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We asked a diverse group of artists and critics for their responses to the following questions:

Do you feel that contemporary art discourse has neglected or repressed any art issues, aesthetic, political issues, ways of working, or specific bodies of work of particular concern to you? What are the visual art works and/or ideas that compel your interest and that you feel should be attended to now?

Emma Amos

Contemporary art discourse does not KNOW or RECOGNIZE half of what my eyes see. With few exceptions its concerns are for the money, fame, power, and publicity value of a few pale and trousered individuals. KNOWING — meaning education, and RECOGNIZING — meaning editorial and curatorial scholarship are powerfully lacking. When an ordering of all the serious art is needed — how the work was made, by whom and why — by a real non-stereotyping, unbiased, non-gender-based art history, how strange will seem many of the books, catalogues, articles, and other writings of the past few decades.

Living in New York City and regularly reading about, communicating with, and traveling to see friends and exhibitions on the North, East, and West Coasts, and in the Middle West, South West, and my ex-home in the South, I try to keep in touch with the art and artists of a world that is far different from what I read about in the slick art magazines or newspaper reviews.

My particular interests are in the work of artists who live without the gain and fame for which careerism grooms many of us. As an African American artist I know first-hand the numbers of exciting works that do not get their share of viewing or critical writing. I work on Heresies magazine, with its amazing outpouring of art, photography, poetry, essays, and fiction by women all over the country. I show with Coast to Coast, the "Women of Color National Artist's Project," put together by Faith Ringgold and Clarissa Sleigh, among others. I have seen the impact of the traveling show "Autobiography, In Her Own Image," which includes art by Vivian Browne, Margo Machida, Kay Walking Stick, Marina Gutierrez, Adrian Piper, Asiba Tupahache, and others, curated by Howardena Pindell. "Beyond Survival," a show of multi-ethnic women artists curated by Sandra Langer.
at the NY Feminist Art Institute and the soon-to-travel "100 Drawings by Women," curated by Judith Collischan Van Wagner of Long Island University promise to focus and explore in a similar fashion.

It is possible for critics, curators, and art historians to find cores of art activity to study and write about that far surpass the tiresome search for "the new." It's "The New" that now cynically repackages (appropriate old art and commercial icons with a smirk. "If You Lived Here," curated by Martha Rosler at the DIA Art Foundation, shows the work of many artists who are concerned with the problems of homelessness, real estate, and greed. The Bronx Museum, Jersey City Museum, Newark Museum, and Studio Museum of Harlem regularly support curators who explore and take chances. I applaud the scholarship and sleuthing of Tom Finklepearl and curators for turning up the incredible South Carolina "Outsider" artists at The Clocktower in 1988. The Spring 1989 INTAR Gallery show, "Another Face of the Diamond: Pathways Through the Black Atlantic South," introduced art that was reviewed by John Perreault in the Village Voice as containing "the spiritual center of artmaking." I felt the same joy when I viewed the marvelous slide collection complete with lists of American women artists of color compiled by Moira Roth and associates at Mills College, California.

The work of Asian, African, and Native American artists thrives and survives despite a lack of knowing and recognizing. The work of artists in other parts of the country survives similarly. I believe that it is important for us to know these artists because we live in an open society, not a province of tradition and stolen statues, or a vast desert. We live in a nation with few internal barriers except for racism, sexism, and major-art-centerism. If the discourse will open up to include what I know is out there (and the "more" that I don't know yet) we would all gain. At the least, artists would be bolstered by the example of the many who survive using the magical compulsion to WORK, without the goal of fame or gain.

Cay Bahnmiller

Keeps me working, the transparent spring of the aspodels, the lineage of German philosophical investigation. From the Eleatics, in that lean to with linden walls. Mute prairie. When Gadamer gets to the part of Hegel's dialectical inversion, that is how my city begins. Confirmation through striation, define fleur de lis. The biography of Nature replete, I cast iron at my still salt. Mt. Fuji and below there are canoes, ponderous pine. The Dutch house and its Argentine memory. Swan dive in Dresden. That first reading of Doe Passos, constellations cradle azalea fall into the dark in the Georg Lake, so much talk about what's for supper. That gets me to the calico joke and she-wolf roman bronze upturned. Just about everything Emerson, how the unintentional becomes. Dickinson's cabinetry filled up. As if corral was discourse, great blue heron dream, broken beach. Cather.

"The New" has been much maligned and the concept is often executed in a tedious manner. Many artists handle materials in old-fashioned ways, expressing familiar emotions. Those with a more challenging attitude take unpredictable risks and push toward an original vision. Touch can mean a vestige of bodily contact with the work or an immediate physical reflection of the making. No longer simply a device for manipulating expression, it can be an integral part of the individual vocabulary.

Work does surface that embodies this interpretation of the term, even when contrary to current discourse. The issue is frequently affected by historical precedent. Minimalism was taken in a divergent direction by the process-oriented artists. Eva Hesse had an extraordinary sense of touch in even her most austere pieces. She was connected to the procedure of making in a way that was unashamed and direct. The few recent exhibitions of Hesse's sculpture show how relevant her work is today. Bill Barrette (an artist and former assistant) has put together a handsome catalogue raisonne offering new insight into her intentions and methods. Work in several younger artists' studios reflects her strong influence but is slow to be shown. Would things have evolved differently if Hesse had lived and continued to work?

It is an especially promising time for sculpture, boundaries are expanding. For instance, Martin Puryear's best work is handmade and primal yet strikingly inventive. He has only recently gotten the attention he deserves. The emergence in this country of work by British sculptors such as Richard Deacon and Alison Wilding shows an obsession with production. Touch can be demonstrated by something as industrial as rivets used excessively. In their forceful sculpture, all that riveting seems to support a labor-intensive statement about our overbuilt world. Technology can be resisted and embraced to maintain a dialogue with human experience. Physical contact and technology are not mutually exclusive. Certain approaches thrive on the interaction between the two. There is a clear opening now for more work which reinterprets touch and making as aspects of content.

Lillian Ball

Recently, I find myself searching for more evidence of the artist's hand/body when looking at art. Touch is one of the last remnants of the human, as opposed to the technological, still available for development in contemporary art. Unfortunately the term "touch" has been much maligned and the concept is often executed in a traditional manner. Many artists handle materials in old-fashioned ways, expressing familiar emotions. Those with a more challenging attitude take unpredictable risks and push toward an original vision. Touch can mean a vestige of bodily contact with the work or an immediate physical reflection of the making. No longer simply a device for manipulating expression, it can be an integral part of the individual vocabulary.

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Susan Bee

NO PRESSURE

You'll pardon all the questions, sir. Ask and listen, listen and ask.

That's all we've got to work with. — Columbo

What is political and what is not? What is hidden and what revealed? What is lost and what is found? What is covered and what is revealed? What is visible and what is invisible? What is cherished and what is reviled? What has value and what has none?
Self vs Other; In vs Out; Marginal vs Mainstream; Surface vs Depth; Virtue vs Power; Pleasure vs Profit; Old vs New.

Is it transparent or is it opaque? Is it artificial or is it natural? Is it abstract or is it real? What will lead and what will follow? Is it a construct? Will it be built? Is it arbitrary or is it authority? Is it obscure or is it crystal clear? Is it false or is it true? Is it open or is it closed? A question of authenticity: mine or yours.

Nancy Bowen

Excerpt from a letter from Rome

I am annoyed by this holier-than-thou attitude of the "social constructivists" (how's that for a new term) (we can be "biological deconstructivists" or "deconstructed biologists"). I must say it's great to be out of the fray, to be in a country where the word "artisanal" isn't greeted with haughty raised eyebrows. Last week I saw the Ludovisi Throne (Museo Nationale Romana): Aphrodite being raised out of the sea by two nymphs. Sublime. For centuries now, we have been grappling with basic issues of the spirit and of the body in a way which reflected the culture's visual sophistication (or lack thereof). We are born of matter, we move in spirit, it seems so utterly natural and logical to continue the discussion in clay, in paint. The urge which prompted some ancient Greek to carve a statue of Aphrodite is still with us. Or better, to make a monument of mud, a tomb underground. It's part of the same chain. You can't convince me that any amount of theory will eradi­cate those urges, or prove to be their better in the long run.

Arthur C. Danto

I have scratched my head over your question, and in the end come to the view that I can think of nothing that fits the bill: everything is noticed. Perhaps some things more than they should be, and some less, but in the end attention is paid.

Robert Feintuch

But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting point for speech... then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. — Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas"

A great deal of recent critical writing about painting employs theories of meaning that give precedence to language as a model. European writers, using a semiotic approach to paintings, have created a discourse about the interde­pendence of culture and meaning that has cast new light on painting in general.

Several of these writers acknowledge that in the relationship between lan­guage and painting, language is inadequate (Kristeva) or unequal­vated (Foucault). As a result their writing on paintings is polemical but subtle, often ambiguous, and disinterested in being right, if being right entails consistency or a unified viewpoint.

As these polemical, nuanced, speculative, and often anti-authoritarian arguments find their way into the magazines they get reduced. It is probably a re­sult of the demands of the marketplace that as these arguments disseminate, they gel, get mastered, become a way of mastering, and often end up being applied in an ideological fashion. I'm using the world ideological for its implication of doctrine here, and also when I say that it seems to me what we believe now is that by applying ideologies to paintings, we expose the ideology hidden in paintings, which mirrors that hidden in the world. Artists and writers alike have put on binoc­ulars to obtain the distance from the experience and ambiguity of lived life that is necessary in order to be ideologically correct when examining the lens of culture through which we look at painting. If we manage to see ourselves in the mirror at all, we see ourselves from a great distance, and if thought resides in the head from the neck up.

I am interested in this idea of the painting as mirror, but I can't help but wonder what of the reflection is obscured by all this distance? What needs of ours are served by seeing culture as a barrier between us and our own reflections? Does the mastery ideology allows accurately reflect our experience of the world? Do paintings really mirror discourse? What happens then (as even the youngest among us have probably seen) when discourses fall away?

Paintings, in their physicality, are more ambiguous than language. What does the ambiguity of physicality allow? Ideology's second definition — "the theory that all ideas arise from sensations" — might be useful here, giving us a way to respond equally to the intellectual and the sensuous presence of painting. For surely in their physical presence, facing us, paintings address the body as well as the head; the fluid interplay between sensation, thought and emotion.

Recent neurophysiological research has located a process in the brain of mapping and remapping that makes it clear that memory and perception, though formed in society, are fluid and rooted in experience. Memory and perception are categorizations and recategorizations that occur in response to sensation and motion. Ideology, with its dependence on language and its fixed categorizations, dis­allows a wide range of experience because that experience doesn't fit easily into language. What about sensation? What about the pleasure and disappointment of
sensation? What about the erotic pleasures paintings offer? What about emotion? Do emotions have sensations? Do thoughts have emotions? Do thoughts have sensations? What about the ambiguous interactions of sensations, thoughts, and emotions? When painting offers us the chance to respond fully to the fluid, ambiguous experiences of sensation, thought and emotion doesn’t it offer us a more complex, fuller image of ourselves?

Sharon Gold

I have always been interested in the relationship between a work of art and its beholder; what is intended to be understood and what is finally experienced. (The beholder is anyone other than myself.) Perhaps the most commonly shared expectation, even cliche, is that a work of art should provide aesthetic pleasure, a notion which developed in the 18th century and was defined by that century’s ideals and standards. While most art historians, theorists, and artists would not agree on a single definition of 18th-century aesthetic pleasure, it continues to be (perhaps unconsciously) an essential ingredient in a work of art. This lack of agreement developed further as a result of the shift to the modernist notion that a work of art is the product of the artist’s consciousness and therefore, an independent object-in-the-world. Many artists moved away from the convention of creating works of art as pleasure-providers to this other, more private, self-absorbed agenda. But we can now see, this too becomes a form of aesthetic pleasure, but one that differs from the 18th-century models. Since the artist’s and beholder’s experiences and expectations are not based on commonality, what then is possible in the experiencing of beholding? The separate interests of the artist and beholder call into question the basis of intentionality.

Until recently I held the view that artistic intention must be understood for a work of art to be truly experienced and successful. Perhaps the conclusion I must come to is that intent as a value and consequence of the artist’s direct experiences (incorporated into a work of art) is not knowable, or even interesting as an aspect of beholding a work of art. From the beholder’s point of view, it is not possible to know intent because of the discrepancy of expectations. From my point of view, misinterpretation is inevitable unless the beholder divests his/her ego for that of the artist’s. Consequently, intent should not be the myopic insistence or expectation of the artist to dominate the beholder.

I continue to consider intent to be of profound significance, but as a private agenda of the artist. It is perhaps a given, that in the process of experiencing or beholding a work of art intent will be misinterpreted. This may be a more propitious paradigm for the transference of meaning and experience to the beholder, particularly if one characterizes misinterpretation as something other than the failure of “getting” the pictorial message. I do not see the embracing of intentional fallacy as an apology; but as a way of transferring the meaning of a work of art to the beholder.

This has therefore become a salient point in my work, that of addressing the schism between a beholder’s expectation and direct experience. My work addresses the associations (existential experience) which the beholder brings to the work rather than set them aside. In fact, the images I use purposefully inculcate those associations without specifically bringing a narrative to my paintings. My work “exists” in the world, not as a historical retreat or decorative surface, but as a reflection of the beholder and beheld. If any “personal symbols” exist, they are perceived anew with each work and each viewer. However, I am not interested in disenfranchising my work from art history or common images. It exists within the contemporary moment, the result of my questioning and private intent, and as a reflection of the beholder’s self-imaging and world-view.

Dan Graham

The issue of art and design, especially works in this area from the ’60s by Pop artists are never taken into account. Specific examples are Warhol’s silver pillows and his book designs and his ‘cow’ wallpaper; Chamberlain’s raw foam rubber couches and in particular, those couches he designed for exhibitions which combined TV monitors with the furniture. Included in this category are exhibition designs by artists, for instance Judith Barry and Ken Sayler’s design for the “McLaren” exhibition at the New Museum, my “Design for a Space Showing Video-tapes” and my design for a Lole Fuller pavilion. The issue of artist’s design of private, domestic, or corporate space is present in the work of many of the best artists, but never discussed. Similarly video and film by artists as diverse as Lawrence Weiner, Ed Ruesha, Bruce Nauman, myself, Judith Barry, Gordon Matta-Clark, and many others are never publically acknowledged. Social, political film, or video by artists such as Darcy Lange has lapsed into a sub-sub category of “Video” Art. The relation of landscape painting tradition to recent projects by artists as diverse as Barbara Kruger and Dara Birnbaum in ecological and land use urban planning in connection with landscape architects has been totally ignored in favor of platitudes about “public art.” It seems critics have forgotten the historical connection between landscape painting, political questions, and art in relation to the city and museum. It is interesting that a filmmaker, Peter Greenaway, can raise these ‘historical’ issues in his films, but artists and critics are unable to grasp neither the connection with art of the past or the relation between this art’s political background and their own situation. “Ecology” seems detached from historical landscape painting and design.

I am interested in the artworks of Dara Birnbaum, Judith Barry, John Knight, Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Darcy Lange, Barbara Ess, Ludger Gertes, Edward Allington, Dennis Adams and many others.
1st QUESTION:

NEGLECTED AND REPRESSED SUBJECTS:

- Art History
  Including studies of minor greats
- Collaboration (in a studio-context)
  Increase interest, more understanding
  Credit to all participants, studio assistants
- Anatomical Studies
  Figures
  Animals
  Botanical
  Adding: Increase in teaching coordination of working from observation in order to develop ability to express anything one wants without technical handicaps
- Sexual Subjects / Still Censorable
- Overcoming Gallery Rejections
  More open discourse / help between artists

Open professional criticism at galleries which students can join

2nd QUESTION:

(SOME) SUBJECTS WHICH COMPEL ME:

- Serious Study of Art History
- Composition
- Painting and drawing technique
- Qualities of continuity between centuries/cultures/generations
- Integration of painting/sculpture/architecture
- More integration/cooperation/collaboration between art fields
  Architecture/Painting/Sculpture/Performance/Literature/Music/Dance/Video

My particular concern has been the abstract painting of this century. It interests me to look at (when it is good), I enjoy being involved in making it, I occasionally write about it, and I know a lot of artists who are currently working with it. To narrow the subject further I am interested in monochrome or reductive abstraction and I would like to see the dialogue around this expanded in the galleries, in verbal discussion, and in the magazines.

What is hinted at everywhere but rarely directly addressed is the narrowness of the art machine. What is shown in galleries and is bought by collectors is also shown in museums and written about in magazines in such strict connection that personal interest is everywhere evident. That together with corporate rather than public/private backing puts exhibition on a marketing basis and what we see is work to interest the most with the newest.

Abstraction runs long term and is not going to be that easily appreciated. It feels a little useless to complain about this since what is, is. Who is going to give me satisfaction. I just see that many good painters have a hard time continuing, as they are little noticed, while the market plays with gigantic sums for its own amusement picking up and dropping "names" with impunity.

If museums could produce exhibitions more independent of the galleries, collectors and corporations, and more writers would make their own choices of where to focus attention, and magazines could forget who is advertising there would be a basis for the dialogue I miss. This political/economic/esthetic question is not being attended to in the press.

Susanna Heller

Let's stop talking and open our eyes!

I wish to promote looking. Looking with more patience and more time spent in more silence. Experiencing a painting is contemplative, solitary, and very slow. It develops inside a viewer in a private, highly charged, and sensual world of memory and re-experience. It is potentially namable but certainly not consumable.

The power of art is that it has the flaws of a thing which exists in nature. An artwork's perfection is in its uniqueness, in its flawed being. This quality eludes packaging and categorization. It is an everyday thing.

I have found that art talk promotes categorization and consumption, which influences artists to make unflawed, more consumable, less genuine work. Therefore I find myself less and less curious to follow the art discourse.

Lenore Malen

AGAINST INTERPRETATION 1989

In her 1964 article, "Against Interpretation," Susan Sontag lamented that "the modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" the text to find a sub-text..." A case could be made that the sub-text of the 80s has been post-structuralism, and, while it is a brilliant social theory, I think it has cast a pall on art. What it seems to be saying is that meaning is fluid, "texts" have no fixed content, subjectivity is socially constructed, and that there is no essence at the heart of the individual. The conclusion to be drawn from this theory is that the artist, too, is unable to impart a personal and enduring meaning to his or her production. It's not surprising that in this climate post-modernism, with its arbitrary appropriations, and its distancing of style from content, has flourished.
What I have missed deeply from the "discourse" of the 1980s is an interest in art that comes out of personal experience — out of the irrational, the poetic, the emotive, the intimate, the personally transgressive, and the personally tragic. For me art consists of images — which are impure — which borrow from extra-artistic sources, but which ultimately are transformed to an irreducible visual language that is independent of literary ideas. Let's liberate ourselves from meaningless discourse. "In place of a hermeneutics, we need an erotics of art."

Diane Neumaier

Ignoring the conditions of our own art production is, in part, a result of Reago-Busho-Quailo-nomic unentitlement. As if we are well-endowed benefactors, we artists are expected to finance the production, display, and distribution of our work, not to mention, to donate our time. As artists, we are in intense competition with each other for every aspect of survival. As if it were the law of nature, the manic myth of the bohemian starving in the gutter has tricked many of us artists into unproductive submission. While a few artists are featured in prominent display showcases, many others submit to insulting submission fees competing for scarce space in juried exhibitions. While a small constellation of stars get rich, or at least are afforded enough support to produce more work, the majority of artists and would-be artists, waiting to be discovered, jealously, gloomily, darken the sky, making the stars seem even brighter. Meanwhile, as the cost of producing artworks soars, a current traveling exhibition by one of today's hottest superstars features picture frames that each probably cost as much as the production of an entire exhibition by most unknown artists. Ultimately, only the interests of a high-priced art market are protected.

How can this situation possibly harbor healthy art production? Why is there so little united effort to resist these repressive conditions? Why don't we establish a distribution forum that would promote lots of previously unshown, and would-be artists, waiting to be discovered, jealously, gloomily, darken the sky, making the stars seem even brighter. Meanwhile, as the cost of producing artworks soars, a current traveling exhibition by one of today's hottest superstars features picture frames that each probably cost as much as the production of an entire exhibition by most unknown artists. Ultimately, only the interests of a high-priced art market are protected.

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Rebecca Quaytman

Antique Modernist Avant-Garde
inner honor outer
history exhibition politics
studio within is without school
home seeing is different than receiving
Paintings Paintings
have a way of not have a way of not
communicating meaning commodifying meaning

Contemporary art discourse on the subjects of gender and politics — or, in fact, any content issues in art — has taken a turn in the past decade that has focused in on some aspects but left a good part of the discussion (begun most recently in the 1960s) aside. What is authentic human identity in society today? What is the relationship between the real lives of people and their art? How do modes of expression shape meaning now? These are unanswered questions.

Arlene Raven

I'd like to recommend Ann Gibson's essay, "The Rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism." In the catalogue, Abstract Expressionism, The Critical Developments, from a show at the Albright-Knox in Buffalo — especially the last section on "allegorical" painting, and also her essay, "Retracing Original Intentions — Barnett Newman and Tiger's Eye." In the Winter 1988 Art International She and other art historians are taking another look at abstract expressionist artists and finding distinctions and developments which were not adequately addressed by criticism of the time.

In 1984, Lawrence Luhring and I curated a show at the Studio School in New York of the work of Forrest Bess, Alfred Jensen, and Myron Stout. We felt that these were major, neglected artists of the same generation. They are still neglected although, thanks to John Yau and to Donald McKinney and Hirsch & Adler Modern Gallery, there is now a major Bess show at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, West Germany.

In February 1989, there was a show at Washburn Gallery of extraordinary paintings from the late 50s by Ronald Bladen, who is primarily known as a sculptor. Nothing is taken for granted in these paintings. What is it to make a mark? What is it to make a sequence of marks? Questioning makes the form of the paintings. Usually materiality emphasizes the surface and destroys a kind of color space that can happen. These paintings are as physical as any made, but the color sings. The thickness is not about concealing but revealing. The paintings seem turned inside out, as if we're seeing them from behind. The boundaries are also not taken for granted, while one form runs parallel to the edge another doesn't; organic forms are cropped, the paintings seem to extend laterally past certain edges. They seem both a magnification of something very small and a fragment of something huge.

I find it amazing that Bladen's paintings were overlooked when they were first shown. And I wonder what was wrong with the critical atmosphere that allowed this to happen. How could the innovations and poetic qualities of these paintings not be recognized? Their rediscovery, stored in Bladen's studio after his death, gives us a second chance to see and learn from them. But it scares me and angers me that these paintings, our legacy, might have been lost. We can't count on this second chance.

David Reed
Meyer Raphael Rubinstein

The most glaring absence in the "art world" is the art of most of the world. We proceed as if no one outside of a handful of prosperous democracies in the West had ever put brush to canvas. While literature and, to a lesser degree, film are increasingly international in character, visual art remains stubbornly parochial. Museum curators, art dealers, editors, and critics ought to begin thinking globally. We are beginning to see the barriers fall between East and West, the same ought to happen between North and South.

On a more personal note, I'd like to see more attention given to postwar European painting, a period that has long been denigrated in America. I have in mind painters of the 1960s such as Capogrossi, Hartung, Manessier, Poliakoff, and Viera da Silva, but also early to mid-60s work by Gerard Deschamps, Alain Jacquet and Martial Raysse, and a Dutch artist named Wim T. Schippers whose assemblages of the 1960s anticipated Meyer Vaisman by some twenty years, not that that is any claim to greatness. What I'm trying to say is that there is plenty of undiscovered bulk on the European iceberg. But such historical explorations should not distract us from the more vital task of establishing contact with the same ought to happen between North and South.

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Mira Schor

Having helped to formulate these questions, it can safely be inferred that I feel that some things have been repressed or neglected by contemporary art discourse. I will elaborate on only one of the points of concern to me: the repressively hierarchic dichotomy between the production of imagery by women artists — interpreted by some critics as engaged in a fallacious biologism — and the re-productions of representations of women from media — emblematic of current theories which focus on the social construction of gender.

A women's experience of her biological and hormonal morphology and a society's narrative of the female body are mutable, as anthropological and historical studies have made evident. The cross-cultural persistence and ubiquity of patriarchal systems is equally established. Either way, the use of these biological elements to rationalize the oppression of women calls for reevaluation of previously "universal" standards and hierarchies, for the denial of women's personal experiences of their bodies. The validity of these experiences as a potential source material for art should not be denied, and yet as a subject of investigation by women artists this source was barely allowed into art discourse for about 8 or 10 years, not much out of about 2500 years of Western discourse.

"Post-feminist" theorists' emphasis on "post-media" art practice, and their proscription from using the body in any manner other than appropriational and ironic may be seen to be a form of repression of production by women, and of female representation. The undermining, in some deconstructionist and simulationist theories, of any possibility of representation, specifically represses the investi-
Perhaps it is time to catalog the body imagery of early feminism, which may at its best have truly transgressed phallicentric norms. It is certainly time to question the repression of a major aspect of production by women in the name of feminism. It is time to question a system of interpretation and a critical hierarchy whose effect is inevitably impoverishment of our discourse about art.

**Pamela Shoemaker**

There is not enough attention being given to community-based and community-financed art work, particularly in the larger cities of the U.S. I am not referring to what is commonly called “Public Art”: not Serra’s *Tilted Arc.* Community art exists as sculpture in neighborhood gardens, installations in subways, artists’ billboards, mural painting everywhere. While Grace Glueck’s 7/22/88 *New York Times* column on murals was gratifying, an apologetic prefatory remark went, “Although murals may not be the highest form of art…” Well, why not? Does a support of brick rather than canvas make a painting a “lower” form of art? Or is it that the work is not a viable art commodity? And all these artists are not chopped liver. How about Juan Sanchez, who painted a mural in Corona, Queens and won a Guggenheim in the same year. And how about such famous predecessors as Diego Rivera and Thomas Hart Benton (to name but a few).

As Janet Heit, of Cityarts Workshop said, “You may talk about art work, but as soon as you attach the word community, all interest from any major art publication goes down the drain.” Eva Cockcroft, artist and founding member of the community-arts cooperative Artmakers Inc., notes that “political content and the fact that the work generates no advertising and is directed at a mass audience prevents this sort of art from getting attention in the more elite art press.” Regardless of the experience or reputation of the artists making the work, such projects are considered social-services or funky Broadway/quaint/folk/urban/wild-style decoration.

The popular sep to all this bellyaching would be such artists as Tim Rollins + K.O.S. or Group Material, both of whom have been discussed extensively in major art magazines. However it must be pointed out that Rollins + K.O.S. (“Kids of Survival”), the group of Bronx teenagers who work collaboratively with Rollins to produce elegant political/literasy/referential paintings) have achieved substantial commercial success; and Group Material, who has organized neighborhood-oriented installations with social and political themes, are now to be seen at such heavily established venues as the Whitney, Documenta, and the Dia Art Foundation: one of their recent exhibitions addressed Baudrillard. These artists seem to be engaged more in an effort to bring the “real world” to the “art world” rather than the other way around, and in view of the hermetically-sealed (off) nature of the latter, it becomes questionable whether such work can be considered in the light of any localized community relationship.

In the world of commercial galleries, museums, and large-scale, arts-in-architecure-type public art, there is both good work and bad work and plenty of the bad work gets discussed along with the good. I would like to see community-funded and -oriented art work regarded by the art press as an important genre of current art. Some of these works are being made by artists who may not be well known to them now, but may be in the future. The spotlight of critical opinion will serve to improve the quality of such projects — and to the great general public for whom this art is made, it matters.

**Harriet Shorr**

The art which engages me most is painting which expresses a direct response to experience; painting where gesture and color convey that response. I am moved by the evocation of a reality I recognize or the creation of one which does not exist outside the canvas. These realities are visual; they are experienced through light and color. Among the artists who make this kind of painting are Martha Diamond, Janet Fish, Rackstraw Downes, Brice Marden, Joseph Santore, Joanna Pousette Dart, and myself. What these artists have in common is an attitude which asserts the sufficiency of a visual form to express their direct response to experience. It is a subjective, rather than an objective response to experience. It is an attitude that transcends style, and perhaps for that reason it is not defined or discussed in contemporary art writing. The result is that although an art of sensation exists today it is more or less ignored.

In some circles painting which is directly visual in its appeal is considered to have less meaning than art which uses visible signs to address, not the senses or the emotions, but the intellect. Signs are not forms. They are static and always servient to a text. The complexity of appearances, and the complexity of what appears, reveal reality.

Some of the best writing about art has been done by artists, among them Donald Judd, Fairfield Porter, and poets, such as John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, and Sanford Schwartz. These writers speak directly and subjectively in their own voices about the nature of the art and their own response to it. They do not attempt to objectify their opinions but speak directly out of their own experience. In talking about the painting which interests me I must also say that the kind of writing which best addresses it is really not part of the mainstream of art writing today.

We are told that the post-modern attitude has supplanted the modern. One of the central themes of modern art was subjectivity, engagement; a belief that the individual artist was capable of interpreting experience without tradition, God, or dogma. This inherently optimistic and confident stance made possible the major expressions of our century. What Proust and Pollock have in common is
their subjectivity and their belief in the essential value of the expression of individual consciousness. It is through the revelation of the artist’s consciousness that we came to recognize ourselves. Many of the attitudes of post-modern art-historicizing, appropriation, deconstruction, are to my mind a retreat from experience, in some sense a failure of nerve.

The first graffiti I remember was the inscription “Kilroy was here.” Direct visual painting is like Kilroy. Through it the artist says: “I was here, it felt this way, I looked this way, I put it down this way.”

MOURNING AND MILITANCY

Emily Dickinson wrote: after great pain a formal feeling comes. After the rage and denial of mourning comes the need to measure the situation, to invent appropriate action, to mobilize. Like consciousness-raising, mourning needs to end in political action.

The mourning I have done in my life has resulted in a desire to give voice to voices that were stilled. In One Plus Or Minus One, an installation at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, February 1988, I made two giant murals to fill the main gallery. The Second International showed Rosa Luxemburg alone among a group of mostly grey-bearded men at a World Socialist Conference. Eden Hotel showed a lone waitress serving the military men who murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, her co-leader in the Spartacist movement. Between the historic moments depicted in the two murals, a great loss has occurred . . . the brutal loss not only of Rosa Luxemburg’s life, a life of many gifts and passionate moral commitment, but also her vision of social justice — one that has yet to be tried.

In the image of celebration in the cafe of the Eden Hotel, Rosa is replaced by an unknown waitress, whose freedom to choose where she works, for whom she works, with what groups she is associated, is compromised by poverty, by class. Rosa Luxemburg fought for such a woman to be free to make other choices. And she fought for the soldiers who drink to her death to be free of militarization in an imperialist war. The waitress’s loss pivots on her complicity in the celebration of Rosa’s death, a loss, a complicity we all know about in one form or another.

Don’t mourn, organize, says an old song. But to mourn is to seed and water the ground for growth — for the drive toward consummation action can bring — and for the awareness of the stakes involved — the consequences of acting and not acting — the way the guilt and ache of mourning punish us if we do not act.

After a loss, a deep mourning, we know how precarious is every drop that is left to us, how valuable every possibility to act, how it needs us and we need it. We also know we can never “get over” the mourning, never forget the loss, never fill in the gap. That we will go on mourning.

Some of these ideas were discussed with Douglas Crimp.

May Stevens

LOVE AND MILITANCY

Love, the way love is part, or not part, of the discourse, which may exclude love to be itself; with love in the discourse, you have something filled up, bloated, that has to be squeezed in under the door, but love without the discourse is not even subject, so you have to ask what is it you love, ask whether that is in the discourse (at the moment); but it is easy to put things inside or outside — almost anything we love will be one time or another, inside or outside, to any of us, but the anger we feel (at times) is certainly with out (outside) the discourse. I prefer it to the sleeping sickness in the discourse.

So you ask me what I love. I love the work of Philipp Otto Runge, the intelligence, the Romantic energy, seen almost in embryo — in one artist. The egg is fertilized, all the mystery of creation — the life and death of the Universe, all we will ever know about it — yet we do know Art. I wish we could have this moment forever, never a decline from it, that I could walk into a gallery and feel in the contemporary what I feel in him. He is a creature of opposites, almost every quality you can locate has its opposite within the work. Sure, in all of history there have to be outstanding giants, relative to the contemporary, and he, it can be seen, pok­ed his head through the cloud cover of his own contemporary, but what I see is what I want, and you can say that that is outside the discourse, but I am angry to hear you say that. Maybe we all should poke our heads through the contemporary cloud cover, and call it “discourse.”

Or I could tell you I love Courbet. I love him because he was a genius, who didn’t know what he was doing with an unerring sense of artistic intelligence — amazing how that goes with the material of paint — it is not the pretty thing everyone tries to make it, obscuring the fact that paint is ugly, it’s the truth, paint is the ugliest thing in the world there is, and making it stick! If Americans could understand this they might be good painters yet; but I love Courbet because he never forgot the invisible. It’s not much, this tradition of respect for silence (Thoreau, et at), it’s painting between the silence and sound, the visible and invis­ible, the way Courbet did, that leads us to awareness. I want to shout blue-blaze­es against those who take us away from awareness of the particular to awareness of the general in the name of “art,” which they think is attractive, and love the anger in the discourse.

Richard Tuttle

What I miss in the caca-phony of “art discourse” is silence. Or some real talk. Or the still, small voice. What I miss in the spectacle is seeing, and a “poor art.” What is a “poor art”? In Three Guineas Virginia Woolf describes a visionary “poor college”: “…The poor college must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practiced by poor people. . . . It should teach the arts of human intercourse, the art of understanding other people’s lives and minds . . . not to segregate and specialize, but to combine. It should explore the ways in which mind and body
can be made to cooperate; discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life. . . . 'If we substitute 'art' for 'college,' I think this would be a manageable set of goals for 'poor' artists to be getting on with. What the poor artist can and must afford is the highest striving for quality of handiwork and thought — and a passionate belief in the worth of this work.

Galleries are showcases for finished objects. They rarely present the work-in-progress, thought-in-progress struggle. Mostly galleries show work which has been canonized, sanctified, validated by curators, dealers, collectors. The work must be salable, must guarantee the gallery owner the $50,000 monthly overhead expense tab of keeping the polished oak doors open. Thus no room for the really interesting stuff, honest messes, working drawings, failed experiments, rough stuff (except in the context of major retrospectives of already hugely successful artists). The way many contemporary artists allow themselves to be packaged, to touch the heart of art. . . .

Money now is the heart of art. A difficult problem for us all to live with. People in the art world don't talk about money in a helpful way, but they always do talk about money. Money is more exciting — and intimidating — than art. Art talk these days is money talk, and money talks loud. So, no still, small voice. It is difficult to imagine talking about our work in fresh ways unless we wrestle first with the overwhelming oppression of money questions. In the 70s, for some brief moments, we were able to do just that. And change art discourse for ever (I think this is true despite temporary setbacks).

What I mostly feel entering the whitewalled hotboxes where my footsteps bounce harshly off marble floors, is intimidated. And that this is no place for me, an artist, to be in. There are other models in the history of Western art for making, showing, seeing art. The effort of building a great cathedral, for example, involved the whole community in making a vast environmental work of art which belonged to all. (I am well aware of the oppressions of the Catholic Church, but I think the point holds anyway.) To the general gallery and museum experience in America, I contrast the memory of Chartres — Chartres in June, when the green corn is already knee-deep in the fields around the cathedral. Yet it is so cold inside that you have to wear two sweaters. You enter by the great oak doors, between the long limestone statues of serene saints and queens with pigeons roosting in their hair. Your eyes trace the black and white stones of the rose-shaped maze in the floor of the nave, then swoop up dizzy to the red and blue blazing rose window. The light-pierced, yet dim space, takes you, holds you, lifts you, makes your heart stop. Later, you stumble upon the shrine of the Black Virgin, festooned with hundreds of dark, carved hearts. No Catholic or other religion's adherent are you, yet you feel moved to pay reverence to the spirits of beauty and belief — and something else hard to name, yet vitally felt. You drop a coin in the tin box and buy a tall white candle which you light in honor of the shrine of hearts.

It used to be that one could think of "the critic as artist," if not as an actual artist. Now it is inevitable that one acknowledge, however reluctantly — for both critic and artist — that "the critic is artist," in the fullest sense that the eroding idea of "artist" retains.

— Donald Kuspit, from the Preface to The Critic Is Artist*

I like to think of making art as a many-layered process. The person who digs down into the psyche, using chance, contemplation, or some other method to come upon images which are then put into a physical form and made visible to others is accomplishing the original foundation of the work. That same person (the artist?) lives with those images, having or developing a personal rapport with them in terms of meaning, and exposing those images to the view of others bringing about responses which feed into the meaning process already underway. The artist receives that information which is then incorporated into his/her meaning connection with the work.

In addition the artist is, most often, not an isolated individual, but rather one who lives within a community of relatives, friends, acquaintances, or within the art community. As the layers of meaning proceed the artist is aware of art history (and becomes an historian?), is aware of currently exhibited as well as the unexhibited work of other artists, and inserts her own work into that milieu making a statement as to what is relevant to the larger dialogue (becomes a curator?). The artist knows other artists and tends to be closer to those who are resonant with her own work, often trading pieces with those other artists (becomes a collector?). The artist, being a person who understands the process of art and having a sharpened sensibility to works of art may suggest a specific exhibition of other's work (becomes a curator?), may write about her own work, or the works of others (becomes a writer?), and often as these layers develop becomes a teacher of the process of the craft, the process of creativity, the history of art and of the theory and criticism related to it. These days this person could function as a literary critic* in criticizing contemporary criticism, as a philosopher exploring the meaning of life, and as a theologian as the work brings and concentrates the soul of the individual and both become quiet and simply there. Or the artist can deal in art, advising, and/or buying and selling.

Donald Kuspit, in the preface to his collection of essays, makes a case for the critic not functioning as an artist, but actually being the artist. "All the weight of meaning in the formula of their relationship is now on the critic rather than the artist." (p. xi).

This I can accept on one level: if an artist can be a complex person it is undeniable that a critic may be as well. The sine qua non of artisthood, however, is usually missing—the initial origination of images together with the putting of them into a visually concrete form. The critic who is confined to working off of art made by others is thus forced into a parasitic position: without the produced art of others the critic has no starting point, no stimulus for flights of fancy. The critic (who does not make art) remains in some inevitable way contingent. The artist option of working through the layers I have described. To reverse the direction; many critics have gone directly to that first layer and become visual artists while others are poets and share a common base in the creative activity. Even so the poet, in writing criticism, wears another hat. I do not deny come visual artists while others are poets and share a common base in the creative activity. I rather like the term “beholder” to describe the person who looks at art and (inevitably) takes on the creative function of the critic. When this happens the interchangeability of the layers but simply want to suggest that differences exist in their definitions.

The artist is one who stands outside the flow of culture and feels it, observes it. The artist is to some degree disconnected from the commerce of the world, and is one who standing back as a kind of voyeur digests it and returns it in a visual form to re-present that world. The artist is a traveler, observer, itinerant worker who moves about the world digesting and regurgitating, commenting in a personal form, making up, inventing, more like the composer than the musician, the choreographer than the dancer, the inventive scientist rather than the “normal” one. The critic can do all this, but becomes an artist (I hate to be dogmatic) only by taking up paint or clay or whatever, words, perhaps, to make his or her own art, rather than making flights of imagination from the compost heap of others, flying merely to explicate a work or state the position of another. The artist is doubly silenced: additional meaning which accompanies the creation of work is denied, while the critic behaves as though the artist is not the artist.

It feels to me that Kuspit lowers our expectation of art through his notion that the artist may not speak in her turn. Another way in which the critic attempts to usurp the artist’s position is through the argument that it is unnecessary to inquire into the artist’s intention, that being irrelevant to the experiencing of the work. For their part most artists accept the idea that the work must stand alone to be read in its silent visuality, and (inevitably) takes on the creative function of the critic. When this happens the artist has not given up the role of the creation of meaning, but rather additional and often personal meaning is added on to the work. Art, by its nature, is, and perhaps always has been, open and ready to set up a dialogue working as a stimulus for communication with the viewer, (see Jan Mukarovsky, Structure, Sign and Function, or Umberto Eco, Opera Apertai allowing the viewer to have and to make her own associations and responses. Thus Kuspit undertakes both the artist and the beholder, taking the function of creating meaning from the artist and refusing to allow any independence of imagination on the part of the beholder. Another way in which the critic attempts to usurp the artist’s position is through the argument that it is unnecessary to inquire into the artist’s intention, that being irrelevant to the experiencing of the work. For their part most artists accept the idea that the work must stand alone to be read in its silent visuality, however, most do have notions of the meaning they are producing. Disregarding this would suggest that whatever depths of meaning the artist may harbor, are simply of no consequence. The artist is doubly silenced: additional meaning which accompanied the creation of work is denied, while the critic behaves as though the artist has no imagination and freely exercises her own.

I like to think there is a lot of art being made now—in painting, for instance—which is not either popular or entirely unworthy, which may or may not strive for purity as its goal or strive to be a “high” art, but which appeals to a sense beyond that of entertainment or reflection of the media or celebration of banality or political disaster. Art is still made which can simply Be, which can stand for existence, go beyond our concrete earthly experience of life to suggest a realm beyond the normally visible: that of Beauty, Awe, Terror, the Void. The balance can tilt the other way. Thomas McEvilley, in his column “Marginalia” (Artforum, May 1988) quotes Richard Milazzo: “Speaking in general now the artist’s practice has suddenly made the critic’s function seem obsolete or superfluous. What exists now is only the critical function, which has become severed from the critic’s domain.” McEvilley responds with: “The claim that the critic has become obsolete because art had become critical makes as much sense as saying that the artist is obsolete if criticism is written artistically.” There is some kind of circling around the question going on here. Different by from Kuspit, McEvilley retains the idea of the primacy of the artist, but he too does not want to allow the artist a critical faculty. My contention would be that indeed the artist does make a critical statement in producing art. Through the critical and historical awareness that is part of the equipment of most contemporary artists the simple act of choosing to do a certain kind of work, and how to do it, makes that statement. I would have to grant McEvilley’s other point, that critical discourse, that is, written and disseminated criticism, does come from the outside, the artist even desiring this other view, while I am not ready to concede that the artist may not speak in her turn. Or that the artist is not the artist.
I have argued, here I go again, that the acceptance (reification) of formalist and New Critical "master" maps of modernism,—by modernism's supporters and detractors alike—have, in some ways tragically, streamlined (in other words, institutionalized) an otherwise messy, polydictory arena of activity and precipitated an often farcical series of spin-off maps under the rubric postmodernism. Formalist criticism provides some of the most detailed, and illuminating, readings we have of modernist visual art. But it is a map, not the map, one possible narrative not the master narrative.

Arthur Danto's essay on the "end of art" that concludes his thoughtful collection of essays, The State of the Art, provides an interesting case study of some of these issues. Danto starts with the Hegelian premise that art, "in its highest vocation" will come to its end as it reaches maximum self-reflectiveness or self-consciousness as art, when, in effect, it turns into ("its own") philosophy and thus comes to its "natural end" as art [pp. 202, 208-209, 214-16]. He then notes that when he first saw Andy Warhol's Brillo cartons in 1964 he realized that art had effectively come to an end: the art object had become totally conscious of itself and could not be distinguished from commonplace non-art objects in the world. No further formal advance was possible; and while art might go on, art in the sense of formal advance could not—everything after Warhol would just be a footnote.

Even accepting this argument, it's hard to understand why art would not have come to an end with Duchamp's readymades, thereby shortcircuiting the long series of formal advances of the 40s, 50s, and 60s that gave rise to Greenbergian modernism. Then again, Warhol made art identical not to any old objects but to commodities, which is not the same thing at all.

Danto's is not an argument for "postmodernism," but for the end of art; still it clearly parallels some postmodernist maps. For Danto, a hundreds-year-old Hegelian narrative of Western art comes to an end with Warhol. But as he says, though a narrative may end, it doesn't mean the story doesn't continue (a narrative ends with "they all lived happily ever after" but the characters continue into that future). The activity continues but it doesn't have the same narrative necessity; closure has already occurred. This, then, for Danto, will explain the relatively bland pluralism of the 80s where no new movement usurps the formal stage every two years, just more or less interesting recylings of the already known.

But this argument is based not on Western art's master narrative but a story Danto is attached to: not history unfolding but a story being told. The idea that art is an activity is completely absorbed into the Hegelian narrative, with the exclusion that there are other, incommensurable, "Western" stories based on different sociocultural and aesthetic assumptions. What Danto usefully documents in his essay is a certain cultural moment of acute awareness about art that changed his and no doubt many other viewers' way of seeing all subsequent art. But this story can never be the narrative of art because art, even of the West, has no single story with beginning, middle, and end; indeed, new stories are being told every day. I'm telling one now.

These arguments suggest more a change of dominant critical paradigms for art than an end to art. Word has gotten out, and from different quarters with different agendas, that the critical narratives of art's history and contemporaneity are multiple and incommensurable (don't jibe). Yet this view reflects less an end to supernormalic (master) narratives than a new supernormalic (anti-master) narrative.

When Warhol's "Brillo box asked, in effect, why it was art when something else just like it was not," Danto says, "the history of art attained that point where it had to turn into its own philosophy. It had gone, as art, as far as it could go. In turning into philosophy, art had come to an end. From now on progress could only be enacted on a level of abstract self-consciousness of the kind which philosophy alone must consist in. If artists wished to participate in this progress, they would have to undertake a study very different from what art schools prepare them for. They would have to become philosophers" [p. 216].

One can only imagine a professional philosopher or critic—Danto is both—making such an argument and one might wonder if this isn't Danto's own "modest proposal," a subtly satiric critique of hegemonizing tendencies of recent critical theory. But Danto seems the most generously reasonable and least ironic of the contemporary literary critics.

Yet it would seem, from Danto's argument, that it is neo-Hegelian philosophy that has come to an end, or anyway impasse, insofar as it can't account for the contemporaneity of art given its always-already defined conception of what art is. "Progress" is the loaded term (turn), but it may not be contemporary art's most important product. The messiness of the current art scene is at least a progressivistic critique of the narrowcasting of neo-formalist and "postmodernist" criticism; but it's not messy enough. If Warhol brings us to a dead end it's not because art, in its highest vocation, has ended but that we need new maps, new kinds of maps, of the past hundreds-of-years that don't lead to the inevitability of this sort of reductivist closure or conclusion.

If your map tells you you've reached the edge of the world and better turn back, it may not be that the world has ended but that your map has failed you. Even the idea of globes is not enough.

I take Danto's argument more seriously than many of the more fashionable
ideas about the postmodern break because he has focussed in on many of the assumptions — the lenses — through which I was taught to view the Western art tradition when I first consciously began to encounter it under that name. Strange-ly, though, this argument makes me see the Hegelian conception of art’s history not as the end but a beginning. Duchamp’s, or Warhol’s (the names seem dictated by the discourse in a blinding ferocity of repetition) (or Martin’s, or Malevich’s, or Manet’s, or Twombly’s . . .) for Stein’s, or Benjamin’s, or Celan’s, or . . .] self-reflexivity marks not the end of art but a preface to what is now possible.

Emerging from the long tunnel of totemized historicity, we come face to face with the materiality of language and the identification of — or, better, transference among — art and its others. These are, so to say, foundational projects for art. Though we may find that these foundations are being built directly under the castles-in-the-air that we have learned to call the history of our arts — that have soared, so to say, without benefit of our finishing touches (torches), to borrow an image of Thoreau’s.

Yet with these foundations in view, we can begin to see the art of the present and the past in less categorical ways; begin to acknowledge art that includes anything of relevance unimaginable in the art it has already produced. One thing the curators seemed to be suggesting, by putting tribal works next to, for example, Picasso’s, was that these tribal works were as aesthetically beautiful as the juxtaposed “masterpieces” of modern art. But what might be more interesting than how tribal works can be understood aesthetically, or how “magical” qualities can be seen in Picasso, is how the very concept of art can be exploded in terms of function, ideology, and culture.

Another angle on some of these issues is provided by the “Primitivism” show at the Museum of Modern Art a few years ago. One thing the curators seemed to be suggesting, by putting tribal works next to, for example, Picasso’s, was that these tribal works were as aesthetically beautiful as the juxtaposed “masterpieces” of modern art. But what might be more interesting than how tribal works can be understood aesthetically, or how “magical” qualities can be seen in Picasso, is how the very concept of art can be exploded in terms of function, ideology, and culture.

Imagine tribal societies making use of our art as culturally functioning. This “other way around” is what interests me: how we can understand our art as not being “merely” aesthetic.

Tribal work — I take this from James Clifford — is not artifact, not evidence, not document, not aesthetic object.

Then what is it?

The answer to that question might help us to understand what our art work is. Which we don’t know. Because we don’t know what the objects are, or quite what to make of them.

Nor that we should.

Or we know sometimes and then lose it, need to find out again, only differently.

by the conductor. Or is it rather a critical end-game of desperation turned to hyster-ia, where to interact you must condescend, to take note you must take possession.

The man who drives the car is on top of the world, thinks he invented speed.

One imagines that a critic who feels this way will seek out works he feels su- perior to, whether or not he is. Surely, he will have difficulty confronting that which questions his cryptoauthority (this authority as decoder). He will miss the one lesson he might learn from art, which is never dreamt of in his philosophy: that no method, much less professionalization of method, has the answers. Art is still our greatest teacher of methodologies and we risk losing our ground when we forget what art teaches, that art teaches . . .
I’m not sure that failure exists, that is, I’m not sure it’s more than an elaborate fiction. Failure’s claim to existence is based on a dualistic separation of the world into areas of success and failure. The word itself — failure — is so loaded with judgment that it draws distinctions like barriers. Our use of such a word must be conscious, for it adds yet another snare to the discussion of risk. This is a dangerous area. The use of the word failure places the discussion in an area that is neither reportage nor strict scholarship.

For the ancient Greeks the idea of success was intrinsically linked to the idea of perfection. In such a world view, no idea could have been more foreign than that expressed by those dangerous new religions that glorified the potential of the child or the imperfections of a repentant sinner. The shift in values was profound when, suddenly, it was not the ‘finished’ man who was ‘chosen,’ but the imperfect disciple — when the sick, the afflicted, and children were no longer despised. For us, thousands of years later, the conflicting ideas of the ancient Greeks and the early Christians operate within us simultaneously rather than sequentially. This should not be possible, but it is. The result is that sometimes we view success as finished perfection — at other times as the perfectability of growth.

Since failure only exists in contrast to success, it, too, mirrors this contradiction: it can be considered as a kind of incompleteness, or as existence without grace. Paying attention to the way we seem to hold two opinions simultaneously, and to the resultant judgments we make, gives us an opportunity to explore some general attitudes toward human achievement. Given such radical ambivalence, what are the means we use to steer or guide our efforts?

I’d like to propose a new field of study to explore attitudes toward human judgment — a study of the science of failure in which anthropologists or philosophers might usefully engage. It is surprising to me that philosophers have not attended to the concept of failure. The more I think about it, the more I believe that the consideration of failure should exist as a distinct area of study. With some good humor, then (and appropriate Greek roots), I have coined a neologism.

The best artist is the imperfect artist. — Wyndham Lewis

I found a similar pattern in an obstetrics textbook which I bought in London shortly before my son was born. It provided a frightening inventory of all the ways a birth could go wrong. There were dozens of chances for disaster in contrast to the essentially unmentioned possibility of a living, healthy baby. Success takes up a very small part of the story. It is easier to consider failure, almost as if the method might be determining the form. There is a hint here, perhaps, that analysis itself is more comfortable with failure.

Such examples would lead us to believe that failure is more common than it is. Manifest failure, however, is relatively uncommon. Often one anticipates failure as the logical end of the path one is following and, when such a situation is sensed or recognized, the path can be abandoned. Perhaps that is why unfinished work used to be seen as a form of failure. In such a resonant example as the story of the Tower of Babel, the unfinished becomes a metaphor for failure itself.

Now, unfinished work is more often accepted as worthy of serious consideration. This shift in values is one on which artists and art historians have had some effect. The metaphor absorbs process in some of Michelangelo’s later sculpture (St. Matthew, the Rondanini Pieta, the Dying Slave); we see the figures as bound and imprisoned in the rock. Today the unfinished is considered a convention, and there is general agreement that the Michelangelos are masterpieces. We no longer need to face the unfinished with a negative prejudice or a suspended judgment. We have begun to look at a work as somehow complete at every point in its development.

While it is true that many inevitable failures are abandoned, others get finished. Sometimes it takes a long time to recognize a problem. Sometimes flaws only appear in retrospect, not having been obvious during the creative process. Is it possible that in such a case the artist might exhibit a work publicly, even sell it, recognizing too late a serious problem in the work. One needs a special kind of judgment here. How can one expect to recognize a failure at a time when one doesn’t know or recognize one’s goals. Many artists define what they want by observing their own decisions which are often very precise. The sense of ‘getting it right’ is proverbial and instinctive.
The means of production would have tainted the art. Similarly, an unseen porting pipe destroys the spirit of Jackie Winsor's piece, because the work itself producing them were working. The impulses of his heart and his sense of compas­son in its relationship to the world. In the artists' statements that accompanied this is a kind of 'rightness', whether it occurs internally as part of the work or external­ly, and always implies the existence of another separate, more vital concern. A genuine failure cannot be intentional. An intentional failure is no such thing, but an unwholesome, nihilistic form of success.

Once again we are involved with intention. It seems to me that over and over again in different ways it is intention that has marked the way of art in the twentieth century. The recognition of intention implies that, to some extent, an artist is accountable for his or her images or actions. The existence of intention provides an opportunity for failure, ground on which failure can grow. Failure itself draws a distinction. Where failure occurs, there is the frontier. It marks the edge of the acceptable or possible, a boundary fraught with possi­bilities. This edge mixes certainty and insecurity. It taunts us to try again and tells us firmly to stay back. The failure tells us clearly where our limitations — at that moment — are. A few minutes later it might be different. This is why the risks of failure add value to success.

The most extreme form of failure occurs when standards are so high, and their satisfaction so unlikely, that the likelihood of success becomes almost fic­tional. Though such standards guarantee failure, they do not discourage the pas­sionate impulse to strive toward the highest ideals — leading to the realm of almost mystical failure that is akin to the implied and eternal failure of neti neti (not this, not that), the ancient Upanishad formula for distinguishing the sacred. The search for an impossible objective is the most profound and pure manifestation of anaprokopological form.

Other approaches to work are less ethereal: there are works for which there is a kind of 'rightness', whether it occurs internally as part of the work or external­ly in its relationship to the world. In the artists' statements that accompanied this essay, Keith Sonnier explains why it was necessary for him to abandon a whole series of works when he saw the conditions in which the children who would be producing them were working. The impulses of his heart and his sense of compassion were greater than his need to follow through on the pieces he had planned. The success of production would have tainted the art. Similarly, an unseen sup­porting pipe destroys the spirit of Jackie Winsor's piece, because the work itself implies that it stands by itself. Winsor knew that false implications could under­mine the work. The seriousness with which she considered that factor proves that the successful creation of an artwork relies on more than visual standards.

What is appropriate to a given artwork has multiple dimensions. Integrity (an ultimate unity) prevails when something is both internally and externally ap­propriate, both true to itself and true to its environment. And the work must also follow through on the promise it makes. It can't soften or dilute its purpose at the last moment.

Several years ago I heard a story about a wealthy collector who decided to put a Picasso painting up for auction. He took it to the auction house and was told by the experts that they would not take it because they thought it was a fake. The man was outraged, and after a few rude comments about the credentials of the auction-house experts he took the painting directly to Picasso himself. He explain­ed the problem to Picasso and asked him to verify it as truly one of his pictures. Picasso looked at the painting carefully, and then came back to the collector.

"I'm sorry," said Picasso. "They are right. It's a fake."

"But that can't be!" gasped the man, "I bought it directly from you fif­teen years ago."

"Well," said Picasso, "I can make fake Picassos just as well as anyone else."

What we call a sense of timing also has to do with this multiple dimension of the appropriate. Without timing a work may be unintentionally invisible; one cannot make a proper evaluation. Thirty years ago when Meret Oppenheim painted her picture, she saw it differently than she did when she put it into this ex­hibition. At that time, instead of seeing the painting in front of her, she saw only what she thought the painting should be, Paul Thek's contribution to this show plays with the sense of the inappropriate in contrast to conventions: he proposes a work that reverses sexual stereotypes by changing "Our Father" to "Our Mother." It is a work that probably has more impact now, when sexual inequality is still obvious, than it will have in the future. It deals with what could be called 'threshold values'. It makes us wonder what distinctions it may be appropriate to make in periods of change.

Corresponding to the different forms of failure are different kinds of obsta­cles. Except for psychological obstacles, which are mostly a matter of anticipa­tion, obstacles appear unexpectedly or contrast with expectation in the overall plan. When an obstacle stops the action completely, all the energy that has ex­isted as expectation is homeless. What one feels is a sense of loss. More and more we find instances of things that work in photograph or in re­production but not in reality. When something works photographically but not actually, one thing that might be wrong is scale or proportion. Scale has a specific, narrow margin of error, and is very sensitive to degree or amount. I take these to be larger issues. Sometimes everything in the recipe can be right except the prop­ortion of the ingredients. We need something more than perfect aim. Our arrow must go far enough to reach the target, and not so far that we overshoot it. In many fields, excess is a kind of deficiency. Twice as much is not twice as good. There is a critical threshold beyond which is error.

Often things fail only in amount — too this or too that. Too aggressive, too argumentative, too arrogant, too arty, too big, too coercive, too confused, too cul­tured, too dangerous, too limited, too self-conscious, too sentimental, too sloppy.
too shy, too subtle, too thin, too little. Too much. The excessive is our preferred value judgment. Which extremes do we value? The kinds of extremes we find objectionable are gauges of our attitudes and values.

Just as all vision has its blind spots, all images have a field of eclipse. Creating the image is only part of the problem. Somehow the image must penetrate the viewer's mind. Images as complex structures are subject to a whole range of snare, traps, and blockages. And they always carry with them a great deal of additional information.

In what ways are we mindful of our failures? Sometimes, of course, not at all. There are times when pain blocks a conscious recognition, when our failure taints our own abilities and what we and others expect of ourselves. It is generally felt that we 'own' our failures in a different sense than our successes. We share success; failure, no matter what, is more private. Thus, we also conspire to protect our friends from their failures. This illusionary protection adds another layer to the pain, sometimes even damaging those it tries to protect. This is the failure in failure; by comparison, the original failure is refreshingly simple and minor. The difficulty we have in containing failure is probably the reason some people view it as contagious. And yet the emphasis is not quite right: a failure when recognized is never so serious as when it isn't recognized. A balance is restored. We could even say than an acknowledged failure does not exist.

Inventors, I suspect, have a very high failure rate, but their attitude of 'try-try-again' protects, within society, the freedom to persevere. Edison once said that he failed his way to success. Nowadays we tend to make collective the kind of individualism that Edison represented. Now we do things in groups. Someone gave me a quote from a Silicon Valley executive: "We tell our people," he said, "to make at least ten mistakes a day. If you're not making ten mistakes a day, you're not trying hard enough." Imagine the change on a person's resume.

If it is true that only failure or anticipated failure is the author of change, a list of failures would be more revealing than a list of successes. Sometimes the failures of big ideas are more impressive than the successes of little ones. For several years the artist's modesty is also evident, and the respect with which he treated others, regardless of their age or occupation. There are tantalizing references to his correspondence with Matisse, various interviews with French publications, and the memoirs of his young assistant - all of which promise a more extended articulation of his ideas. But Terrasse chooses to remain true to the tone and authority of the older man's ideas. But Terrasse chooses to remain true to the tone and authority of the older man's ideas. For the most part, Bonnard's own remarks which appear in the text are drawn from conversations with this grand-nephew, which lends them an intimate character.
the small diary/datebook in which he made single-word weather notes and drew quick impressions of what he observed (adding comments such as “weather fine but cool, there is vermilion in the orange shadows and violet in the grey ones”), color photographs of the house before its restoration, and more showing its current restored state. Forty-two paintings are selected from the 217 that he painted but cool, there is vermilion in the orange shadows and violet in the grey quick impressions of what he observed (adding comments such as “weather fine

The illustrations are grouped according to the room or view which they depict and here is where the revelation lies and where the meaning of Bonnard’s own remarks becomes fully understood. After the photos and drawings familiarize us with the house and its contents we can better marvel at their transformation in the paintings. We see how he may have been struck by a slanting table edge seen from this angle or a succession of shapes from that one, noticed perhaps as he walked from one room to the next. Figures appear in fleeting glimpses — stooping under a table, disappearing behind a door, partially revealed on the far side of a room or in a mirror or out a window. The long dining table is painted over and over, yet the simplest rearrangement of red and yellow clothes (or beaked fruit, and pottery) on its surface lead him to audacious compositions which simultaneously extend the space and flatten it, while immersing the familiar in color that can only be described as sublime. He is powerfully stimulated by the daily, and calls upon his lifetime of visual experience to record his freshest impressions. He commented “in the Suite A Manger (Dining Room) which I’m painting at the moment, I’m trying to do what I’ve never done: give the impression one has on entering a room — one sees everything and at the same time nothing.” In these late works, edges disappear, color dominates, and the paintings radiate a unified effect rather than an accumulation of particular ones. “Likeness is a means, not an end” he jotted in his diary, and “It’s not a matter of painting life. It’s a matter of giving life to painting.”

Nothing chatters the life or vision of this artist, who rejects Matissie’s suggestion that he pass a winter in the comfort of a Cannes hotel: “... for the sake of a little material well-being I would lose everything that forms the basis of my existence, the constant contact with nature and my sort of work.” As the austere house supplies him with endless and vibrant motifs, so his daily walk refreshes his eye and senses. “Art will never be able to do without nature” he maintains. “When one forgets everything all that remains is oneself. And that is not enough. It is necessary to have a subject, minimal as it may be, to keep your feet on the ground.” In January of 1934 several revealing entries appear in his diary. “Untruth is cutting out a piece of nature and copying it,” yet “when one distorts nature it still remains underneath, unlike purely imaginative works.” And “one can take all possible liberties of line, form, proportions, and colors to make feeling intelligible and clearly visible.”

Herein lies Bonnard’s greatest achievement and what this modest book demonstrates most effectively. Paintings of the same room or view bear little resemblance to one another in color or composition, because each is charged with a specific response to the subject. Bonnard remarks that “in the future one will have to know whether one is a painter-decorator or a painter of feeling,” and he describes the painter of feeling as “an artist whom one imagines spending a lot of time doing nothing but looking around him and within himself.”

His own work makes it clear that it is not eccentricity which moves him, nor ornamentation, but rather the degree of feeling which is realized in each painting. While we can take an intimate pleasure in recognizing the contents of his rooms or knowing just where the artist must have stood to observe a certain motif, the paintings elicit a far stronger response than this. Four or five pictures of the small sitting room, for example, vary widely in color, composition, and mood. They leap beyond the raw visual information recorded in preliminary drawings and each one carries a unique emotional charge. His paintings combine the particular beauty of one person’s visual perceptions and the passionate strength of his emotional response. This book quietly reminds us of that wondrous interplay of nature and subjectivity in all of Bonnard’s work. — Louise Hamlin
I remember lupins and foxgloves in our garden in London when I was about four. The text of that remembering is not written down in any of my notebooks, and nowhere else that I could think to go to look it up, as one looks up something so possible to tell many people, here and now, there and in the future. But reading (my literacy) does not make me any less likely to remember, in the sense of having one makes to face the world, as historical. The “privileged” seeing is in any way “privileged” it is because it (still) is regarded as a way of testing the truth of the words. Telescopes and microscopes bring in to focus the hitherto unseen, as the evidence of one’s eyes, that would make sense in court. As far as modern surveillance goes (Jay invokes a modern here, Foucault, it should be obvious that microphones play a large part. They too can reveal secrets, evidence of the ears. But these devices of observation and recording are always enclosed in the problem of telling (the truth), which is a difficulty of the social.

The discourse is distracted from the uses of seeing, in the processes of testing, as instruments of truth-testing, by the effort to establish which is the dominant sense, a dubious task at best. “So that’s what you say you see?”

Visual art is certainly prestigious. Who is going to take note of Steve Benson’s Blue Book (The Figures/Roof, 1988)? Painters, theoreticians, and historians of the “visual” arts? “Visual arts” certainly have a market value above that of writing. Does that actually mean that reading of the visual arts has improved, that everybody wants to engage with it? On the contrary, few do. Is this the “ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era” (p. 3)?

Much marketed and noticeable in the later twentieth century are music, movie and video. But these have tended to mass audience interests: specialized and difficult material has been marginalized. The oddity, in the visual arts, is the marketing of the new, advanced, difficult, and specialized, the other-than-mass-audience materials.

The Blue Book is a collection of texts, actually performance-events, and of overlays of texts one over another, or several texts variously interwoven. A face-to-face relation between this and David Salle’s painting is not as far as I know part of any ongoing public discussion, even though there is a comparable problem of reading overlaps, overlays, transparencies, and disjunctures in the work of each. I suppose that market divisions in the arts preclude it, with the result that most discussion of the arts is confined to one art with no reference to activities in another. The advantages of the cross-overs and in-betweens of the seventies have been lost.

The notion of modern ocularity or visuality as dominant is too easily granted by Jay. To go on to split modern visuality, as “Cartesian perspectivalism” is at the top in the modern era. What modern era? His is “lengthy,” back to the Renaissance, but forwards to what? The discussion does not make any acknowledgement of anything in the “visual arts” later than the painting of Degas, except for a fleeting reference to Joshua Neustein “whose fascination with the flat materiality of maps has recently earned a comparison with Alpers’ seventeenth century Dutchmen.” Should one take it that the modern era stopped in the later nineteenth century? No advantage is taken of the criticism of Cartesian perspectivalism offered by twentieth century art and artists.

In the explanations of twentieth century art, “Cartesian perspectivalism,” the “Renaissance,” “fausse tradition,” have long been targets for attack. So have traditional grammar, syntax and spelling, metronome-time and classical harmonic systems, and the classical orders of architecture. Twentieth century art could only run counter, if these older systems were shown to be either finally false or irrelevant. Hence the copious argument against them, replete with historical explanations.

The historical explanations have to be watched very carefully, though, because they are used in an evident polemic against the nineteenth century academic versions of the “renaissance” tradition, specifications for narrative, proportion, perspective, drawing, composition and finish.

Would it not be far more to Jay’s point, that there are varieties of scopic regimes in the modern era to look into the alternatives offered in the twentieth century to “Cartesian perspectival?” The supposed variations he finds in Dutch art in the seventeenth century or in the Baroque in Italy are based on readings of Svetlana Alpers and Buci-Glucksmann. He makes no attempt to discuss any art though. One finds oneself trying to follow an argument which is going on elsewhere, in these other texts. And I, for one, am irritated by the raising of them to the status of established doctrine. I would say they were very much open to doubt.

One further thought, and a footnote: the bugbear of Modernism in painting was Illusion. The use of illusion in the seventeenth century especially in Dutch painting is as a device that induces, for inducing, a particular experience. It sucks you in, to blow you out. You are induced to suppose that what you see is not simply painting but a glimpse of a place, as much like those which you see when not looking at paintings. You begin a specific kind of talk: “... in this place, there is an old woman holding up a dead rabbit, and another younger woman who points to it...” Picture becomes occasion for comment on relations of the two persons. But this reaches a limit as soon as you come to their seeming movement, what they seem to say, seem to touch, you are reminded that this is a painting. The persons are figures. Painting does not allow things to move, it does not make the sound it pretends to (a merry violinist, Honthorst), it does not smell (soiled diapers, Molenaer). It does not change as all the signs of weathering and gradual decay indicate, the clouds are fixed though fleeting.
"Figure" is no ordinary term. It reeks of the "figurative," a layering of meanings through a system of analogies, that seems to be richly in place as a way of understanding things in European culture well into the 1650s, in spite of all commercialism, and new science. And it's right in Descartes' own writing. It is precisely the illusionary experience of dreams and of disguises that he raises as that which cannot be trusted. He begins by projecting an image of himself as author, as a person, who is a kind of modern Ulysses, experienced and seeking a ground to end suspicion of illusory manifestations. The whole discourse is framed by what this figure is supposed to think. It is as much artificial as the philosophical dialogue form, but with its own special perspective.

Illusion for the modernists was not regarded as a device in a pictorial method of arousing or controlling a specific kind of discourse, but a deception, a kind of effect, the doctrine of specific nerve energies redefines vision as a capacity for being affected by sensations of the body (conceived of as nerves receiving stimulations) producing sensations. The subject, in the camera obscura model, is defined as subjective awareness of the outside world. Different sensations are identified with different sets of nerves. He identifies the special perspective to deal with it as something more than an "inert and neutral" technique.

― Tony Green

**SWISS MIX:**
Markus Raetz and Adolf Wolfli

Contemporary Swiss artist Markus Raetz's *Arbeiten/Traum/Werke 1971-1981* is a long, narrow book with pages proportioned like a single train whose corridor collects strange and fleeting expressions. Like the unearthly suspension of time and place to which one surrenders on a long voyage by train, the best drawings in this book of heads disdain the solid presence of the body for the ephemeralism of thought. Lighter than cerebral, the most striking images seem fortuitous. The linear drawings, made with leaves, twigs or india ink, are imbued with a lightness that is only latent in the modeled, more ponderous thought-drawings. These line-drawn heads possess the closed eyes of reverie, sleep, meditation, or those other, less defined but blissful moments when one is not a self but simply being. A grainy photo of the subtext of elements — eucalyptus leaves hovering slightly away from the wall, attached by pins, and throwing soft shadows. These line-drawn heads possess the closed eyes of reverie, sleep, meditation, or those other, less defined but blissful moments when one is not a self but simply being. A grainy photo of the subtext of elements — eucalyptus leaves hovering slightly away from the wall, attached by pins, and throwing soft shadows.

This catalog accompanied a show that traveled from the Kunsthalle Basel to Paris, Villerbanne and Frankfurt in 1982/83. It is available in NYC.

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Fellow Swiss artist Adolf Wolfli (1864-1930) was sumptuously introduced to the New York art public this fall with an exhibition of 85 formidable drawings at NYU's Grey Art Gallery (with catalog) and 18 more intimate drawings at Phyllis Kind Gallery. Contrary to Raetz, Wolfli's dense work nearly sucks the air capacities of a human subject was being articulated in these terms." What do you say you see, still remains the crucial question.

There is a question asked and not entirely answered here. What is the relation to painting/sculpture/photography at that time? Turner is mentioned as someone who made use of Goethe's color theory, but the position of "observer" in Constable's painting, in Barbizon painting, would be interesting in this context. I am not entirely convinced that the relation with painting is postponed until the twentieth century as Crary suggests. Nevertheless, his comments in discussion are interesting: "I'm very deliberately trying to reframe the whole problem of the observer by severing it from the kinds of questions art history has usually asked. Rather than let a history of an observer be defined in terms of the changing forms of visual representations (which gives art works a kind of ontological priority), I think of an observer as an amalgam of many disparate events and forces" (p. 48).

I would like to suggest that the uses of perspective, proportion and so on, which seem to continue in nineteenth century painting, are subject to an equally fluctuating notion of what they do for painting. The question needs to range beyond perspective to deal with it as something more than an "inert and neutral" technique.
out of the room by its cosmic intensity, mind-boggling accumulation of detail, and sheer physical presence.

Born poor and orphaned at a young age, Wolfli worked as a farm hand, soldier, and grave digger until the age of 35 when he was arrested for the attempted molestation of a young girl. Diagnosed as schizophrenic, he spent the second half of his life in an insane asylum. In his own words, a “derailed victim,” an “unfortunate case.”

Isolated and without much education, Wolfli began to write, draw, and compose music. His life-long oeuvre was an extravagant re-working of his sad life story into a grandiose journey of exploration, and subsequent possession, of the entire world and cosmos. He never left the asylum, but labored obsessively in his cell to create a parallel world from the voices that haunted him. “Oh, if only I had color pencils, how I would draw now. I have a belly full of venom and am losing hold of everything.”

In 1976, the Wolfli Foundation published an exhibition catalog in which a psychiatrist, a poet, an art historian, a musicologist, a doctor of German literature, a painter (Markus Raetz), and a musician begin to map out and interpret Wolfli’s hermetic and immense oeuvre-cum-universe. This catalog represents a layer of discoveries by those seriously studying the Wolfli phenomenon, and it continues work begun by Swiss psychiatrist Walter Morgenthaler in his 1921 monograph on Wolfli, “A mentally ill person as an artist” (not translated into English). One hopes that more work on Wolfli of this high caliber will soon be translated into English.


CALDECOTT AND COMPANY
by Maurice Sendak
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $18.95

On a recent trip to the Los Angeles Zoo, I was stopped short at the sight of the rhino. What was arresting was not so much his own qualities — his stolid structure and impervious expression — as the fact that he instantly reminded me of something I hadn’t thought of in years: Edward Lear’s drawing of a rhinoceros for his story, “Four Little Children Who Went Round The World.” The oddly elongated body and head, a sense of desolation that haunted the image of the animal, immediately recalled Lear’s put-upon beast to me. (In return for giving the children a lift, they kill the rhino and turn him into a Diapason Doorstopper.)

Maurice Sendak’s new book of essays on children’s book illustration, Caldecott and Company, reminds me of how powerfully our childhood books imprint themselves in us. Sendak recalls how he picked up a book from his childhood and, just by touching it, “was able to relive the delicious first experience of reading it.”

We all may recognize the experience he describes and have had these little madeleine epiphanies occasionally. Sendak however has profound and constant access to the emotions of childhood. He approaches the art he writes about — ranging from Caldecott and Beatrix Potter, through the films of Disney, to more recent illustrators such as Leu Myers and Edward Ardizzone — in a way that is deeply sensual. His pleasure in looking at the Babar books, “with their huge delectable format and spacious compositions” is so directly communicated to the reader that one can see the books themselves. And the same eloquence which enables him to make the work of Jean de Brunhoff sound like a satisfying meal leads us to understand the necessity of giving children a handle on the more tragic aspects of existence. Sendak’s description of a La Fontaine fable illustrated by Boutet de Monvel, in which a lamb resigns itself to death at the jaw of a wolf, forces us to reconsider the importance of acknowledging to a child “the evanescence of life,” the finding within oneself of the world’s darker aspects.

I’ve always enjoyed Sendak’s work; indeed, my own childhood is imprinted with the lively images from his book with Ruth Krauss, A Hole Is To Dig. I recently went back and reread much of Sendak’s work. His great achievement is the 1973 edition of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales. It is a satisfying work in every sense, from the hand-size volumes with their lovely subdued bindings (Sendak’s books always have wonderful bindings), to the placement of the illustrations. They always occur midway in the story’s development, not at the beginning, so that one’s sense of the narrative and characters has already taken root by the time one comes to the picture. A feeling of anticipation sets in with each tale, waiting for the image to appear, and when it does appear, it does not disappoint. It enlarges and deepens the tale, clarifying resonances one hears only dimly under the beauty and malevolence of the prose. The compression of the illustrations invites one’s eyes to roam them without resorting to the use of whimsical detail; they open the story up without acting the story out. Sendak’s current venture into Grimm seems less successful. Dear Mili is based on a previously lost story Wilhelm Grimm wrote to a little girl. The story is odd and slight — too slight to bear the burden of Sendak’s admittedly gorgeous neo-German Romantic illustrations. The spectacular double-page illustrations, with their wildly proliferating vegetation and Runician angels, are like fabulously caparisoned Arabian stallions drawing a somewhat insignificant cart.

Still, the arrival of a new book from Sendak is something to look forward to. Like any important artist, each new work contains to some measure unexpected pleasures. How many great illustrators do we have now whose work affects us in this way? As children we enjoy a perfectly matched story and picture. It is an intense happiness, this recognition of the capacity of a text to strike deeper because of visual correspondences, of the manner in which they both, text and image, embody our understanding and questioning of the world. In adulthood, illustration becomes one of the guilty pleasures because it is so seldom done well. When we see the phrase “illustrated books for adults,” it conjures up: A) dreamy book club editions with their leather and gold bindings and postage duotones; B) the work of Barry Moser, who produced magnificent editions of Moby Dick and the Alice books, and whose work now, in his dugged campaign to revive the illustrated book, seems in
danger of wearing extremely thin; and C) the worst: books by “fine artists” who have been commissioned to do the illustrations on the theory that they will bring some new insight to the work. These illustrations are practically guaranteed to be either the most simple-minded images possible or to have the least to do with the text at hand. (A case in point would be the recent Arion Press edition of Joyce’s Ulysses illustrated by Robert Motherwell’s non sequitur.) And the failure is hardly surprising, in an art world in which text and image warily circle each other, looking for an opening. The natural relationship between the two is seen as a dialectic, and this dialectic is drummed into any artist who passes through the current system of art education. Figurative work with a literary basis which is not ironic or critical is labelled pejoratively as illustration, reinforcing the idea that the relationship between the image and text is an argumentative one. (Henry James said: “It is the privilege of art to make us friendly to the human mind and not to make us suspicious of it.”) We’ve locked away in some inner vault our memories of the pleasure we took in pictured stories, denied ourselves access to this powerful lodestone — until we have a child to buy books for and find ourselves in a bookstore looking at volumes we’d forgot — or until we read the articulate essays of Sendak — or until we confront a peculiar bored beast at the zoo. — Tom Knechtel

EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE SAID

THE WORLD AS I FOUND IT

by Bruce Duffy

Ticknor & Fields, $19.95; $8.95, paper

translated by David McClintock

Alfred A. Knopf, $17.95, hard

How am I filled with pity for this man? How does it come out what the object of my pity is? (Pity, one may say, is a form of conviction that someone else is in pain.)

— Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations

Ludwig Wittgenstein was one of the most enigmatic figures in modern philosophy. His attempt to render philosophy a scientific endeavor, and his insistence on the limits of philosophy (that is, that philosophy not step into the territories of politics, of ethics, of sociology), changed the course of Anglo-American philosophy in this century. In addition, his exacting and precise delineation of specific problems of knowledge radically altered the work (and, in some cases, the lives) of many of his colleagues at Cambridge, including Russell, Ayer, and Quine. His influence on analytic fields of inquiry was far-ranging; by the 1960s, Wittgenstein was one of the philosophers of choice of many of the artists who would be grouped under the terms “Minimal” or “Conceptual.” The attempt to define a methodology which would be responsible for only that which could be deduced obviously would have great appeal for artists trying to delineate strict conditions for their art.

The question of meaning and its relation to intentionality has been one of the dilemmas of the modern epoch in art. The rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism played on the ambiguity of interpretation, relying on artistic intentionality to provide an aesthetic rationale to the enactments of gesture. With Conceptual Art, artistic intentionality became the work of art. But what are the limits of interpretation? Beyond the limits of intentionality, is it important for us to know about the artist? D. H. Lawrence believed that we should “never trust the teller, trust the tale.” Is it important for us to know, for example, that the heightened colors in Van Gogh’s paintings might be a representation of the way he experienced the world, because of a nervous disorder which caused acute sensory impressions? Artists like Jonathan Borofsky and Adrian Piper create works which are representational and directly autobiographical, but what about Meyer Vaisman or Annette Lemieux? In short, returning to Lawrence’s admonition, beyond knowing the intentions of the tale, is it important for us to know the teller? And how much should we know about the teller?

The paradox in Wittgenstein’s philosophy hinges on the concept of “the philosophy of ordinary language.” The idea of the vernacular as expressive of the most complex concepts will be familiar to those who were participants in the discourse surrounding advanced art (dance, music, and film as well as painting and sculpture) during the 1960s and 1970s. The attempt to divert attention from the subjective and the personal resulted in work which seemed more abstract than ever.

While in college in 1973, I took a course in Wittgenstein. We were taught the standard Anglo-American interpretation of Wittgenstein, seeing Wittgenstein as a paradigm of analytic philosophy, with a stress on problems of language as a way of dealing with problems of knowledge. One day, I asked if there might not have been a relation between Wittgenstein’s insistence on language and Freud’s idea of “the talking cure,” especially as, knowing the time frame of Wittgenstein’s life, he would have grown up in the Vienna of Freud. I was told that my question revealed my ignorance of Wittgenstein’s intentions, and, not only that, but if I persisted in that kind of questioning, I would flunk the course! Within that Anglo-American tradition, Wittgenstein’s work was interpreted as part of linguistic philosophy, along with the work of Frege, Ayer, and Quine, and speculation about his work in relation to history and sociology was discouraged. In a way, studying Wittgenstein within the confines of the Anglo-American tradition was like an exercise in formalism. That is, until the mid-1970s.

With the appearance of such books as Bernard Leitner’s The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1973), a fuller picture of Wittgenstein’s life was allowed into the discussion of his work. The relation of his ideas to the attempts to create scientific discourse in psychology, linguistics, and philosophy, especially as those studies were being redefined in the culture of Vienna during the early part of this century (years which coincided with Wittgenstein’s youth), now has found respectability. It is in this spirit that I want to recommend two novels: Bruce Duffy’s The World As I Found It and Thomas Bernhard’s Wittgenstein’s Nephew. However, it should be pointed out that neither novel is really an interpretation of Wittgen-
understandings."

Duffy's novel is an interpretation of Wittgenstein's life, made fictional because of changes occasioned by Duffy's particular narrative predilections. For example, Wittgenstein had three sisters, not two, but Duffy explains: "Fiction also allows the author to fill in holes and even largely make up the personalities of certain obscure real-life figures, and this I have done as well.") Duffy constantly offers speculation about Wittgenstein's life as well as the lives of those around him, but, since even the most cursory details of Wittgenstein's life had for so long been denied any hearing, even the speculation seems fun. I'd like to wager that Duffy was not a philosophy major, because no philosophy major would have dared to write a book like The World As I Found It. In the sense that the novel is a "novel of ideas," it is not totally successful. But, if you've ever read Wittgenstein, and wondered about his life, this novel seems like a good introductory biographical volume. It helps to answer questions about Wittgenstein's background, his life, and the way history related to his life, while yielding considerable pleasure.

Thomas Bernhard's Wittgenstein's Nephew is altogether more complex. It's also less directly connected with Ludwig Wittgenstein. It's an autobiographical record of Bernhard's friendship with Paul Wittgenstein, and, only tangentially, does it concern Wittgenstein. Yet Bernhard deals with issues of assimilation, acculturation, and insanity as those issues were operative in the Vienna of Bernhard's (and Paul Wittgenstein's) lifetime, issues which were crucial to the Vienna of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Bernhard writes: "For a whole century the Wittgensteins had produced weapons and machines, until finally they produced Ludwig and Paul—the famous, epoch-making philosopher and the madman, who, in Vienna at least, was equally famous and possibly more so. Paul the madman was just as philosophical as his uncle Ludwig, while Ludwig the philosopher was just as mad as his nephew Paul. Ludwig became famous through his philosophy, Paul through his madness. The one was possibly more philosophical, the other possibly more mad." Bernhard's account is, as this statement indicates, highly self-conscious, reflexive, and particularly contemplative.

Bernhard's novel (published in German in 1982; translated and published in English in 1989) is, perhaps, a fitting testimony to the myth of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, who so rigorously attempted to free philosophy from the distractions of psychology, sociology, and religion, is here alluded to, in an existential elegy that attempts to examine the background from which Wittgenstein removed himself. For the Anglo-American audience, The World As I Found It begins the process of reclaimation for Wittgenstein to the existential tradition, and Wittgenstein's Nephew helps to end that process. — Daryl Chin

Addendum: Wittgenstein's Nephew ends with the death of Paul Wittgenstein, a death Bernhard perceives as emblematic of the crisis of the life of the mind, a life that Ludwig Wittgenstein lived at its most extreme. Perhaps fittingly, Wittgenstein's Nephew was the last work of Bernhard's to be translated and published in English prior to his own death, an elegy to two members of a prominent family, and an attempt to bridge the gap between the traditions of Anglo-American and European philosophy.

CARROLL DUNHAM

Drawings 1982-1983

Text by Prudence Carlson

Verlag Fred Jahn, Munich

With text in German and English, and impeccably laid out, Carroll Dunham is 108 pages of quality packaging, a catalog that documents a year's worth of drawings dated 1982-83, drawings that gave shape to the ideas New York painter Carroll Dunham has worked with for the last five years. With ten color, and forty b&w plates, one can see the chronological development of this artist's sometimes phallic-festive obsessions, his quirky scrolal (& cervical) automatisms as they activate, with an unpredicably delicate hand growing steadily bolder, the space of often quite small sheets of paper. Libidinous graphology, Pan on the prowl, Dunham provides a hole for most every slip of the tongue, an offrhyme for every burst of melody, winking at the naturalist who would see sea anemones, centipedes, spiders, bees drunk on nectar, where another would most assuredly see the feeling of, if not the exact image of, sex, or portions thereof (the riding-high orgasmic contortions of shapes locked in abstraction, the penis at the point of entry before it is "lost" in the seams of a divided rectangle.)

Prudence Carlson's brilliant essay contextualizes the issues in Dunham's work with an unparalleled command of pertinent twentieth-century art forces. In separate chapters titled "On Line," "On Wood Grain," and "On the Drawings," she disentangles recent attitudes towards the line, considers the problem of representation, of imitations, hooking her probe to Surrealism's "seismographic capacity for registering, moment by moment, the slightest motions and nuances of the creating (or 'authorial') psyche."

In Dunham's drawings on wood grain (wood veneer and imitation wood Contact paper), she sees its latent imagery as a ready-made repository of potential signs. This surface of patterned lines and knotholes serves as a point of departure, a pre-existing "body" to discover ("violates") with graffiti-esque "vulgariies." Both self-conscious and improvisatory, Dunham's eye for fresh composition is never idle. His tendency to make images is never permitted to narrate, to become explicit. Carlen's precision signifiers track the influences of Marden, Twombly, Johns, and Surrealism on Dunham's aesthetic, cataloguing his image theatre of sometimes cartoonish, sometimes pungent obsessions with fascinating results, returning again and again to Dunham's line, its sophistication, its complexly suggestive, and finally poetic nature. Having looked hard and written with clarity, Prudence Carlen's essay will stand in relation to Carroll Dunham's early work as Apollinaire's paragraphs on Picasso in The Cubist Painters stand in relation to Picasso's early years, in substance if not in tone. — Geoffrey Young
Contributors

EMMA AMOS is a painter who lives in New York and teaches at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

CAY BAHNMILLER is an artist who lives in Detroit. She writes: "Steamship past Montevideo in '59 shaped. Great Lakes now, 'what I read then paint.'"

LILLIAN BALL is a sculptor who lives and works in New York City.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN is a poet, homemaker, and father. Rough Trades should be out from Sun & Moon Press in the Fall.

NANCY BOWEN is a New York-based sculptor spending several months in Rome.

DARYL CHIN is a playwright and producer living and working in New York.

ARTHUR C. DANTO is art critic for The Nation.

ROBERT FEINTUCH is a painter living in New York City. He exhibits his work at fiction/nonfiction gallery.

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SHARON GOLD is a painter living in New York City. She had a solo exhibition at the Stephen Rosenberg Gallery in April 1989.

DAN GRAHAM is an artist who writes. Recent works have been installed as part of the "New Urban Landscape" at 2 World Trade Center and "Theatergarten Bestiarum" exhibitions. MIT Press will publish his Selected Writings edited by Brian Wallis.

TONY GREEN, born in London in 1936, is Professor of Art History at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

MIMI GROSS is a painter living and working in New York. She has designed costumes and sets for many dance productions and exhibited in April 1989 at Tatistcheff Gallery.

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REBECCA QUAYTMAN is a painter in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She is Program Coordinator at The Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1 Museum. She co-curated, with Ake Fant, "The Secret Pictures of Hilma af Klint."

ARLENE RAVEN is an art historian writing criticism for the Village Voice and a variety of art magazines and scholarly journals. Her collected essays were published by UMI Research as Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern, 1988.

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MAY STEVENS is a New York-based artist currently a fellow at The Bunting Institute at Radcliffe. She will have two murals The Canal and The Garden at The Bunting in May and June, and will lecture at The Carpenter Center at Harvard.

RICHARD TUTTLE is an artist who has been living and working for twenty-five years in New York City and is married to the poet Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge.

FAITH WILDING is an artist who writes, paints, draws, teaches, and works in radio. She has produced a suite of etchings funded by a NYFA Fellowship. She is a member of the Heresies collective.

PAMELA WYE is an artist living in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She recently had paintings and drawings at Artists Space and published writings in Arts.

GEOFFREY YOUNG is a poet living in Western Massachusetts, the publisher of The Figures, and teaches a class at Columbia.
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