reject allegorical and poetic interpretations, for if one can interpret the narrative in these ways it loses its ambiguity. I refer to natural forms, architecture, experiences in nature, but they can never be specific. If the reference becomes specific the painting could slide out of the genre of the fantastic and into the genres of either side. If there is a rational explanation (as I feel there is for my experiences in the desert) then the genre is the uncanny. If the explanation is supernatural then the genre becomes the marvelous. Rationality or belief don’t work well for painting. Suspension—doubt, works best.
TRANSACTIONAL SPACE

JORDAN CRANDALL

To speak of art in the present moment is to disorient oneself and to blur the object of study. One is led to speak of art's spatialization, its dispersion into configurations of elements; such art has been recently termed by Laura Trippi as "configurative." Building on "the spatial sensibility established through conceptualism, feminist artmaking, and traditional installation, among other types of art," configurative work exists as an arrangement of components, "an open constellation which the viewer engages as much with her or his body, moving through space, as with the eyes."

The viewer enters into relation with the work as a mobile element among others given in the space of display. In this way, configurative work dissolves simple subject/object relations between viewer and art work, granting the viewer a participatory role in "producing" the work and its contents. The parts played by exchange and negotiation in the production and circulation of meaning are brought to the fore, as are qualities of the provisional and the improvisatory. Boundaries between interior and exterior, self and other, private and public, object, viewer, and context, all unravel into one another... (Such work) embraces the viewer as a crucial, mobile component, an integral aspect of a variable system of spatial relations—for the system alters as the viewer moves. Emphasizing the peripatetic nature of art "viewing," along with the function of context in providing a frame, the artwork seems to reside in the layered and shifting perceptual relations between configured objects, the viewer, and elements of the space itself.

Artwork is becoming increasingly decentralized—that is, becoming difficult to locate—and our culture is increasingly dominated by a spatial logic that profoundly alters the meaning of art. (Even time itself is becoming spatialized as an expanding present—an ever-occurring Now—pushes outward and subsumes all history, reconfiguring it according to varied transactional terms.) While it is exceedingly difficult to isolate an artwork phenomenologically, or as a product of authorial intent, we are led to examine the work as a co-production which exists in a charged space, articulated in terms of its defining systems. This arena wherein the artwork exists can be referred to as a "transactional space." If one were to shift one's focus toward the study of such a space and its defining processes, one might posit alternate methods of the production and reception of the art generated therein, along with alternate intentional strategies and relationships. One can then redefine that which constitutes the artwork.

While questions such as "what are the factors which compose this artwork? What are its defining systems, its methods of circulation, valuation, and control?" (cf. Foucault) were intended to advance a new dialogue beyond such lines of inquiry as "who produced the art and what were his or her intentions?" it appears as though they have all but vanished from the general discourse as the authorial others who create the artwork are eclipsed by the artist's aura, fueled by powerful market forces which seek to isolate a particular producer in order to endow an art product with value. Though they are directly constitutive of the system as it stands, these market forces are rarely acknowledged in art criticism or journalism, though they are repressed as are their related systemic questions above, never to be infused into the discourse, only the material of rumor. It is time for the mechanics of this to be confronted by the artist, critic, curator, and dealer. Rather than a discourse which constructs and privileges a sole creator and his or her artistic impulse, the emphasis should shift toward a spatialization and sociologization of art's processes of production, its methods of circulation, valuation, and control. The art system should evolve and expand as such; it does not call for conservative or protectionist strategies but those which break through them and parallel the new pathways being forged by the information technologies.

In accordance with the increasing democratization of the methods of text/image production and circulation, their horizontality and their dissolution of authorial hegemony and notions of authenticity, the "viewer" is positioned to assume the traditional role of the artist. Artists should cede this authority and allow this transition to take place, shifting their production toward a spatialized art system where the "viewer" may assume their (previous) role at will—indeed, where such roles can be functions of the dialogue or exchange. One party may establish relative conditions and limits, assume responsibility for development, production, circulation, alliances with other systems and structures (the role of producer), the other party may isolate, relate, actualize, recontextualize, and so forth (the role of consumer), and vice versa. In economies, this parallels the growing power of the consumer to define product markets and strategies. Producer and consumer enter into a coded dialogue via information technology, each at the service of the other: an interpenetration of roles which stave out a shifting exchange space, through which the transactional "product"—an item, a service, a structure, a self—arises.

This situation also appears in the post-deconstructive idea of the electronic hypertext, where the text exists as a collaboration between author and reader. A hypertext incorporates its reference material, notes, explications and digressions, all cross-linked to its "body" in a labyrinthine, multi-dimensional textual landscape which no longer has a body in that previous sense. Such a text—especially as it begins to incorporate moving images and sound—can no longer be printed in book form: its natural environment is computer space. One's keystroke choices determine one's reading of the text, which is particular to each reader and each act of reading. The hypertextual "work," in its entirety, constitutes a space of possibility through which each reader navigates/constructs a different work, thereby co-authoring it. Computer bulletin boards and networks such as "The Thing"—operated by the artist collective ThingCo—constitute vast hypertextual works-in-process. Accessible to those with a computer and modem, such systems write themselves in relation to their participants, configure themselves in response to authorial choices. A hypertext need not be entirely digital: it can include both printed and elec-
tronic elements (as well as multisensory ones) which flux in and out of materiality. The art publication Blast which I edit is modeled on such hypertexual production, circulation, and consumption.

Whether in textuality, art, or economics, the transition from producer to consumer—from author to reader—and back again should occur easily and naturally. One can no longer locate the "work" as the result of a sole artist's intention, or place him or her at the centerpoint from which it spirals. Instead, authority and "authenticity" are situationalized, and a constellation of origins generate new configurations of possibility. The viewer/reader co-creates by seeing, co-writes while reading. Positions are relatively assumed within these transactional spaces, and the "work" becomes an evolving collective artwork, a social and historical product.

There are countless possibilities for such artworks; they may constitute those events temporarily "claimed" by the art-context for study (the movement from the centered art object to the conceptualist claimed object to the spatialized and decentered claimed event is thus highly relevant), or they may comprise the social "actions" of collectives such as Border Arts Workshop, Gran Fury, or The Artists and Homeless Collaborative, which seek to cultivate responsibilities among both their members and society at large, in order to reposition and forge new relationships between individuals and the larger dynamics of socio-culture. The agency of the late Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica incorporates both of these areas, most strikingly through the Parangóle, an "environment-structure"—usually a cape, a tent, or a claimed structure—which can contain the "participant-work."

The "discovery" of Parangóle elements in the landscape of the urban or rural world is also part of "establishing perceptive-structural relations" between what grows in the structural grid of the Parangóle (representing here the general character of colour-structure in environmental space), and what is "found" in the spatial environmental world. One may construct such relations whether "within" or "in relation to" the Parangóle, as its divisions shift according to perceptual conditions. For example, Oiticica suggests that in the architecture of the favela there is a lyric implicit Parangóle character. The structural organicity of its constituent elements, and the internal circulation and disembemberment of these constructions mean that there are no abrupt transitions from 'room' to 'living-room' or 'kitchen,' only the essential, which defines each part connecting to the other in a continuity. Such perceptual molding of sociologized space is explored by a growing number of artists, who use conventional situations as channels through which to rework and investigate conceptual/consensual relations within socio-environmental structure. One such artist's strategy results in a shared responsibility for the artwork either through its collectivization, through a subsequent erasure of her name and all documentation of the work, or through her initial refusal to allow any attribution, acknowledgment, or documentation whatsoever.

Such art calls for an educative context to be forged, not by educators per se but by artists, critics, curators, and theorists, which emphasizes the revived pedagogical functions of art. This should not involve the supplementation of artistic activity with more didactic material, or the privileging of educational departments and programs. Rather, it calls for a focus on art-as-education in a much broader sense: a reviving of art as an inherently educative activity whose pedagogic function must not be departmentalized but reworked into all aspects of artistic practice and expanded (spatialized) outward into the world. Art becomes a context not for the study of "art" but of perceptual relations (such as between codes or objects, spatial elements, and the body) across wide and divergent fields of dialogue not only with the art-historical system but the systems of the world—including its constitutive economic systems.

As our workspace is increasingly defined through the media and information technology, it is increasingly determined through the concerns of the market and thus, the global system of capital. As the artist Francesc Torres suggests, "in the New World Order, this era dominated by the political equivalent of Postmodernism, the former and extraordinarily simple symmetry of terror has been undermined by the emergence of an unstable plurality of players conditioned not by ideology (the global interpretive system that lends direction to experience), but by politics in its purest technocratic form: economics. Political behavior based exclusively on economic factors is bound to reproduce the inherent chaos of the marketplace; some call this chaos freedom..." One must strive to grasp the dynamics of this network of power and control. So vast and so pervasive is this system that it seems to have replaced Nature as the mysterious "other" and has seized her functions, infusing them with its (new and improved) system of Culture. Economic and cultural concerns have merged so seamlessly, the market has so firmly aligned itself with the media (the latter at the service of the former), that one is firmly but unknowingly enmeshed in its transactional net, caught in an orgy of productization of such extent that it is no longer possible to distinguish "fact" from "fiction," or oneself from the products one consumes—all while the notion of the autonomy of the individual and his or her "free choice" is deceivingly upheld. A phenomenon in its media interpretation—it is never seen first-hand, although it appears otherwise. The realms of news media, commercial media, fictional media, and "real life" have interpenetrated to such an extent that each feeds back into the other in endless cycles of commodification, repetition, and interpretation. Events (and individuals, "real" or televisual) circulate within these matrices, become so many product logos, and spilt out into life, only to be sucked back in, cycled, and flung out again. Within these transactional fields we locate "reality"; these logos constitute a language with which we construct socio-culture. And while one has always to some extent packaged oneself according to the dictates of the market, this process has now escalat-ed enormously: within the (increasingly multisensory) telecommunication networks, one can rapidly configure one's psychological and physical characteristics according to a dizzying array of conditions. One can now travel out of body, "astral project" into the great transactional matrix of capital, and subject one's self to consumerist demands.

To ignore these economic forces any longer is to blind oneself to the mechanics of cultural production, to deal with only its most surface qualities, its factory sheen. One can no longer "transcend" or "oppose" these forces. This does not impel one to surrender to economic concerns, but to seize them and infuse them into art production, in order to uncover the constitutive dynamics of capital and to forge a new dynamic, a study of such processes subsumed into a new vision of humanity and nature. Capital here constitutes a tool or a technology, with which
to bring about such a vision, in a triadic symbiosis of humanity, nature, and technology. In its broadest sense, "technology" indicates an intentional structure, system, or method (after the Greek root techne, which means a set of rules, a system, or a method of making or doing); thus, symbolic exchange, writing, and even thinking can be seen as technologies. As a technology becomes second nature it seems to become part of the user's subjectivity, and thus is seen less and less as a technology (e.g., writing becomes an extension of thought, and computer space becomes an extension of cognitive space). One always incorporates one's technologies into the very fabric of one's being, and defines oneself through them: through technology, and in relation to technology, as with nature—through it, and in relation to it. Thus "humanity," "nature," and "technology" interpenetrate, each located in a relation to the others and mediated by them.

The patterns and processes of these realms are analogous in many ways yet to be articulated. Our system of capital parallels the exchange processes of nature; it can, for example, be related to theoretical physics, where systems exchange the processes of value" within specific contexts; an 'empty set' can speak of evolution in terms of biological exchange or genetic transaction, production, or circulation. For example, Richard Dawkins's post-Darwinist theories posit the "genetic replicator," not the individual organism, as the unit of selection, and further defines this replicator as one which does not have rigidly fixed boundaries. His notions of the "extended phenotype" map "genetic action at a distance"—all of the gene's effects outside the body in which the gene resides. (A conventional "phenotypic effect" is regarded as that which is confined to the individual body in which the gene sits, such as the color of the eye; an "extended" phenotypic effect would exist outside of the body, such as the dam of the beaver.) In theory, genetic action at a distance "could include almost all interactions between individuals of the same or different species. The living world can be seen as a network of interlocking fields of replicator power." Dawkins suggests that almost all phenotypic characters will turn out to bear the marks of compromise between internal and external replicator forces. 7

Links are also being drawn between physics and information theory, relating, for example, the quantum to the bit. Observing that physical phenomena are somehow defined by the questions we ask of them, these theorists' suggest that the basis of reality may not be the quantum but the bit—the answer to a "yes" or "no" question, the fundamental currency of computing and, increasingly, communications. They have found that concepts such as the uncertainty principle (which replaces the notion of cause and effect with a principle of indeterminism), wave-particle duality, and nonlocality 8 can be formulated more powerfully in the context of information theory. Genetic and binary coding are also being linked, as the text of information theory. Genetic and binary coding are also being linked, as the text of information theory. Genetic and binary coding are also being linked, as the text of information theory.

One also draws between physics and information theory, relating, for example, the quantum to the bit. Observing that physical phenomena are somehow defined by the questions we ask of them, these theorists' suggest that the basis of reality may not be the quantum but the bit—the answer to a "yes" or "no" question, the fundamental currency of computing and, increasingly, communications. They have found that concepts such as the uncertainty principle (which replaces the notion of cause and effect with a principle of indeterminism), wave-particle duality, and nonlocality can be formulated more powerfully in the context of information theory. Genetic and binary coding are also being linked, as the body's codes are mapped and projected onto computer space. Todd Siler 9 posts a theory of "informators" which relate the processes of subatomic phenomena to the processes of symbolic structuring, language, and meaning (and therefore, value), situated within a "neurosphere"—our individual and collective nervous systems projected onto the earth's biosphere—and an artscience practice of "Cerebralism," which links all phenomena to cognitive processes. According to Siler, Cerebralism entails "expressing the 'connectedness' of the world—from the forces that bind atomic nuclei to the forces that unleash our brain's creative potential," reflecting this in artwork which illuminates connections between the mind and nature and between the mind and its creations. The human mind...is not the brain alone—a densely packed web of chemical and electromagnetic phenomena. The mind is also the society you live in and the tangible effects of your values. It's the telephone and communications satellite you use to stay in touch. All of our creations are embodiments of mind. Cerebralists remind us: The brain is what the brain creates. Its workings reflect the workings of its creations. When you explore the mind, you ultimately explore everything. 10

Here and in much cognitive science, the patterns of cognition have become spatialized, pushing the mind out beyond the brain and transforming it into a transactional network which activates codes in space and generates meaning not in the Cartesian theater but in the space of perception. According to Daniel C. Dennett, the self becomes a "center of narrative gravity" whose existence depends on the transactional persistence of that narrative, which could, in theory, survive changes in medium. For Dennett, after Quine (especially his 1960 thesis of the "indeterminacy of radical translation"), inner speech is "a way of thinking," and inner speech and thought are brain-writing, tokens which are as much subject to interpretation as any other. Dennett adopts an "intentional stance" and employs a method of "heterophenomenology" to interpret his subjects as "intentional systems." 11

As Michael Friedman suggests, contemporary psychology tries to explain individual cognitive activity independently from social cognitive activity and then tries to give a "macro" reduction of social cognitive activity—that is, the use of a public language—in terms of a prior theory of individual cognitive activity. The opposing suggestion is that we first look for a theory of social activity, and then try to give a "micro" reduction of individual cognitive activity—"the activity of applying concepts, making judgments, and so forth—in terms of our prior social theory. 12 "Social" must here include both language-oriented and non-language-oriented subjects together with inorganic "information-bearing systems"; it thus comnotes system-environment interaction and development. All of the relationships summarized here become social, and the natural ("of nature") as well as the technological become active sociological agents—whether or not one believes that artificial intelligence per se is possible. These relationships should not be explored solely in analogies with our practices as language-users, or in standard subject/object divisions, but in terms of the "centered consciousness," articulated in terms of transactional space, located in alternate epistemic systems, attributed to alternate social relationships. This, held against our inability to execute the task as centered subjects (or "centers of narrative gravity"), with the resulting tension—the tensional space—brought to the forefront of artistic discourse.

A revived art practice, theory, and criticism explores its concerns out into nature and techne and into the processes of the body, which then interpenetrate. As it attempts to grasp the hybrid subjects that we have now become (what Donna Haraway calls "potent fusions of the technical, textual, organic, mythic, and political" ), it recognizes the authorial others who collectively create our art, mapping the transactional matrices which uphold this work—which produce, circulate, value, and consume it. Spatialized and articulated in terms of transactional systems,
it impels one (perhaps with, as Laura Trippi posits, a "spatial drive") outward into our vast phenomenological and cultural workspace, in an attempt to grasp its dynamics and forge a new sense of positioning within. Such a renewed orientation, which aims to generate new possibilities for individual and collective action—social, cultural, and political—is, in this context, the objective of art. Alternate modes of identity and identification arise as we begin to chart this new landscape, restructuring ourselves through our technologies. Subject and object, the cognitive and the social, are linked as aspects of homologous processes, and one’s notion of selfhood is spatialized and expanded—prompting one to assume a responsibility for that which had previously been rejected as "not I."

Through what Todd Siler calls a "processmorphology" and its relational language of "metaphors"—forms of metaphor, analogy, allegory, trope, and symbolism—the phenomena and processes of this new landscape can be connected and communicated; and, as Donna Haraway suggests, Trinh T. Minh-ha’s term "inappropriated others," which means to be in "critical, deconstructive relationality—as the new metaphors of the societas that exceeds domination" can be used to provoke rethinking of social relationality.

To be inappropriate/d is not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors, not to be originally fixed by difference. Trinh is looking for a way to figure "difference" as a "critical difference within," and not as special taxonomic marks grounding difference as apartheid... Trinh T. Minh-ha’s metaphors suggest another geometry for considering the relations of differences among people and among humans, animals, and machines than hierarchical domination, incorporation of parts into wholes, paternalistic and colonialist protection, antagonistic opposition, or instrumental production from resource. But her metaphors also suggest the hard intellectual, cultural, and political work these new geometries will require... This interpenetration of difference requires one to incorporate conflicting viewpoints, and problematizes the notion of "opposition" which, as Donald Kuspit suggests, has already become an establishment in itself—a necessary, fixed component of the larger dialectic of the societas that exceeds domination and incorporates the opposition into the establishment, giving it strength, authority, and outreach. While "[o]pposition" was once desire in rebellion against the existing semiosis of art and society, it has become, after much repetition—and assimilation of all its repetitions—a standard semiosis...this dialectic has become a predetermined, fixed semiotic system." One is no longer led to adopt bullet-proof propositions and defend them against counterexamples, but to incorporate these counterexamples into one’s schema, reconfiguring the boundary conditions which divide the opposer from the opposed. Thus, one no longer assumes an oppositional stance but develops new transactional systems which undo this notion, spatialize and reconstitute it.

Notes


5. Francesc Torroja, exhibition notes from 'The Newsweek Series: An Act of Revenge in the Recording of This Week’s News' at The Bohem Foundation, New York, New York. Torroja's strategy consists of “choosing a subject matter and organizing the aesthetics of the piece around it, of aesthetically articulating an idea or intellectual concern that often has nothing to do with art. This dialectical process results in the organic emergence of the art.”

6. While we have always done this in one sense or another, always identified ourselves in terms of our products, always written ourselves in relation to them, what is particular to this situation is that we no longer consume only products, but a process of consumption, a process of transformation. It matters not to what or from what something is transformed, only that a movement from one to the other takes place. These poles themselves code to their process of definition: they are at the service of the movement, not the converse. This process opens up the space of perception, and is rich with potentiality.

7. Also of note are Dawkins’s theories of "memes," the "new replicators" analogous to the particulate gene, which "take up residence" in the brain and replicate through memes. See Richard Dawkins, The Extended Phenotype (Oxford University Press, 1982). Cf. the work of Daniel C. Dennett, below.


9. Matter exists in both wave and particle form, as a wave it is spread out, distributed throughout space, and as a particle it is concentrated in one point. While these forms are mutually exclusive, one must take both into account in order to understand phenomena.

10. ...the notion that one body can influence another instantaneously from an arbitrary distance despite there being no apparent exchange of force or energy...


15. According to Siler, "metaphorizing represents nature’s instrument for uniting things, thoughts, people, events, and environments." The "informents" described earlier represent the "energy-states" of metaphors. See Siler, 1993, pp. 5-6, 24.


primary impressions that emerge from the writing are the artist's emotions - ranging from terror and anxiety to rapture in the presence of nature. I was also struck by the harmony between Burchfield's writing and his drawings and paintings.

However, the journals are a fascinating record of a superobservant artist at work. The personal relationships outside of his family. He was a very private person who wrote his journals as notes to himself - certainly never intending them for publication.

Burchfield was a wonderful observer of natural phenomena, as is attested by his drawings and paintings and his journal entries:

Salem, September 15, 1913

Today's charm lies in to-night's moon. Moon to begin with was in the full. It was very bright and white. Closely clasping it was a small ring of pale yellow; a little further away was a slightly larger ring, which, tho very pale, rivaled a rainbow in color, of which there were many delicate elastic tints. Then far out, embracing a large portion of misty sky, was a larger ring, of pale white, so delicate it was almost invisible. Wind was strong and cool, and blew the darkness in a charming manner. Did the wind come thru those rings? Since it was so soft and whispery and charming that (sic) I believe it must have. And as each spasmodic puff came down, it sifted the moonlight to earth like sand.

Burchfield's life was relatively free of dramatic external events or influential personal relationships outside of his family. He was a very private person who wrote his journals as notes to himself - certainly never intending them for publication. J. Benjamin Townsend has edited the journals, arranging entries under such headings as "Dreams and Fantasies," "Love," "Professional Life," and "Life, Aging, and Death." I found myself wishing that the entries had just been arranged chronologically and not placed into these artificial and in many instances needlessly superficial categories. However, the journals are a fascinating record of a superbly observant artist at work. The primary impressions that emerge from the writing are the artist's emotions - ranging from terror and anxiety to rapture in the presence of nature. I was also struck by the harmony between Burchfield's writing and his drawings and paintings.

Salem, March 10, 1917

Bluebirds along the muddy road - singing of telegraph - a feeling that spring may come but it is not time & nature grows more & more evil & hideous - the dusk is so hideous it crushes; black haze — Strange clouds half seen in the starry sky; a cluster of stars to the north reminds of days when the Gods ruled on earth —

At times white flashes from the northern sky; once it glared brilliant pink over the sloppy road —

Woods in black haze, stars behind —

Nights on which a window open in a room yawns a frightful black; outside, black shapes gleam against a whitish horizon; a raindrop may rattle.

This passage echoes watercolors such as The East Wind, 1918, where threatening, ominous black clouds shaped like hands pour dagger-like rain onto a tottering, frightened little house.

While Burchfield at times seems like a relentless chronicler of the pastoral landscape, he also made minute, accurate, and moving observations about the crumbling industrial cityscape of Buffalo:

Gardenville, April 30, 1941

It is pleasant walking by the creek, in this abandoned waste territory... A strong wind out of the sun-white southwest, ruffled the surface of the water. The tiny rivulets belied out toward me, endlessly interlacing and parting, forming a complicated pattern of sky and earth reflections. The air was thick with the mingling of a thousand smokes from the chemical and steel plants to the west.

I found some old stalks of wild sunflower, that had alternately been bleached by the weather, and then coated with smoke & grime, until they were now a beautiful silvery gray (as if polished) in the high-lights, shading down to sooty black in the shadows. I made some studies of the water.

Burchfield's philosophy and the underlying power of his work are summed up in this entry:

Salem, September 21, 1916

Paint the feeling regardless of the drawing. At dusk there is an ominous feeling of something huge & black about to descend upon the earth; this should be painted, not sky or clouds etc —

John Heartfield: AIZ/VI 1930-1938

text by David Evans

Kent Fine Arts, New York, 1992, 523 pp., $45

Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942

Essays by Maud Lavin, Annette Michelson, Christopher Phillips, Sally Stein, Matthew Tieweihm, Margaretta Juddison

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA & The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1992, 208 pp., $24.95

John Heartfield, the German Dadaist, began experimenting with photomontage in 1915 or 1916. During the 1920s and 1930s Heartfield developed photomontage into a powerful tool for political satire. Kent Gallery has published an
outstanding, comprehensive catalogue of the photomontages Heartfield published in *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (renamed *Volks Illustrierte*) from 1930-1938. These works imaginatively and caustically expose the forces within Germany that resulted in the ascent of Hitler and fascism. Heartfield's montages always combined image and text. For this edition, David Evans has provided translations. In a striking photomontage from 1930, Heartfield has an image of a soldier whose head is artfully and totally swathed in newspapers. The text reads:

**WHOEVER READS BOURGEOIS NEWSPAPERS**

**BECOMES BLIND AND DEAF**

**AWAY WITH THE STULTIFYING BANDAGES!**

I am a cabbagehead. Do you know my leaves? From worries I am at my wit's end, but I keep quiet and hope for a savior, I want to be a black-red-gold cabbagehead! I don't want to see and hear anything, or to interfere with public affairs. And you can strip me right down to my shirt, but I'm not having any red press in my house!

Heartfield's images are powerful in their radical juxtapositions and uncertain in their elaborate combinations and distortions of photographs and their use of lighting and scale. The images are by turns, witty, poignant, terrifying, surprising, and horrifying — they are always supremely inventive. Heartfield mischievously inverted the hierarchy of power — by making a comic hybrid form that combines the forces of editorial cartoon, caricature, and photojournalism — while undermining photography's claims to represent the truth. Heartfield's work has been aptly described as a “furious lampoon that made laughter into a devastating weapon.”

The catalogue contains an illuminating essay by Evans, who comments that Heartfield used four satirical devices to convey his messages: metamorphosis, hybridizations, contrasts of high and low, large and small, and unmasking through a mixture of image and quotation. Evans also provides a detailed chronology and analysis of the development of Heartfield's photomontages. His essay includes a fascinating discussion of how Heartfield's art was derided and dismissed by orthodox Communists as an inappropriate technique for making revolutionary art.

Heartfield's images are powerful in their radical juxtapositions and uncertain in their elaborate combinations and distortions of photographs and their use of lighting and scale. The images are by turns, witty, poignant, terrifying, surprising, and horrifying — they are always supremely inventive. Heartfield mischievously inverted the hierarchy of power — by making a comic hybrid form that combines the forces of editorial cartoon, caricature, and photojournalism — while undermining photography's claims to represent the truth. Heartfield's work has been aptly described as a “furious lampoon that made laughter into a devastating weapon.”

The catalogue contains an illuminating essay by Evans, who comments that Heartfield used four satirical devices to convey his messages: metamorphosis, hybridizations, contrasts of high and low, large and small, and unmasking through a mixture of image and quotation. Evans also provides a detailed chronology and analysis of the development of Heartfield's photomontages. His essay includes a fascinating discussion of how Heartfield's art was derided and dismissed by orthodox Communists as an inappropriate technique for making revolutionary art.

As suggested in the catalogue for the exhibit *Montage and Modern Life*, montage sought not merely to represent the real but also to extend the idea of the real. Montage offers a kaleidoscopic expanded vision by collapsing many views into one. It offers an escape from the “limits” of the so-called straight photograph by dramatically repositioning and recombining various figures, objects, and spaces. The single image is replaced by a set of reassembled images that reflect a multifaceted complex reality.

**Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942** offers an overview of montage practice in both fine art and commercial art in Germany, the USSR, and the United States — in an attempt to suggest the complexity of relations between art, mass media, and everyday life. The catalogue essays focus on photographic and cinematic montage and provide a fully expanded historical and theoretical background for the work of Heartfield and other montage artists such as Hannah Hoch, Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, Gustav Klutsis, Charles Sheeler, and Berenice Abbott.

Montage served not only as an innovative artistic technique but also as a symbolic form, providing a shared visual idiom that reflected the arrival of a urbanized, industrialized, consumer-driven society. The German art historian Franz Roh in 1925 described montage as a precursory synthesis of the two most important tendencies in modern visual culture — extreme fantasy and extreme sobriety — or put another way, the pictorial techniques of modernist abstraction and realism of photographic fragments. The history of montage points to the need for new ways to represent our own culture of fragments.

What makes Heartfield's montages in particular so important is that he consistently uses the most sophisticated techniques of modernist juxtaposition, so often associated with a nonpolitical abstraction, for explicitly political ends. Heartfield's work is definitive proof that the most radical formal innovations of modernism can offer searingly anti-authoritarian social commentary without sacrificing any of the formal imagination of less politically focused modernist artworks.

In this way, Heartfield's work harks back to such political artists as Goya, Hogarth, and Daumier and looks forward to the politically charged art of our time. — Susan Bee

**BONNARD/MATISSE LETTERS BETWEEN FRIENDS**

*Introduction and notes by Antoine Terrasse,*

*Preface by Jean Clair, translated by Richard Howard,*

*Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1992, 144 pp., $19.95*

"Long live painting

In Friendship,

Matisses" — 1925

The correspondence between Pierre Bonnard and Henri Matisse begins with a haiku manifesto on the back of a postcard from Amsterdam expressing the two themes of this book—friendship and painting.

Much of art history is busy establishing artistic greatness as a condition of distinction from others. As artists, however, we crave the personal anecdotes that bring the lives and ideas of those that interest us closer. In this exquisite little volume, rarely do the exchanges center on painting. The manners and temperaments of these two men insist that first comes friendship and politesse. They are concerned with care for each other's health and family, with the frailty of eyesight, the difficulty in finding sufficient heating, the death of friends and relatives, and the vicissitudes of life during wartime. Bonnard's grand-nephew Antoine Terrasse provides an introduction that sketches in the history of their friendship and adds quotations about art from other sources.

The photographs, many by Cartier-Bresson, are another window into the actualities of their lives. Matisse envelops himself in an exotic paradise of objects in a fishing hat, jacket, and scarf, engulfed in solitude. Bonnard forges ahead spot
by spot of color, always, as it was said, with a brush in one hand and a rag in the
other. Desiring to create their own pictorial universe out of oil paint, Bonnard and
Matisse share a belief in the preeminence of the painted surface through the decora-
tive organization of color. Terrasse quotes Bonnard from his journal in 1939: "People
always speak of submission to nature. There is also submission to the picture."

The artists met around the turn of the century. Born in 1867, Bonnard was
only two years older than Matisse, but they were historically separated by the tem-
pons of their individual development. Bonnard, the precocious Nabi, was called "le
Japonard" because of his enthusiasm for Japanese prints. At the age of twenty-two, he
influenced Lautrec, with his lithographic posters for "France Champagne." At
the age of twenty Matisse had only just received a paintbox of watercolors from his
mother to help him recover from his chronic appendicitis. By 1909 they were both
exhibiting at Bernheim-Jeune Gallery. They had showed also with Vollard, though
Matisse never became intimate with him as did Bonnard, who joined Alfred Jarry
among others for banquets held in Vollard's vaulted basement which might easily
end in violent debate punctuated by pistol fire. In 1911, Matisse bought Le novicié
au salon (1907), by Bonnard for 1200 francs, which he kept for the rest of his life,
as Bonnard kept a painting of Matisse's La fin dure ouverte (1911) for all of his.

Until the 1920s they saw each other regularly so that their correspondence is
infrequent, mostly on the order of postcards which Matisse sends to Bonnard from
his travels in America or Tahiti. Color is often a thread between the two artists.
Matisse from Tahiti on June 6, 1930 describes a "coral isle": pure light, pure air,
pure color; diamond sapphire emerald turquoise...." In 1933 Bonnard writes to
Matisse to congratulate him on the successful installation of the Barres murals:
"Really, painting is 'something' only provided one gives oneself up to it entirely. I
think we understand each other on this point."

Matisse feverish with flu on Jan. 28, 1935 had been making painting notes to
his friend and tearing them up because unlike conversation which is an easily flow-
ning process, putting ideas on paper immediately invokes their opposite for him and
his generalizations about art are quickly proved wrong. "In truth, a painter exists with
a palette in his hand and he does what he can. But let me tell you anyway, like all
the old men, that theory is something rather sterilizing or impoverishing." In the
same month, Bonnard responds with the highest possible acknowledgement of his
friend: "When I think of you, I think of a mind cleansed of every old aesthetic con-
vention, and it is that alone that permits a direct view of nature, the greatest joy
that can befall a painter."

This reaches Matisse who is "utterly beaten down, totally discouraged."
Though he admits Bonnard's evaluation is much in harmony with his own desires,
he complains about a schism between drawing and painting occurring in his work
and I think, looks fondly at the less programmatic working methods of Bonnard.

My drawing suits me because it renders what I specifically feel. But my paint-
ing is hampered by the new conventions of flat areas of color, which I must
use exclusively to express myself, with local tones only, no shadows or sur-
face relief that might react on each other to suggest light and spiritual space.
That hardly suits my spontaneity, which makes me discard a time-consuming
work in a minute because I reconceive my picture several times as it's being
painted without really knowing where I am going, relying on my instinct. I've

found a way of drawing that, after preparatory work, has a spontaneity that
releases just what I feel, but this method is exclusively for me, as artist and as
viewer. A colorist's drawing is not a painting. One must produce an equivalent
in color. And that's what I'm not managing to do.

There is something that the artists look for in each other's work. Three
weeks later it is Bonnard who says, "I fully intend to come see you in Nice. I very
much need to see another kind of painting besides my own." Later in September of
1940, it is Matisse who needs the change. "I believe that a visit to you would do me
the greatest good. Certainly the sight of your paintings would lighten the wall in
front of my nose right now and make me take things—my work above all—in a
simpler more direct way."

One of the last letters is from Bonnard in May 1946. He had borrowed two
canvas from Matisse, including L'isoie (1946), a painting that was sold off the
walls of the Museum of Modern Art's recent Matisse exhibition. "Your two pictures
decorate (that's my word) my dining room, against an ochre background that
becomes them. Especially the woman with the necklace—the red there is wonde-
rous late in the afternoon. By day it is the blue that takes the lead. What an intense
life the colors have, and how they vary with the light! I make discoveries every day,
and I have you to thank for this pleasure and instruction."

Bonnard reads this bold, graphic, 1940s Matisse as one might read a painting
by Bonnard with a gradual procession through its color orchestrations. At the end
of February, Bonnard has written, "My work is going pretty well, especially in
the direction of understanding. During my morning walks I amuse myself by defining
different conceptions of landscape—landscape as 'space,' intimate landscape,
decorative landscape, etc. But as for vision, I see things differently every day, the sky,
objects, everything changes continually, you can drown in it. But that's what brings
life."

These quotations are like a painter's poetry. We see the same space differ-
ently everyday—feel how the light strikes our eyes. Taking his daily promenade
Bonnard jots down a few notes in his pocket calendar, a quick scribble drawing,
and perhaps a weather notation—"rainy." Back in his rooms he develops his draw-
ing in oil paint on canvas. It is what he described in his journal as: "the adventures
of the optic nerve."

Bonnard's aspirations are clear in a brief aside in an otherwise prosaic letter.
On November 6, 1940, Bonnard writes thanking Matisse for some canvas he has
received. He wants to settle the debt, relays the latest war gossip of the south,
weather notes, news of mutual friends, and closes with: "My work is not going too
badly, and I dream of seeking the absolute." The friendship that we track in these
letters is a delightful surprise. We come into it searching for their thoughts and
ideas about art, yet must stop and reconsider their essential humanity. The bond
that these two men share is as affecting as their commitment to painting.

—Steven O'Leary Harvey
"WHOSE IDEA IS IT? AND WHO CARES?"
by Sheila Butler, Madeline Lennon and Alice Mansell,
42 pages; with accompanying videotape, 30 minutes; video work by A. Mauds; both produced with a grant from the Canada Council.

Three women stand in a kitchen making a meal, casual, unstaged, in rambling conversation. The same three women stand around in a studio, looking at paintings made by one of them, paintings which treat the history of women as artists and images. They talk. About the problems. About the images and frames. About the contemporary associations. About themselves. Watching themselves in a mirror they discuss the painting of faces and body as image—their own bodies and fashion bodies. Finally, they sit around a coffee table, looking at art history books, discussing their teaching, their relations to authority, their relations to power.

This is the stuff of real life. Not scripted or narrative or turned into the polished rhetoric of art performance or critical discourse. This short tape (and the excerpt from it transcribed in the accompanying pamphlet) reveals instead the processes by which we continually arrive at, reinforce, backtrack, rethink, and solidify our positions as women artists, teachers, critics through exchange. The levels of exchange are manifold: between self and tradition, between personal practice and art history, between art making and pedagogy, between commodity culture and daily life, between critical theory and painterly activity. The tape has a blunt, flatfooted quality that refuses any attempt at glamour, it is floppy, almost clumsy. As viewers we are positioned like a receptive television set, sitting by and watching as the conversation unfolds; gets cut, hops forward, and starts up again. This complete refusal of even the tropes of documentary etiquette return us to the matter under discussion, the images of the three women standing, sitting, moving around in normal but slightly self-conscious manner.

On one level everything in this tape is utterly unremarkable—how many conversations have we all had like this—with pauses, repeats, hanging phrases, and earnest assertions? The remarkable thing is that this has been recorded and presented not just as a work, but as a work addressing the very central issue of authorship, as the processes by which we continually arrive to, reinforce, backtrack, rethink, and solidify our positions as women artists, teachers, critics through exchange. The levels of exchange are manifold: between self and tradition, between personal practice and art history, between art making and pedagogy, between commodity culture and daily life, between critical theory and painterly activity. The tape has a blunt, flatfooted quality that refuses any attempt at glamour, it is floppy, almost clumsy. As viewers we are positioned like a receptive television set, sitting by and watching as the conversation unfolds; gets cut, hops forward, and starts up again. This complete refusal of even the tropes of documentary etiquette return us to the matter under discussion, the images of the three women standing, sitting, moving around in normal but slightly self-conscious manner.

As with any conversation, this one issued forth in a conversation linking the processes of art making with the ongoing experience of women's actual lives in a contrast between the messiness of working (and life) and the neatness of theory with its overarching generalities.

The central section, the main meal of the tape (we see food preparation before this section and the tail ends of a shared repast at its end), takes place in Mansell's studio in front of the large canvases which comprised her show, Cultured Identities. The paintings in this exhibition each borrowed stylistically from some master painter—deKooning, Warhol, Ingres—so that mode and imagery were reworked into a feminist critique of both art making and art's objectifying operations. The pleasures of paint, of fetishizing, of pasting on seashells gilded with spray paint, soft velvet frames, and pastry decoration geegaws all abound in images so large they lean against the wall of the studio like doorways, offering full-scale entry into a new position vis-à-vis the western tradition. These hybrid works form the basis of an exchange in which Lennon and Butler (also a painter) talk through their own associations (Butler: that Ingres' works are cracked, not the ideal object and perfect image which his cut and paste parts of models together had aspired to achieve; Lennon: the surface pulls you in, way in—her hands stroking the air in appreciative gesture; Mansell: all those pink, peach flesh tones in deKooning, and yet, he was considered so virile, so masculine as a painter). Their comments move through a kind of conversational process of free-association moving from critical discussion of images of women back to a point of personal reference. What considerations are fostered by this history which return to attention the self as image, one's own self? What happens to these critical discussions when the body is one's own body: What about the fact that the pop body seems most viable when (and because?) it is actually no one's body? Is putting on makeup a form of painting—something the women do before or after the painting of real bodies? These themes weave back and forth in a conversation linking the processes of art making with the ongoing experience of women's actual lives in a contrast between the messiness of working (and life) and the neatness of theory with its overarching generalities and resistance to particular.
tons that begin to look rather persuasive even for those—and I am among them—inclined to retain at least a functional component in a mixed definition. But not quite persuasive enough. It might be better to say that modernism is the era of just this contention among definitions, but that the question remains essentially undecided. This is why Davies himself can cite, as evidence for his view, “much of the art (so-called) of the present era.” Davies has the right to that parenthetical phrase, which registers a certain skepticism about the art status of much that has been so designated by qualified agents of the art world, precisely because there exist objects whose status as artworks remains essentially dubious. Indeed, sometimes this ambiguity or ambivalence is just what makes these objects interesting enough to count as art. This is where the Anglo-American approach to philosophy typically breaks down: it’s just too level-headed to accept as much paradox as the world of art can generate. One might say that art, at least in the century of the perpetual crisis of the art object, is the terrain upon which criticism, surprisingly, turns more deeply philosophical than philosophy itself, because it is only criticism that finds itself faced repeatedly with the questions, What is the art status of this object? Is it a status I am merely willing to concede, or a status I am compelled to claim for the object? In the face of the temptation to imagine that criticism ought to be grounded in aesthetics, as the specific is grounded in the abstract, this book reminded me—rather at cross-purposes to its own intention—that, to the contrary, criticism’s engagement with the question of the art object is the only basis for a genuine aesthetics. —Barry Schwabsky

ON INNOVATIVE ART (1ST) SY: RECOLLECTIONS OF AN EXPANDING FIELD
by Richard Kostelanetz
McFarland, Jefferson, North Carolina, 1992, $38

Richard Kostelanetz has an attitude that is very much of the 1960s. This does not necessarily imply a value judgment about the quality of his books — either in his content or his writing. This is a certain dilemma and curiosity about his attitude. He is clearly not an advocate of anything postmodern or anything connected to recent French theory; that is, poststructuralism or deconstruction. Even his views of feminism seem closer to the 60s than the 50s, although this is a perennial issue, perhaps even a problem, as inadvertently revealed in one of his essays from 1979 called “The Opiate of the Artist.” The fact is that Kostelanetz is a terrific writer about art and artists, a writer who loves writing. His ideas contain a certain passion that is ineluctable. The content of his writing nearly verges on the anecdotal, particularly when he writes short monographic pieces. The current anthology of his own collected writings is full of anecdotes, some quite wonderful (Cage, Moholy-Nagy, Taei, Cunningham, and other minor artists). Yet Kostelanetz is more than a chronicler. His writing has force and a desire to evoke the structural basis of why and how art happens, what

DEFINITIONS OF ART
by Stephen Davies

In addition to an excerpt from this tape which focuses on the part of the above conversation which is most concerned with art history and representations of women, the accompanying pamphlet includes a long essay by Sheila Butler, “A Commentary on Lucie Irigaray’s ‘...And If, Taking the Eye of a Man Recently Dead...’ as it Relates to Linear Perspective,” and a brief closing essay by Madeline Lennox, “Struggles with Authority.” —Johanna Drucker
it means. He is not a cynical writer. He is a supportive writer — that is, supportive of artists. However, he attacks critics and granting institutions with a vengeance.

The structure of *On Innovative Art* (1967) is tripartite; that is, it is divided into three sections: Part I: Histories; Part II: Individuals; and Part III: Positions. One of the most valuable contributions — perhaps, the central theme or focus of the book — is what Kostelanetz has defined as “polyartistry.” The term seems a bit awkward — too pop-oriented, and resounds in a way that is strangely at odds with the author’s more serious perspective on culture and art. Yet the concept is good. It is more than good — it is important.

The quintessential polyartist, for Kostelanetz, is the Hungarian-born Bauhaus artist Moholy-Nagy. There are at least six essays in this collection devoted to this artist, including the important introduction he wrote to his edition of Moholy’s own writing over twenty years ago, entitled: “The Risk and Necessity of Artistic Adventurism.” In a more recent essay on Moholy, “The Truest Polyartist,” he regrets that he had not yet invented the term. Essentially, the polyartist is an artist who does more than one thing, who functions independently of style, and who deserves conceptual clarity and the communication of ideas through a chosen medium. In the case of Moholy, he was not only a painter, but also a designer, photographer, filmmaker, typographer, architect, theorist, writer, and teacher. For Kostelanetz, the fact that Moholy practiced each of these disciplines should not be held against him in that, in many instances, he achieved not only excellence, but also inventiveness and originality. Kostelanetz is quick to point out that Moholy influenced numerous other artists and designers and is too often given short shrift. It is important, according to Kostelanetz, that each medium be understood clearly in terms of what that particular medium is about. It is here that the author clearly betrays his Modernist roots.

In his exceptional essay, “Two Ways of Polyartistry”—in which he discusses the careers of Moholy and that of the late American composer John Cage—Kostelanetz goes on to define how polyartistry is a practice not reserved for adjacent art forms. That is, painting and sculpture are natural extensions of one another, but painting and writing are not. One can argue this point, but it is important to keep in mind that artist-writers have usually been held suspect—that one should paint and shut up; whereas painters who ventured off into making an occasional sculpture or even a series of three-dimensional works are not judged in the same way.

Kostelanetz is the champion of the artist who can articulate a position. He is the champion of the intellectual artist in a relatively non-intellectual artistic climate. Kostelanetz is a practicing polyartist himself. He makes videos, films, visual poems, artists’ books, paintings, writings, criticism, and anthologizes collections, and lectures (about his own work and others). This is also discussed in the current collection — most extensively in his “Art Autobiography.”

Frankly, he is at his best when he is writing about other artists who he really cares about in terms of their ideas. This is not a criticism of Kostelanetz the artist, it is merely to suggest that art and writing can go together, but there is also the factor of aesthetic distance. As Greenberg and others would probably agree, aesthetic distance is something one has to work at. It is not a given. Being a polyartist is fine — and Kostelanetz argues his point well — but the substance of the medium is quite something else. This is the challenge in making form that truly incites content.

**ART AND OTHERNESS; CRISIS IN CULTURAL IDENTITY**
by Thomas McEvilley
*Documenta, 1992, Kingston, New York, S20*

Thomas McEvilley’s second collection of essays, published one year after the first, continues to explore many of the issues raised in *Art and Discontent*. These issues include his blatant attack on Modernism as a form of monolithic criterion, his questioning of the Hegelian notion of historical determinism, the advocacy of a multi-cultural position in art appreciation, and his concerns about the exclusionary aspects of major art historical surveys.

The essay, “Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief,” originally published in *Artforum*, was a response to the infamous 1984 exhibition, “Primitivism” in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, organized by William Rubin, then Director of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art. One reason why this exhibition became “infamous” was partially due to McEvilley’s essay and his ensuing dialogues with Rubin in the pages of *Artforum*. In retrospect, it is disappointing that the entire series of exchanges by McEvilley and Rubin—including a brief intervention by Kirk Varnedoe—was not printed in its entirety. While McEvilley’s general point is clearly well-taken in regards to the decontextualization of tribal art by Modernism, the original dialogue in relation to Rubin’s defense of the exhibition was riveting and ultimately more significant. It is difficult to disagree with McEvilley’s points within the context in which they are stated, but it is even more fascinating to see how Rubin interprets what McEvilley has to say in relation to his own interpretation of Modernism and to the role of the museum. The way it stands in the current book, we are simply given a fragment of the discussion more as a platform by which to set the stage for the proselytizing of McEvilley’s multi-cultural position.

The issue of multi-culturalism, as presented here by McEvilley, is not without problems. Given the fact that his original *Artforum* essays played an important role in instigating the important *Les Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou’s Musee national d’art in 1980, one cannot deny the good intentions of the author’s premise that too much art has been excluded from the history of the West; thus, it is time to change or to choose, and thereby, to seek “otherness” in relation to our own aesthetic discourse — namely, the patronizing discourse of the West. The problems arise when McEvilley’s tries to define the goal and the purpose of what he wants to achieve, especially in terms of quality.

According to McEvilley:

A post-Modern exhibition strategy begins with the realization that categories and criteria have no innate validity — only the validity that is projected upon them — and thus that their transgression can be an opening to freedom. In terms of the culture of the exhibition, this means that humans can exhibit anything whatever to one another for whatever reasons.

McEvilley emphatically argues against aesthetic absolutism, as presumably championed throughout the history of Modernism, and advocates relativism in its place. In this sense, he sees post-Modernism as a necessary rupture with the recent past — necessary insofar as it usurps the hierarchy of white middle-class taste.
Where Modernism was absolutistic, post-Modernism might be relativistic. Where Modernism was based on hierarchies, post-Modernism might work to level hierarchies and see what is left that can serve as a direction. Where Modernism was universalist in its championing of a certain idea of quality, post-Modernism might recognize the appropriateness of different ideas of quality to different cultural situations.

Again, it is difficult to disagree with McEvilley’s politicized claim against the dictatorship of Modernism as a centralized, patrimonial force in establishing global standards of taste. In a sense, McEvilley is arguing for a greater flexibility in the use of criteria, rather than a monolithic, overarching criterion—but he never says it, at least, he never says it quite that way. Rather, he leaves the purpose for making art and mounting exhibitions in a somewhat nebulous zone, implying that critics should suddenly function bereft of any qualitative standard and become like chameleons who are capable of absorbing various cultural affectations that will, in turn, be secreted back into the global village.

It is also disturbing that McEvilley sees the current interest in multi-culturalism as having been paved by way of the appropriation strategies of the 80s, suggesting that the emphasis on culling objects and images from post-Modern culture was somehow connected to the more recent receptivity (in some cases, genuine sensitivity) toward art by peoples outside of the West. It would seem that what this strategy really suggests is that the same old colonialism is taking place in another guise—that now we can engage ourselves with the arts and crafts of peoples living in distant lands as if we were all a part of one big feast amid the Simulacra. The "otherness" becomes a necessity by which to escape the painful, and somewhat arduous cul-de-sac of late Modernism or, perhaps advanced capitalism.

Could it be that multi-culturalism is to advanced capitalism what Romanticism was to the Industrial Revolution—a necessary escape valve? Without coming to terms with the risk of establishing a criteria of some sort, the task of criticism is left without a rudder—the identical problem of imposing identity on a faltering culture, beset with TV and the focal of electronic shopping. This is the moment when "good taste" is the only possibility because the hard work of really learning about other cultures is left in the lurch. If McEvilley really wants to save multi-culturalism from the predictable, trendiness of "multi-culti", the hard work of risking standards of criteria are the next important step.

—Robert C. Morgan

CONTRIBUTORS

STEWART RUTTNER teaches art history at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. His articles have appeared in many art journals. He is the author of American Art Theory: 1945-1970.

DARYL CHIN is an artist and independent curator who has always lived in New York City.

JORDAN CRANDALL is an artist and member of The X-Art Foundation.

JOHANNA DRUCKER is a writer who lives in New York City and teaches contemporary art and critical theory at Columbia University. OTHERSPACE: Martian Typography, a collaboration with Brad Freeman, was recently published by Nexus Press and The Visible Appearance of the Word is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.

STEVEN O'LEARY HARVEY is a painter, musician, curator, and director of Soho 20 Gallery. He exhibits at Gallery Schlesinger, NYC.

JO ANNA ISAAK teaches art history at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York and is currently working on a book on feminist issues in contemporary art.

CURTIS MITCHELL is an artist living in New York.

ROBERT C. MORGAN's book, Commentaries on the New Media Arts, was recently published by Umbrella Associates, and his new book, After the Deluge: Essays on the Art of the Nineties (Red Bass Publications) is scheduled to appear in May 1993. He is a Visiting Professor of Art at Pratt Institute and lectures regularly at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

DAVID REED is a painter living in New York. He shows at Max Protetch Gallery in NYC, Galerie Rolf Rieck in Cologne, and Asher/Flak Gallery in Los Angeles.

BARRY SCHWARTSKY, the former editor of Arts magazine, is a poet who currently writes on art for Artforum, Sculpture, Tema Celeste, and others.
Subscribe to M/E/A/N/I/N/G!

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2 ISSUES (1 YEAR):
$12 for individuals; $20 for institutions
4 ISSUES (2 YEARS):
$24 for individuals; $40 for institutions

Foreign subscribers please add $10 per year for shipping; $5 per year for Canada

Limited supplies of back issues available at $6 each.
Contact Mira Schor for information.

All checks should be made payable to Mira Schor.

Send all subscriptions to:
Mira Schor
60 Lispenard Street
New York, NY 10013

Name ____________________________
Address ___________________________
City/State/Zip _______________________
Please start with issue #: ____________
M/E/A/N/I/N/G #13

Susan Bee
Stewart Buettner
Daryl Chin
Jordan Crandall
Johanna Drucker
Steven O'Leary Harvey
Jo Anna Isaak
Curtis Mitchell
Robert C. Morgan
David Reed
Mira Schor
Barry Schwabsky

$6