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We asked a number of artists and critics from around the country to consider these questions and related issues.

How do race, ethnicity, and class influence art discourse and practice?

Do you feel that enough artists of color are currently having work exhibited and discussed?

Do you think that recent attention to artists of color and to artists of the third world (in articles and exhibitions) is effecting a genuine transformation of mainstream art discourse, or does tokenism remain a problem? And, if so, how does it operate in the contemporary art world?

Are there stylistic double standards at work or a stylistics of "otherness"?

Alternatively, is there pressure for an artist of color to assimilate to mainstream ideas and artistic practices?

Emma Amos

In a letter to The New York Times, April 23, 1989, I wrote, in part:

It is true that African American artists are doing work that will help all Americans to refocus on our shared strengths, as Michael Brenson so rightly described March 12th (1989) in "Black Artists: A Place in the Sun."

I am invisible as an African American woman artist. I show in February. Thank God for February. I show with other black artists in ghetto month shows that fulfill the funding needs of white institutions. Our few and far between shows seldom get shuffled into the other 11 months of the calendar. And I come from a long line of African American artists, including Mary Edmonia Lewis, Augusta Savage, Horace Pippin, Palmer Hayden, Hale Woodruff, Norman Lewis, Alma Thomas, Nellie Mae Rowe and Romare Bearden, whose exhibitions also get compressed into the shortest month of the year.

Are there enough black and minority artists whose work is currently exhibited and discussed? No. What would it be like if we heard jazz and the blues mostly in February? Since the early 1989 New York Times flurry of written attention to the sculptor Mel Edwards, which prompted me to write that art by blacks was "definitely happening," I have a feeling that some of the art-viewing public, and some artists as well, think minorities have had "enough" exposure. But
"wait-your-turners" can cool out; not much has happened since. A flurry of interest in and resentment against Martin Puryear for his "Sao Paulo Bienal" outing and an outrageous put-down of black artists in an article by Schjeldahl (Elle, 11/89) on the occasion of Basquiat's Baghoomian retrospective broke the usual stay-at-the-rear-of-the-bus silence.

Minorities and women still don't receive press coverage in proportion to their importance or numbers. Reviews and art magazine interviews are hard to come by for every artist, but even more elusive for minority artists. I'm sure much of the progress that has been made is a result of the activities of the Guerilla Girls ragging on the press, curators, publicly supported viewing spaces and museums, and not because awareness or scholarship has risen at these institutions.

Artists make the kind of art their experience leads them to. Black people stand outside much of this country's life — schools, churches, advertising, film, etc. Even in fields in which they are central figures (sports, jazz, pop music, style and fashion) they are often exploited. The experiences of black and non-white artists produce art that has a different framework from that of white artists. Why is it that when minority artists are trained along with white artists in Western European male-biased college and graduate art programs, their work still may look "different?" I think it is because black artists know or sense that what art historians, curators, and critics want to write and talk about as ART is only a fragment of the picture. From the minority artist's position on the OUTSIDE, participation in what we see as an ART WAGON TRAIN FORMED IN A CIRCLE to exclude us is silly at best and apartheid at worst.

Critics and observers of the art scene write about what they experience through their limited Western-European centered eyes. What has been left out of our school curriculum? If women and black artists are just now appearing in a few art texts, if books are segregated according to race, sex, and the dominant style of the period, then what scholars at which universities are learned enough to teach the total picture?

There is very little criticism of the work of non-white artists which relates the content of their work to the work of white artists. Why are black voices only compared to other black voices? Why all this talk about the language of jazz and capturing cultural history in the works of black artists like Romare Bearden, Bob Thompson, Faith Ringgold? Why not look for the language of jazz and cultural history, and other significantly American art forms in the smooth, cold, smug-look of works of Frank Stella, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre? It's as self-contained as that.

I feel it is that when minority artists are trained along with white artists in Western European male-biased college and graduate art programs, their work still may look "different?" I think it is because black artists know or sense that what art historians, curators, and critics want to write and talk about as ART is only a fragment of the picture. From the minority artist's position on the OUTSIDE, participation in what we see as an ART WAGON TRAIN FORMED IN A CIRCLE to exclude us is silly at best and apartheid at worst.

Do I think there are stylistic double standards? My answer comes when I just say my last paragraph the other way.

There is NO criticism of the work of white artists which relates the content of their work to the work of non-white artists. Why are white voices only compared to other white voices? Why are German, Jewish, Italian, French, and Middle-European Americans allowed to call themselves American artists and given to hold the standard for American art, while Chinese-Americans, Native-Americans, Brazilian-Americans, and African-Americans remain always "people of color," or "minority" artists?

When Europe and the East look at this country, they steal our rap and hip-hop, our blues, jazz, and country-western, our graffiti, movies, and pop performances, our sneaker-wearing hard-working women, and our prejudices. Who says the mainstream is blue chip artists? The mainstream is me, baby-darling.

Why am I so concerned since I'm one of those people who seems to be many places at once? Because usually, when you see me, you'll also see Howardena Pindell, Faith Ringgold, Vivian Browne, Camille Billops, Clarissa Sligh, Deborah Willis, Lorna Simpson, and maybe Tyrone Mitchell, Mel Edwards, Jackie Whitten, Al Loving, Houston Conwill, Terry Adkins, Bill Huxton, James Little, Gina Endesha Daniels, James Andrew Brown, Howard McCaleb, and the other hard working black artists who gather in support of each other. But we know that most gatherings of artists, curators, dealers, and critics at museums, galleries, art societies, and socials are without us. DON'T YOU MISS US WHEN WE'RE NOT THERE?

The following are excerpts from Zora Neale Hurston's essay published in 1928 called "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" and collected by Alice Walker in "I Love Myself When I Am Laughing,"

I do not always feel colored. Even now I often achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville before the Hegira. I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background. I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. It is merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries. My country, right or wrong. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me.

But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellaneous propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of things priceless and worthless. A first-rate diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag.

"...and the Rhetoric of Power"

HAS CULTURE HAVE COLOR?

Josely Carvalho

My art is tightly connected with myself and my hybrid culture. Although I was born and raised in Brazil, I have lived more than half of my life in the United States. I have become more and more aware of the dichotomy of living in a space that is not mine while, at the same time, no longer belonging to a country that I still consider mine. The tension, brought about by these dichotomies, is further intensified in the art world which makes me more and more conscious of being viewed as the "other." Questions such as: How am I perceived and seen here as well as in Brazil? What are the stereotypes associated with Hispanics, Latinos, and Latin Americans in this country? What are the consequences of these stereotypes in the survival of an artist? And What are the consequences which are bound to create an impact and to shape one's modus vivendi? What does this do to my identity, my politics, my art? Do I embrace my cultural identity or do I accept a cultural dependency? To accept dependency for me is to accept homogenization. It is to accept labels... Hispanic... Latino... Third World... woman of color... or any new term that may arise to satisfy a political purpose, an intellectual curiosity, a naivete, or even a guilt of some... It is to allow myself to become a racial object rather than a subject, a human resource rather than a human being.

A few years ago, "Hispanic" was the standard label to categorize "us." Its racist intention tended to disregard differences in order to facilitate statistics, descriptions, surveys, and comprehension. Most Latin Americans prefer to classify themselves by country of origin rather than the standardized label "Hispanic," because it blurs their historical identity. And yet, a more detached label "Latino" has followed. It still includes the negativity of homogenization, the lack of incorporating socioeconomic class and the failure of understanding historical differences among Puerto Ricans, Mexican/Americans, Dominicans, Haitians, Cubans, Central Americans and South Americans, and within Central and South Americans, the distinct nationalities. When classifying, we automatically dismiss certain groups either because of language, color, nationality, gender, or class. The obsession for categorizing and labeling stems perhaps from a fear of understanding subtleties, layers, and differences. Categorizations tend to stereotype. Where does it come from, this race and color obsession that has been re-ignited in this country lately? By constantly looking for new classifications as the solution for the discontent with older classifications, rather than fighting classifications per se, it tends to throw us back in the hands of chauvinistic and racist intentions.

In the last year, a new label has arisen: "women of color." Afro-Americans, by uniting through denominations (even if these labels are constantly updated), build pride and self-respect as themselves as a group and as an individual within the group. In this way, classifications can be used positively as an organizing tool. It seems to be necessary to build strength and power. Unfortunately, I don't see that this has been the case for "Hispanics." By deconstructing "colored" and re-constructing into "of color," Afro-Americans empower a once powerless word and have created a terminology that embodies personal and political strength and includes all others that have been marginalized or segregated. Unfortunately, the terminology 'woman of color' has a tendency to divide us rather than connect us. It segregates us by race and by sex and it can further separate peoples of different cultures as well as create division within a culture.

I have personally suffered discrimination here in the United States and yet I do not want to be broadly classified and lose my cultural identity. "Woman of color" is a denomination imposed upon us. To accept this label is to give away our history, diverting the attention from a complex cultural subject (where race is a part of it) to that of a one-dimensional color issue.

Do I have to color myself to be with my sisters?... or... if I keep a colorless memory of my ancestors, do I become "an other" within the "other"?... do I have options?...
what can you do? I tried to be polite, but it made me feel that everything was hopeless. What’s done is done. Is this an example of racism? I honestly don’t know.

I took samples of films by Asian-Americans to a prominent film programmer. There were “experimental” shorts, of a wide variety. She returned them, with a note saying that she was not impressed with any of the work, and some of the work was horrible: the filmmakers should be ashamed of themselves for denying their Asian heritage. A few weeks ago, I found out that when Isaac Julien showed the same programmer films from the Sankofa Film Collective and the Black Audio-Film Collective from London, her response was the same. Under no circumstance would she ever show such work, and who did these black British filmmakers think their audience was? No one, she informed them, would sit through these films! The message is clear: she does not feel that nonwhites have any business doing “experimental” work. Is this an example of racism? I honestly don’t know.

Recently, I was on a panel of the College Art Association, organized by Howardena Pindell. The topic was “De-Facto Racism in the Arts.” The point is in all of the cases cited above, the people were not intentionally racist (not even the film programmer). They were (by and large) “liberals,” who, confronted with nonwhites not fulfilling specified tasks, didn’t know how to react. In the arts, this is particularly insidious, because of the issue of taste and sensibility. People can always say, I know what I like. But what conditions what they like?

About three years ago, the work of Martin Puryear began to be noticed on a national level. There was an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of several recent pieces in 1988; a few months later, his work was included in the Whitney Biennial. When the first reviews appeared, Puryear’s work was seen in terms of the scale and texture of post-Minimal sculpture and in terms of his contemporaries such as Joel Shapiro and Jackie Winsor. However, just before the Whitney Biennial, Puryear’s work was included in several survey exhibitions of Afro-American artists. Since then, the critical reaction to his work has changed, subtly but definitely. An example of this might be seen in the writings of Michael Brenson in The New York Times. The first time Puryear was reviewed in The New York Times, he was reviewed as an example of a post-Minimal sculptor (such as Shapiro, Winsor, Ursula von Rydingsvard). No mention of race. Suddenly, this changed. Brenson writes in a long essay in the Arts & Leisure section of The New York Times of Sunday, October 29, 1989: “Part of what distinguishes Puryear from many other minority artists is his lack of defensiveness about mainstream American art. He remains something of an outsider, with one foot outside the mainstream, but he has one foot comfortably within it as well.” What is Martin Puryear, a Martian? As far as I know, he’s an American. What the hell is this talk about “mainstream” and “outsider”? Ursula von Rydingsvard could be considered more of an “outsider” (since she wasn’t born in this country), but she’s rarely discussed in those terms. Martin Puryear is an American, went to American art schools, where he was taught about American art, and that’s what he does.

This point about art schools and training has been made by people as different as the artist Yong Soon Min and the art historian Judith Wilson. And Puryear hadn’t been discussed as an “outsider” in his initial reviews. Just as a sculptor. To personalize: I’m an American. People who meet me always ask me where I come from, as if I were born in China or Hong Kong or somewhere. Pardon me; I’m a fourth-generation American. My family came over here in the 1880s. (My father was born in New York City, my mother was born in Pittsburgh, my grandmother, who just died at the age of 90, was born in New York City.) When people talk to me on the phone, before meeting me, they never ask me where I was born. It’s obvious the minute I open my mouth (New York City), but when they see my face, suddenly I might as well be the brother from another planet. This is also funny, because one of my best friends is from a Swiss German family. She was born here, but her parents weren’t, and she grew up in Inwood, in a neighborhood full of other immigrant (often German Jewish) families. As she once said, her knowledge of American culture was very sporadic, until that fatal day in high school when we became friends.

Another example: Many African-American artists (photographers, choreographers, sculptors) get a lot of calls in the winter. Arts organizations are trying to line up African-American artists for "Black History Month" which is February (a friend of mine noted, wouldn’t you know it, the shortest month in the year). One photographer I know said, I stopped taking those calls. If he’s not “good” enough to be shown at any other time, why should February be any different?

I could go on and on, but I’d like to conclude on two points. The first is that I haven’t worked as an artist in five years. There are many reasons for that, but I’d like to try to focus on one, relating to ethnicity. My decision to do "theater" was partly formulated on the idea that I would take what Richard Foreman among other theater Modernists and post-Modernists had done and subvert it. It was the whole avant-garde aesthetic of negation. You test the limits of the generation before you. I thought this was perfectly fine, but what I didn’t realize was that people expect you to be docile if you’re Asian.

It’s a little like Ralph Ellison’s concept of "Invisible Man": no matter what I’ve done, I’m not white, I’m not African-American, and I don’t do “Asian-American” work, and I won’t bullshit about myself in phony Asian-American terms, so it’s as if I never existed. It’s like the Cole Porter song, “It’s the wrong place! And the wrong race! Though your face is charming! It’s the wrong face.” Basically, what people such as the critic were telling me was: you have the wrong face. What did they expect? I’m Chinese-American. As we used to say, that’s my name, don’t wear it out. I’m not ashamed of it. But it has nothing to do with my work. It doesn’t even have much to do with my life. Since I’ve been 15, I’ve been hanging out in the artworld, and so my work has concerned itself with what John Howard called “performance lining up with art issues.” I’m 36 now. That’s more than half my life. And even before that, my life had nothing to do with immigration, or with laundries, or with Chinese restaurants. And I wouldn’t pretend that it had.

All this makes me defensive, and when you get defensive, you get infec-tual, and there’s a lot of psychological damage from this guilt people toss at you. What I mean is: "apologies" are also threats. People were telling me, you weren’t
being a good Asian-American, you weren’t being what we wanted an Asian-American playwright or performance artist to be, it’s your fault that we misunderstood your work. My fault? Huh, don’t blame me for your ignorance! Don’t blame me for your stereotyping! Don’t blame me for your (unconscious) racism! For the last five years I have been primarily involved in art activism, been doing everything to help establish (and reestablish) Asian-American media artists. I have helped them exhibit their works, both within the Asian-American media community and outside of it. I have alerted programmers and curators to their work. I have tried to help them find funding. It’s not easy. I started with the example of the two young filmmakers, one white, one nonwhite. It will take the nonwhite longer to get established. Longer, yes, but it’s not never. It is not impossible.

There are many traditional venues for those nonwhite artists who work in a “traditional” vein, for instance, Asian-Americans who make documentaries about the Asian-American experience. But there are others, who are making the claim that, as Americans, they can work as American filmmakers and video artists. It’s still not easy: the hot young white filmmaker will get calls from Hollywood. A young Asian-American filmmaker will not (and may never get such calls). It will take twice as long to get half as much. And, even there, part of those screenings and bookings will be dependent on the Asian-American media community (and if that community is closed, that’s it). But these changes are happening, and will definitely happen if we work for them.

One can make a difference, and, because of this interest in new filmmakers and video artists, I’ve gotten to know the work of people like Lise Yum, Jon Moritatsu, Gregg Araki, Roddy Bogawa, Rea Tajiri, Tom Yasumi, and Rico Martinez. Obviously, this is (in a way) all displacement: I’m channeling my anger and frustration about my own work into this activism. But, it’s something to do. Tom Yasumi (in passing) made one of the funniest comments I’ve ever heard: he said that when his father first told him that they were moving to California from Japan, he cried, because he was afraid of going to America. But then he realized that when his father first told him that they were moving to California from Japan, he cried, because he was afraid of going to America. And then he realized that if he had stayed in Japan, he would have been one of those kids who wanted to be an American. This way, he is one.

And that’s the point: we’re not “Asian-Americans” or some other species of life form, we’re Americans. And that’s the way it crumbles, cookie-wise.

Tom Finkelpearl

In my mind it is clear that the current art world is racist and sexist. Certainly the statistics compiled by the Guerilla Girls have proven this beyond a shadow of a doubt. But this should come as no surprise if one considers the art world in the context of popular culture. How often do you see a multi-cultural cast in a Hollywood film? Or a Broadway play? Or listen to an “integrated” radio station? Even record shops and bookstores segregate African-American artists. If you look at the structure of the “mainstream” art world, it is clear that almost all of the positions of power are held by white middle-class men and women. The recent “attention to artists of color” has been within a framework of museums, galleries, and publications that are directed by an elite. Even the phrasing of the question posed for this statement seems to be based upon the sense that the center is the white power structure. When you inquire about “... recent attention to artists of color...” we must ask where the attention is coming from.

A recent study has shown that European anthropologists created history for the Maori of New Zealand, through the questionable discovery of a 1350 migration from Polynesia. The “discovery” of this migration, now accepted by the Maori as historical fact, conveniently fit certain Eurocentric theories about the movements of cultures from the “cradles of civilization.” Western anthropologists now believe these findings to be false, but their study of the culture had a lasting effect. While “post-modern” anthropologists are calling for a new cultural relativism, a continuous reinvention of culture, there is still the sense that we are studying them. Where are the Maori anthropologists to help us re-invent our culture?

We must recognize our own cultural bias, the bias of the establishment in the “attention to artists of color.” As a white middle-class curator, I am not fully prepared to understand all art works. The cultural bias in my education is astonishing. In the ten art history courses I took in college and graduate school (with an emphasis on 19th and 20th century), I was not exposed to a single African-American artist. My wife, Eugenie Tsai can say the same, and she has finished her course work toward a Ph.D. in modern art. Everything we have learned on the subject has been self-initiated.

Certainly this does not mean it is wrong for me to exhibit the work of artists of color at The Clocktower. But it is equally important for me to push to make the institution, and its decision-making apparatus more inclusive and multi-cultural. To the present, what has happened for the most part is that the mainstream museums and galleries have made an attempt to absorb different sorts of art without changing their character, and the mainstream audience has yet to make a real effort to find new contexts within which to see art. Artists of color are given an “opportunity” to show, but it is on the terms of the establishment. No significant shift of power has taken place. We don’t only need artists of color but also administrators, curators, dealers, fund raisers, writers, editors, funders, board members, preparators, registrars, and especially directors. In our current system the museum’s role is to be exclusive, the curator’s to be selective. We need inclusiveness at all levels to effect a real change.

In the same question, you wonder if there has been a transformation of mainstream art discourse. This phrase is problematic to me in two ways: First, the notion of a “mainstream” seems to be a barrier in the path toward an inclusive art world. We do not need a transformed mainstream but a structural change, a multi-faceted art world more like Jesse Jackson’s metaphoric “quilt” or David Dinkins’ “mosaic.” Second, the “discourse” is not what needs to be transformed, but the course of action. Discourse within the structure cannot dismantle the structure. As Malcolm X said, “a chicken cannot produce a duck egg,” and the discourse to which you refer is still among the chickens.

We must address the political and social implications of our artistic “practice.” Many artists and writers are willing to make political statements in their
work, to criticize the "ideology of display." We see show after show at commercial galleries that are purported critiques. But these critiques are presented within the existing system. They are veiled political statements, but the veils are so opaque that the actual function of the objects belies their supposed intent. Jeff Rooms is not making his collectors examine the nature of the art object in any way that interferes with the purchase and enjoyment of his luxury items. While Barbara Kruger's critiques may be helpful to inquiring minds within the mainstream, her one-of-a-kind photographic objects are bought and sold in the traditional fashion, even bypassing the monetary and philosophical questions of uniqueness presented by the reproducible photographic print. The galleries these artists show in are high-powered businesses catering to an elite — and the same can be said for the art magazines that are supported by the commercial system.

But I hate to be so negative. There are alternative, positive models. Here is a few, listed in increasing detachment from the current system: Critical engagement: Tim Rollins and K.O.S. perhaps present the best example of using the commercial system while engaging in a positive social experiment. There is nothing particularly radical about their final product, except in relation to the nature of its creation: a collective and collaborative project within a community context. It is hard to integrate their context of creation with the context of exchange. Inside-out critique: There are a number of African-American artists whose work serves as social and museological critique, exhibited within the established system. Renee Green, Fred Wilson, and Daniel Tisdale, for example, have each recently exhibited works that question the traditional notions of anthropological display — the natural history museum. Participatory projects: The Asian American Art Centre's "China June 4" exhibition and Glenn Weiss' global participatory event "Exhibition Diomede" were both multi-cultural, politically based, non-commercial, and open to all artists. All work submitted (within the size requirements) was exhibited. These exhibitions set up the model of curator as cultural catalyst instead of exclusive tastemaker. Self-initiated short-term projects: For example, David Hammons' five-story basketball hoops in an empty lot in Harlem bypassed the art world to create site-specific work for the community. Long-term investigation/intervention: Bolek Greczyński's "Living Museum" at Creedmoor Mental Hospital, and Mierle Ukeles' work within the Sanitation Department show that context can define the meaning of art, and vice versa. These artists, and many more, are taking action rather than engaging in internal discourse. Their model can help us think of new directions rather than dwelling on the shortcomings of the present and past.

3. The class connotations of the word "practise" are troubling — doctors have a "practice," carpenters do not.

SUPPLANTING OUTLINE FOR A PREFACE TO "GET THE RACIST."
A WORK NEVER TO BE REALIZED
I. The racist does not want you to be you. It would have been better had you been excluded from being yourself. The racist wants to destroy you for your difference, to begin with. The racist's object is murder. Naturally too, it is never not a question of economics.

A. Should racist (or misogynist or elitist) acts against the form that a mind-body has been obliged to start out with succeed in having done with it — that is the killing point.
1. Failing the complicity of the victim, this could never be accomplished.
2. The victim's full complicity ( escort) requires after all that to put it as T. Carlyle forcefully did in The French Revolution — ordinances of Art [i.e. artful ordinances (read decrees)] become confused with and taken for ordinances of Nature: "Twenty years ago, the Friend of Men (preaching to the dead) described the Limousin Peasants as wearing a pain-stricken (souffre-douleur) look, a look past complaint, 'as if the oppression of the great were like the hail and the thunder, a thing irreparable, the ordinance of Nature.' And now if in some great hour, the shock of a falling Bastille should awaken you, and it were found to be the ordinance of Art merely; and remediable, reversible!"

B. Between radical, total erasure and some measure of continuance, how many different positions of retreat on both sides; no neutral zone with racism in play, ...

II. For those who play the innocent, saying, "O agony, o racism, o misogynry whatever could that be?"
A. Know that it never comes without a broad-based and definite No, foretelling an exclusion, hard or otherwise.
   (It may be too early in this to point out that a soft inclusion is yet another means of assuring a hard (read total) exclusion)

B. To determine the limit of inveterate nastiness, live as the noticeably other in a country not your own.
   ("But the body, each body, is its own country with which it travels," some might rightly protest.)

III. Contrary to what might be expected, the art world alleviates not at all the hideously dependable agony of all this.
A. This, the art world, is not, as might have been hoped, a more forgiving version of the general case; instead, its main non-intraction is that it is a direct bell. The motives of its members are too mixed and maddly for anything resembling truth or justice to prevail. Not much chance of
careful evaluation and weighing of evidence in a world in which the order of the day is manipulate or be manipulated.

1. The resultant asymmetrical relations to "what is to be done" put a dull half-ideological face on discourse or on attempts at discourse.
   a. The artist as theorist will sink into his or her own sodden half-thought.
   b. One protects one's own — nothing different here. The one-man show and the one-man anything and everything.

   (1) If it's not like me and my discourse, it's quite worthless, or, if it is not part of a discourse that I as I recognize, it's, practically by definition, unworthy of attention, or on an arguably less conscious level, simply, if it's not for my (or my country's) pocket-book, then I'd rather it be excluded.

   (2) How to get the point across without coming out with it, or, what might suffice as necessary and sufficient slurs of exclusion.
      a. "This artist has no critical sense!"
         i. Wielded unjustly but effectively against an artist of great critical sensibility.
         ii. Even should this be an accusation that is justified why is it never one that is accompanied by an invitation of some kind into the prevailing discourse — remedial course in critical process; that this be no longer a society without mercy.

b. The use of the value-judgement in the casual but definitive dismissal of a work of art.
   i. Too messy or too clean
   ii. Too decorative or too minimal
   iii. Lacking X

c. Do the members of the art world seriously think that there are no witnesses to these cruel, destructive games?

2. It has been set up in the dominant or dominating culture to have it that all discourse in those countries made up of races non-validated for the production of great artists in our time never be taken as in any way corresponding to what are supposedly the main discourses.
   a. A provincial mafia believes, and is continually seeking to convince (rope in) others, that it alone has the right to speak to and for what is international.
   b. Layers of deceit or a glimpse at the extent to which racism might be hopelessly entrenched in the art world.

   (1) A chance meeting with an art critic. I knew her to be someone who, despite her relative unfamiliarity with the work of a new presence in the New York art world, an artist considered to be important by numerous artists and critics, one who had come from what might be said to be a non-dominant culture, had even so gone about letting it be known around town that this was certainly work that was too trivial to play a role in the central discourse. As it happened, this artist's work was being shown that month at a gallery that I knew this critic to frequent. Here then was a chance for evidence to be presented and the case to be reconsidered, it immediately came to mind, if only ... I told her that the show was going on, to which she replied that she was aware of that, and then I asked her to go take a look at it. At this point, she fidgeted and appeared distracted; she made it plain how disinterested she was in the subject. "I think you are behaving this way because you are prejudiced!" I cried out. "Well," she snapped back at me, "maybe I am, but isn't everyone?" She's never reconsidered this artist's work; she never even made a try. Ten years later, we find her wanting to be recognized as a critic concerned for the rights of third-world artists, as long, that is, as these are kept off to one side. She has changed nothing about her critical approach, except for the all-too-predictable adding on of hypocrisy to racism. Then, go and fight that.

   [To Come to a Stop.]

Renee Green

"I WON'T PLAY OTHER TO YOUR SAME"

Perhaps this is cynicism on my part, but lately it seems as if the "Other" has become a cultural industry. With the casual and ever more frequent use of the term in art discussions, in art journals, and in other cultural contexts, I'm afraid an essentialist category is being created, one which is defined by the trait of absence from the "mainstream." I suggest that a re-examination of this cultural and political construct is in order, and that its unexamined use can in fact reinforce dominant ideology.

With the repeated mention of the category of "Other," another seldom-encountered and rather hazy and well-shrouded category comes to mind, that of not-otherwise, an insistent centralness that assumes itself to be primary and further assumes itself to constitute the norm. About this category we hear very little.

The notion of the "Other" as a category separate from the "mainstream" (which mainstream?) is a division which may be useful, as next mental separations are for funding agencies, but which is perplexing for someone who is designated as the "Other." I'd like to turn to fiction to provide an example of this situation as it is encountered by Sarah Phillips, the main character and narrator in a novel by
the same name written by Andrea Lee in 1984. A conversation develops between Gretchen and Sarah after they have both been assigned to the hockey team for "athletic pariahs" at the private school they attend, where Sarah is the only black.

Gretchen stretched out on the grass, propping herself on one round elbow, and peered at me through an oily fall of hair. "My father knows yours," she said. "Your father is James Forrest Phillips, the civil-rights minister. My father is very interested in civil rights, and so am I."

"Don’t do me any favors," I said in a tough, snappish voice I had learned from Dragnet.

Gretchen looked at me admiringly. "Don’t you think it’s rather romantic to be a Negro?" she asked. "I do. A few years ago, when Mama and Daddy used to talk to us about the Freedom Riders in the South, my sister Sara­beth and I spent a whole night up crying because we weren’t Negroes. If I were a Negro, I’d be like a knight and skewer the Ku Klux Klan. My father says Negroes are the tragic figures of America. Isn’t it exciting to be a tragic figure? It’s a kind of destiny!"

The next sentence describes the motley pair these two make as best friends, so there is no outraged response on Sarah’s part because outrage under these circumstances isn’t in order. But annoyance is, and that annoyance with the spoken designation of otherness is apparent in Sarah’s “snappish voice.” Even though Gretchen is well intentioned, and she is in fact the only girl at the Prescott School for Girls who befriends her and supports her “position,” her initial connection to Sarah is bound to her mythical world of Negroes. This passage underlines the point that “Other” is not a natural state, but rather one which is constructed and which must be designated, and once it is designated it can either be accepted or re-fused.

Sarah’s ranking at being designated as the “Other,” even though this position is regarded in a “positive” way, can hint at the problems with the term “Other” (and its implications of monolithic wholeness) and suggests the enabling possibilities of a self-designation of difference. Unlike otherness difference implies the articulation of one’s own complex position in relationship to the matrix of cultural, political, and social relations suggested by class, ethnicity, and gender, rather than an imposed naming. I quote Trinh T. Minh-Ha on this point:

To make things even more complex and more disposed to critical investi­gation, “western” and “non-western” must be understood not merely in terms of oppositions and separations but rather in terms of differences. This implies a constant to-and-fro movement between the same and the other.

To that statement, I would add that the binarism of “same” and “other” is a frustrating one and in its place I have no new names to offer, but I have instead the desire that with dialogues in which we can discuss differences as well as over­lapping concerns that these inadequate terms will not acquire more rigidity.

Hung Liu

FIVE TERMS, TWO LETTERS

My legal term: Resident Alien
My professional term: Artist
My academic term: Assistant Professor
My racial term: Asian (Chinese)
My art world term: Woman of Color (Yellow)

The following two letters were written in 1989. I believe they pertain to the relationship between artists (and especially women) of color and the academic art world. The first letter was to the Chairman of a Search Committee for a western university; the second letter was posted in a university art gallery along with my floor installation, “Where is Mao?”, which was the object of some confusion by both American and Chinese students.

Letter to the Chairman of a Search Committee

Dear Professor:

With this letter, I would like to withdraw my application for the draw­ing/painting position in your department. I have based this decision on the inter­view I had with you at the College Art Association meeting in San Francisco.

To begin with, you didn’t have my slides at the interview, and were appar­ently not familiar with my work. In fact, your comments suggested that you thought I was a traditional Chinese artist with little or no sense of contemporary art. Consequently, the interview was more about my racial and cultural back­ground than my abilities as an artist or an educator, even though I’m sure you believe the reverse to be true.

From my perspective, your questions were arrogant, patronizing, conde­sending, and full of false assumptions. For example, you continually noted your “concern” about my nationality, as if being Chinese automatically meant that I was unqualified to practice as a contemporary artist in America, or to teach American students. I wonder, was I the only candidate to be asked such ques­tions? Or was I just your to en women of color?

While you allowed me a “profound knowledge” of Chinese art and culture, you questioned my ability to “help students survive” in this one. Being a profes­sor in a university, however, does not necessarily involve teaching students to sur­vive. Such a notion has never occurred to me, either here or in China. Rather, I be­lieve, my responsibilities to students involve preparing them to take themselves seriously as artists, as well as to expose them to as many different aesthetic and cultural viewpoints as I can. In fact, diversity is precisely what I can offer Ameri­can art students, and what is more “American” than pluralism?

But what disturbed me most about our interview was the underlying as­sumption in your questions that American art and culture is somehow monolithic and uniform, more like “us” than “them.” At best, your assumption is merely academic; at worst, it is racist.
Finally, I am left with several “concerns” of my own about art education in your department, and since you seem to have yours as well, I don’t wish to add to them by being Chinese at ______ University.

Thank you.

Hung Liu

Letter to University Students

Seventy-five years after the famous battle had been fought, the former soldiers, from both the North and the South, gathered together at Gettysburg for a spectacular banquet instead of a battle. Their average age was ninety-three. One of them said: “I am enjoying it more now than I did 75 years ago.”

In order to understand the past — we call it History — we need to have a distance, a gap between Now and Then.

When I was in China during the Cultural Revolution, I was sent by the government to work in the fields, as were thousands of Chinese students, intellectuals, and artists. At that time — in 1968 — I didn’t understand what was happening to me and to the whole nation. “We the people” lost families, jobs, health, and sometimes our lives. Bending over in the sun, laboring like a cog in the proletariat machine, I experienced both physical and spiritual oppression. Time seemed endless, but after four years I was able to return to Beijing, my family, and my education.

In 1989, I find myself once again bending, but this time over a gallery floor as I place fortune cookies (which are American-Chinese inventions) on the face of Mao Tse Tung. It reminds me of the rice fields, but from both an ironic and a historical distance. If you understand the difference between a rice field in China and a gallery floor in America, then you may understand the satirical nature of my “memorial” to Mao. After all, I am here, but where is he? And like the Gettysburg veteran, I am enjoying it more now than I did twenty years ago.

Hung Liu

Speaking on behalf of the academic art world, Moira Roth once said: “We should work with artists of color, not on them.” Perhaps there is hope for cultural and aesthetic pluralism in the 90s. As a classically-trained Chinese artist in the United States, my responsibility is not to assimilate, but to express my Chineseess as clearly as I can.

Fern Logan

African-American artists still remain in the shadows of American history. This country was built on the blood, sweat, and tears of many different cultural and racial groups. Isn’t it time that the “golden door” was opened so that we can benefit from the richness of experience that we all have to offer? Why is it that the best and brightest of our talent have a hard time even making a living at their art?

Most of them need to teach to afford the security that advancing age demands. These are people who teach their art to others. Most of these others face no racial barriers. Our artists prime them and let them go on to the great American museums and galleries while the masters try to eke out a living and create their art between classes. Eventually they will accumulate enough of their own work to mount an exhibition somewhere on the fringes of the art world. If they are very lucky, been around long enough, gotten to know the right people, their work will be shown in a major gallery. For the most part, the national museums continue to look the other way. Great American artists like Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Elizabeth Catlett are still relegated to the back shelves of our major museums, virtually unknown to the masses; this is concrete evidence of a major malaise afflicting our mainstream historians and curators.

Despite the obstacles, the Harlem Renaissance continues to this day. There are writers, painters, sculptors, printmakers, filmmakers, photographers... all creating extraordinary works of art. Today we can claim the “African-American Renaissance” because these talented people of color are spread across the land from “sea to shining sea.” It’s time to recognize the fact that we share the history of this country, we are Americans. When one discusses or exhibits American art, African-Americans are to be included. And we have a long history of masters that were never included. We need to demand that Eurocentricity come to an end.

It’s hard to talk about the tragedies of artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat. He was adopted by the establishment like a prized pet. He spray-painted graffiti on the street one day and was selling his work for hundreds of thousands of dollars the next. He didn’t earn his place in the sun, he was thrust into an inferno, and he was destroyed by it. His remarkable success was even featured on the cover of The New York Times Magazine. He was photographed barefoot and, as I recall, dressed in a suit. I remember being thrilled to see a brother artist featured in such a prestigious publication, but when I studied the visual message being conveyed, I had the feeling that they were telling us that they had let a little savage into their living rooms, how quaint. When will Jacob Lawrence appear on the cover of The New York Times Magazine? Here is a genius who has been dedicated to his art for nearly fifty years and he is still creating masterpieces. He is a black man who has had major museum exhibitions, whose work is in the permanent collections of many public and private houses. He tells the story of African-Americans with artistic beauty and dignity. Why isn’t he showcased on a national level? He is definitely an artist that all Americans can be proud of.

Just as the racial barriers fell in the field of sports and African-Americans excelled, as the racial curtains lifted on the stage of music and African-Americans excelled, and as the lights in Hollywood are beginning to shine on African-Americans and they are rising to the applause, everywhere we are “allowed” to
show our talent, we excel. Yes, it's time. Time for America to understand that by letting all her people share in her heritage we will all rise. No one has anything to lose and we all have everything to gain. It's the American way!

Robert C. Morgan

Rhetoric is influenced by cultural bias. This is a perennial condition. The language I use has something to do with my Welsh background. It has something to do with being an only child. It has a lot to do with where I was born and where I grew up. It has something to do with growing up and being accustomed to a lower-standard of living. It has something to do with the kids I met after school on the streets and in the alleys behind apartment buildings outside of Los Angeles. Much of my rhetoric is used to cover emotional guilt. It is not about an elitist point of view. I never understood the concept of social class until I was a late adolescent. I was too involved with metaphysics, trying to figure out who I was. When social class became evident to me, it changed everything, my entire world view. Finding myself as an artist has always been contingent on a search for freedom — from the conditions of exploitation, standardization, and unhappiness. Generally the art world supports those who support it. There are those who make art and there are those who make the making of art possible by either investing in it or legislating for its support in education or government funding. Art is a very personal concept, regardless of how abstract it may appear or how academic the language may sound. People of color — black people, hispanic people, oriental people, arab people — need the opportunity to practice art and to fulfill their lives through this activity. So do white people, male and female, both in terms of their own aspirations, their ideas and feelings. Neurosis is a problem among the white art community — blind ambition as a course in self-education. Pseudo-issues are foregrounded to make-believe the neurosis is absent. Personal issues are forfeited in terms of theory and counter-theory. Subjective intervention is highly problematic in the art world. Signs and symbols are too quickly challenged or too often mistaken for the substance of real issues. Racism can occur in many forms, most of them are quite subtle. The real nature of racism — social exclusion — is rarely discussed. With social exclusion comes mistrust and fear. America has a tendency to manifest racism in all areas of discourse. White people talk to each other. Cultural sub-groups talk to each other. Intelligence is still based on Princeton S.A.T. scores and has little to do with physicality or mind/body expressiveness or "creative" functioning on another level of language. The discourse of white America is too limited. Consequently, the discourse of the white art world is too limited.

As long as the art world moves in the direction of capital and commodity prestige (they go together), there will be no opportunity to have the real issues heard. Art should be expressing freedom on some level, dialectical freedom, an interface with an oppressive culture. I am not talking about overtly political art or explicit use of signs, but I am hinting at the possibility of intersubjective reasoning, a discourse on the important issues, and art works that arrive as a result of that discourse or through that discourse.

Juan Sanchez

STATEMENT FOR THE DE-FACTO RACISM IN THE VISUAL ARTS CAA PANEL DISCUSSION

If art is to create and contribute to the necessary critical consciousness of what is culture and society, in order to assist in the further development and evolution toward change that is humanistic and just, exchange and communication must be established through the participation of all people. That is, all people bridging gender, race, class, political and sexual positions, and nationalities. If art is to respond and take responsibility for the cultural and social fabric of a people, it must extend to the very needs of our time culturally, socially and politically. All people committed to such cultural and critical dialogue must be recognized, invited, involved, and heard. If art is to respond and reflect yesterday, today, and tomorrow, people of color who have greatly contributed historically and aesthetically to the creative and artistic processes of art and society cannot continue to be omitted, segregated, and ignored.

APARTHEID in the United States, not only in the so-called art world, but also within the social, political, and economic structure of North American society, continues to exist and has never left. Even when millions of North American whites are protesting and moving forward against Apartheid in South Africa; celebrating and contributing to the destruction of repressive and segregating walls in Eastern Europe; and fighting for democracy in Latin America and other oppressed nations; oppression, repression, and racist segregation among other inhumane situations continue here in our own back yard.

The reality, as far as artists of color are concerned, is that we are an invisible people. A people who continues to fight for true representation and recognition in history, let alone in group and one-person exhibitions, art publications, and art history books. Only a handful can claim to be actively exhibiting artists and much less than that are represented in commercial galleries in addition to selling and placing their art into important public and private collections. There are hardly any museums, nationally and internationally, that have a fair collection of art by contemporary artists of color. How many art schools in the United States can claim to have a decent representation of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native American Indians, among other people of color, in their faculty and student body? The obvious absence is absolute. What is most evident is the fact that we as a people living within the framework of neglect, marginality, oppression, and repression are a censored society. A society who apparently have no civil or human rights — because we are not white — to participate in the definition of American or United States culture. According to Chicano visual artist and activist David Avalos:

"It should be clear that the mainstream of art is less a "legitimate territory" and more a license to exploit tax-payer supported cultural institutions, creating a racist and undemocratic territory within a nation of democratic ideals. This country's cultural apparatus was created and maintained to showcase the cultural superiority of European derived values. As designed, they were never intended to support and nurture the cultural values of those citizens conquered by the United States."
Colonialism is an epidemic — a widespread racist disease, an uncontrollable, prevailing condition imposing direct political, social, cultural, and economic control by one nation over another. As the process of colonization moves forward, the colonizer moves to destroy the colonized people’s sense of its own identity and existence by wiping out the people’s history, language, and culture. Native American visual artist, poet, performer, and activist Jimmie Durham brings a very clear perspective to this question of colonialism pertaining to the plight of his people:

... with Indians we’re invisible, and that is our discourse. I think that is the main discourse of this country, that Indians are invisible. I think that is the engine that drives the culture of this country, the fact that Indians are denied. We don’t exist in this culture, in this history, in the consciousness or the discourse of this country. But it’s our country, we’re invaded; we’re colonized. And if we’re that invisible that must be the agenda item, that must be what the discourse is about.1

Colonialism, Apartheid, and Sexism are definitely the AIDS and the GENOCIDE of the oppressor. Cultural imperialism is another level of colonialism (a colonialism that has been so persistent in the art world where the colonizer and descendants aim to rob and reinterpret the culture of the colonized. Artists of color cannot even participate in the dialogue pertaining to their own sense of ethnic and racial culture, history and aesthetics. The cultural imperialist appropriates, edits/censors, distorts, and exploits the elements that belong to the colonized. Interestingly enough, artists of color are even penalized for using their own ethno-cultural aesthetic and conceptualism in their creative expressions.

Appropriation is a post-modern continuation of Picasso’s first use of motifs derived from African sculpture. The birth of modernism is tied up with colonialism. To appropriate is to take what belongs to the ‘other’. To re-appropriate is to take back what has been taken from you. Whereas appropriation is fashionable, re-appropriation isn’t. The former technique is considered an integral part of contemporary trends and mainstream style, while the other is ignored. — John Yau2

Liberation takes on many forms in its manifestations. What has become clear to the oppressor is that culture in our music, dance, literature, theatre, and visual art can have its insurgent effects both physically and metaphorically. Cultural aesthetics has intensity in its subversive potential for freedom. Colonialism cannot permit this, although at present it is happening very much in the same manner that the slave owner prevented his imprisoned slaves from embracing their African culture, language, and identity, enforcing the question of life and death into their enslaved existence.

The outcome of Senator Helms’ contemptuous attack on art and his attempt to implement censorship tactics from the most reactionary, conservative, sexist, and racist perspective in the United States is of tremendously grave concern to us all. But I am having great difficulty trying to save a system with its own ingrained sectarian and colonialist structure. Certain sectors of the art community are protesting the potential disruption of a federal, state, and city cultural funding system that is viewed as being "perfect" and as working. But considering the contradictions and deficiencies of this "perfect" system does not leave me much to want to defend. As a Black Puerto Rican struggling against second-and third-class status in this country, in addition to colonialism, I cannot see how much more intensely government imposed censorship in the arts will really affect me or my people. That is to say, we have always been a censored people, omitted, and erased from anything and everything that we as a people have contributed to positively. Yet we never really heard a strong enough voice from other sectors of this society about our plight:

Everywhere I look, TV, talk shows, art exhibitions, newspaper editorials, art forums, and demonstrations all addressing this plague that threatens all our individual liberties. Somehow this demonstration of concern is reminiscent of the reaction to the drug epidemic after it reached the suburbs. I asked myself, 'Is this just another fad that will go away once the white community no longer feels threatened?' I ask you my fellow artists and citizens, "where were you during the sixties, seventies, and eighties?" I do not recall this type of outrage regarding the lack of representation of artists of color, although most of us know that African people and all peoples of color were and still are in essence censored out of the art world, let alone United States and World history. . . . Do we not see this issue of censorship separate from other social issues confronting America. I personally find it impossible to talk about censorship without talking about racism, sexism, imperialism, and a declining economy. . . . the idea of censorship goes beyond Jesse Helms and our elected officials. In our culture, peoples are censored through the process of omission and exclusion. . . . These painful truths plus others are the realities we will have to address in the nineties if we are to solve the problem of censorship. . . . we are all in the same boat and as Malcolm X said in reference to another painful time in our history, 'The chickens have come home to roost.'3

This statement by Willie Birch points to the fact that we are still fighting for our civil and human rights for employment, fair housing, redress, education, non-segregation, and equality not to mention against racist police brutality and other forms of racial violence we encounter on a daily basis. Our political and social battle against injustice in this country is also reflected in the many African Americans, Asian Americans, Native American Indians, Puerto Ricans, and Chicanos as well as progressive whites who are presently occupying American jails as political prisoners.

Now that the whole art world is concerned about government censorship and repression, where do we people/artists of color fit in? Do we fight to defend and save a system that has never been perfect, that has never considered us in the first place, and is still not considering us in this dilemma? Or do we wage a battle within a battle in the hope that we can kill two imperialist tendencies with one strong and unified stone? Killing racism, sexism, oppression, and colonialism while at the same time helping to resolve the same problems that are now affecting certain liberal sectors of a colonialist society?

I pray that the answer is a unification and a breaking down of another wall by the same name, APARTHEID, here in the United States.
Is there racism in the art world? Of course. Subtle and crude, it crops up in every imaginable form from Andrew Dice Clay-type "humor" overhead in university art departments to the embarrassed looks of dealers and critics when they fail to recognize the names of established artists of color. Even among the well-intentioned, racism manifests itself in language that acknowledges difference but often increases alienation. Habitual recourse to terms such as "minorities." "The Other," "Third World," all beg essential questions of vantage point and comitative bias. "Minority" relative to what majority within which boundaries? "Other" than who? "Third" according to what hierarchy? No matter how neutral or inclusive the words used, misunderstandings still ensue. The generally preferred collective "people of color" itself raises as many problems as it solves, by re-emphasizing skin color as the ultimate criteria and homogenizing all shades that are not pink. "People of culture," one might better say were the phrase not so vague, given that what most distinguishes different ethnic groups from each other is a matter of heritage for which pigmentation is an uncertain code not a certain pink.

Robert Storr

The change towards a pluralistic consciousness began years ago when I tutored fifth grade Hispanic students who were reading United States history. I observed a lack of interest on the students' part. Their teacher, in spite of much personal effort, was unable to generate a dialogue and enthusiasm for the subject matter. Not sure of the reasons for the students' passivity I left their classroom wanting to present additional educational information relevant to their Hispanic heritage.

The educational challenge confronted me. How was I to make art instruction more balanced, less sexist, and more meaningful to me personally so that I could convey the language and techniques of visual art to my multicultural classes? What ownership could they take on to motivate their learning through self-pride? How could I make the curriculum less distant?

In previous years I answered that challenge in a short-term way during the lunar New Year celebration when I shared my Chinese-American heritage. A major American foreign policy event influenced my teaching in the classroom when, following the Vietnam War, the Southeast Asian refugees arrived in our community. Their resettlement and the entry of their children into our school systems re-powered my conviction of meaningful instruction. At that time, I was invited to curate an exhibit of student art reflecting refugee experiences. For the project I read We Came From Vietnam to the first to fifth grade artists. After hearing the story a first grader, using colored pencils, drew his artistic interpretation of the refugees' plight. He sketched a boat with escapes looking longingly from the
ship's portholes. On deck, a man jumped high in the air joyfully as he spotted land after despairing days on the choppy blue waters. A grayish triangular shape, pointedly emerging from the seas, indicated a shark hungrily following the boat. This young artist’s understanding was expressed with feeling.

That assignment changed my teaching. Mindful of the duality of multicultural art instruction I drew a distinction between art of distant root countries and the art of people-of-color descendants who are Americans. I did this because of my frustration with most educational curriculums which solely recognize the root country culture to the exclusion of the hyphenated American culture. As a Chinese-American artist, I need to educate people that I blend sensibilities of China with American influences because I am an American. I am committed to cultural pluralism, believing that heritage is an important aesthetic element in creation. Towards that end, I make art that blends my ancestral Chinese symbols with a western contemporary sensibility, in hopes of taking myself and others to newer and greater heights of creative awareness.

From that time on I included art of many cultures in my teaching, making comparisons between what was created in root countries and in the United States. I could not deny the cross-cultural implications and influences. I discussed the influence that African masks had on Picasso. Black History Month and Martin Luther King’s birthday gave me the opportunity to talk about African-American artists, telling about the life and work of Horace Pippin. For one Martin Luther King assignment I gave colored yarn to the children and asked them to tie knots every time they responded to the civil rights struggles of African-Americans. Their Eva Hesse-type rope creations spoke eloquently.

For my Hispanic heritage students I taught art based on their culture. We studied Diego Rivera, discussing the cross-cultural implications of Rivera’s stay in Europe and the influence of his murals upon other artists. When I returned from an art trip to Peru and Ecuador my students learned about the Chancay civilization of ancient South America and created death masks in clay.

To increase the visibility of women artists beyond Mary Cassatt and Georgia O’Keefe I showed slides of contemporary Native American women artists. The classes exploded with excitement when they viewed what these women created. One student was so inspired by the beaded tennis shoes created by a Native American woman that she came to the art room during lunch on her own time to stitch beads onto pink tennis shoes.

As a Chinese-American artist, I realize what was missing for me when I attended school. It wasn’t until I took art classes as an adult that I discovered it was permissible for me to reflect that which was deeply imbedded within me. A Filipino art instructor created a sculpture using rice sacks from his youth as a migrant worker. When I questioned him about the symbolism of the rice sack, his courageous response triggered an understanding and integration of myself as a human being, an artist, and a classroom teacher.

I teach the way I do because I am a community-based artist who exhibits contemporary art reflective of my heritage. I teach the way I do because of my contacts with artists outside of the classroom. I feel I must face my students, wholeheartedly delivering to them my perception of a balanced foundation of in-
1. Imagine effect. You and I stand between ourselves and any action that would change us. We monitor the drift between our exposure, and our aggression.

2. In order to understand what I am here recording, you must first accept the opacity of all media, the flight of meaning in the name of the collective. Ignorance is the product of the very agreement to communicate.

3. I am absent in the making of the art which comes to be known as mine.

4. The construction of myself, that is the myth of my art, takes place through the dialectic of permission and fear. The result is illegible. No interpretation is legitimate.

5. The inability of art to constitute a world is commensurate with the artist’s and audience’s removal from the conditions of their birth. This failure explains the paranoiac at the heart of any systematic cultural economy.

6. Perception does not rest, nor does it repeat itself. No system can contain the aspirations, nor the capacity for terror, of a culture.

7. Shielded by its ambiguity, which has come to be known as its beauty, art is the diadem of a culture, preceding its formulation. In a criminal culture, such "beauty" is presented as dialectic with the crimes, and contributes to a larger rationale: History. This rationale’s power lies in the control of the interpretive act — an appropriative violence which thereby justifies itself.

8. The producer is defined by the act of making. When at rest, the producer is the victim of (consumed by) the product.

9. Unable to advance my own becoming, I turn parasitic.

10. The language of love is filled with terms of consumption. We are convinced love, like responsibility, is conditional.

The most important question. . . is whether. . . feminism is coopted by being harnessed to other discourses which neutralise its radical potential.

As developed in the last twenty-five years, feminism and its corollaries, feminist art and art criticism, are critical perspectives that offer multiple positions and strategies as a means to critique and disrupt patriarchal practices on political, economic, and cultural fronts. The critical goals of feminism are thus nothing short of the dismantling of patriarchy’s strategies of ideological and institutional repression. Given these goals, it is clear why patriarchal formations would have a large stake in repressing or diffusing feminism’s various voices.

I shouldn’t have been surprised, then, by the title of a recent article on postmodern art by critic Dan Cameron — “Post-Feminism.” Perhaps too insulated by my own identification with the theoretical promise of various feminist positions, however, I was taken aback — and since that time, my dismay has grown as I have encountered this term more and more frequently in the art and popular press. What is “post” but the signification of a kind of termination — a temporal designation of whatever it prefaces as ended, done with, obsolete?

To make matters worse, this determination of an end to feminism, most often articulated by male critics who congratulate themselves for their attention to art by women, is revealing itself to be part of a larger discursive project (one that appears to be spreading like a voracious fungus) to appropriate feminism into the larger (masculine) projects of “universal” humanism or critical postmodernism. This subsumption is certainly a strategy of negating feminism’s specific political power — its perceived potential to undermine the theoretical certainties that continue to validate American cultural discourses, including, it seems, that of “postmodernism,” though the latter defines itself as having left these certainties behind in its modernist wake.

Evidence abounds of this insidious reworking of feminism, which can certainly be seen as part of a broader socio-political shift toward a newly entrenched patriarchal formation in the 1980s, “in which the new masculine affirms itself as incorporating . . . the feminine.” The texts I examine here work to reinforce and reproduce increasingly hegemonic patriarchal relations of domination in society at large. They represent the dominant postmodernist cultural discourse, one that continues to empower itself through a modernist “aesthetic terrorism” that hierarchizes art on the basis of traditional categories of value and negates that which threatens its hegemony through various means. These texts operate first to arrogate feminism into a universalist “mainstream” or into postmodernism (as one radical strategy among many available to disrupt modernism’s purities); they
then work to proclaim the end of feminism altogether, genderlessly celebrating its welcomed inclusion into the humanist canon or into a supposedly widespread, already achieved radical project of postmodernist "cultural critique."

While the former gesture is more easily identifiable as coming from a center or right position within art discourse, the other strategy is more difficult to recognize and negotiate, since it often comes from well-meaning critics who position themselves as "in." Even some well-intentioned arguments articulated from a feminist perspective feed into this dynamic by praising feminism as a useful tool for postmodernism: this allows for the subsequent conflation of the two into an exhausted leftist category of "anti-authoritarianism," with texts viewed as inherently critical if they fall into this category of "radicality." Or feminism is lumped with civil rights and other specific protests as merely a "jargon" taken up as a means of empowerment: thus Fredric Jameson includes feminism as an example of the "stupendous proliferation of social codes today into professional and disciplinary jargons, but also into the badges of ethnic, race, religious, and class-refraction adhesion."

Before discussing the trajectory this move has taken specifically in art discourse, let me submit evidence, from the popular media, of this "remasculinizing" strategy in its visual and textual structuring of gender roles. Using a position offered to me by feminist cultural theories, I will analyze an example of public representations of the feminine and feminism to identify points of rupture where ideological inconsistencies come through in the form of unconsciously gendered language and logical confusion.

What can the *Time* cover story of December 4, 1989, then, tell us about current construals of feminism? "Women Face the 90s," the cover reads in bold yellow letters; it continues, less favorably, in white: "In the 80s they tried to have it all. Now they've just plain had it. Is there a future for feminism?" Our first warning should be the very fact that this mouthpiece of reactionary journalistic "objectivity" poses as middle-of-the-roadism chooses to spotlight (the death of) feminism.

The accompanying image is a further warning sign, but an intriguingly ambiguous one: filling the red bordered block is a wooden block on which is drawn a very boxy (one could say "masculine") woman's body. Caucasian of course, in a severe business suit. Appended are stubby feet, a blockish head with quite "manish" features, and crudely carved hands, one tensely clutching a briefcase, the other attached to a fleshy, peasant-like arm a child also carved of wood. We are graphically presented with the dilemma of the 90s woman (that is, the white upper-middle-class woman): the restrictive choice between having a child, and by extension a procreative life of the flesh, and the alternative, a (non) life of the course, brutal face and the obliterated body, hidden by masculine clothing — signifiers of what a woman must sacrifice, must become in order to achieve (masculine) "success." But this image, a kind of mysticized voodoo or votive figure, is rendered in the folksy medium of handcarved and painted wood that links the two terms: the "feminine" and the astavistically "primitive."

Inside on the title page, there is a photograph of pro-choice advocates on the mall in Washington with their banners and raised fists, trapped, ironically, behind a chain link fence (the 90s equivalent of the Delacroixian barricade?). The accompanying caption reads: "The superwomen are weary, the young are complacent. Is there a future for feminism?" and continues in smaller type, "... some look back wistfully at the simpler times before women's liberation. But very few would really like to turn back the clock..." The second sentence in the smaller type indicates that perhaps the "end" of feminism is not as conclusive as the bulk of the textual and visual codes would suggest. The text naturalizes what is being questioned by preced ing its acknowledgment of the possible continuation of feminism with the "weary," and "complacent" attitude of today's women. Furthermore, the assumption that the "pre" feminist phase was "simpler" goes unchallenged and is doubly insidious by its casual placement. Here the masculine basis of judgment is laid bare, for it is certainly men who would find the monolithic dominance of pre-feminist patriarchy "simpler." For women, life under patriarchy has always been complicated by our ambiguous relation to our own domination.

The term "post-feminist" is used here to describe the rejection of feminism by younger generations of women as a result of their realization that women can't (what a surprise!) have it all. To naturalize this rejection as logical, the article confirms for us that "motherhood is back." In this way, hoping to encourage an image of younger women's enthusiastic subscription to American narratives of the familiar, the article constructs for these women the desire for a secure position of femininity (remember, it is "simpler"). By presenting these ideas as a set of facts, the *Time* writers avoid the appearance of validating them as right. Yet their language manipulates the reader into accepting these terms that call so innocently for a return to a "simpler" previous state. In the same moment that they appear to "ask" innocently if there is "a future for feminism," they effectively preclude any consideration of this "future" with their term "post-feminist."

Our first warning confirmed the sensibleness of the supposed rejection of feminism by explaining that, after all, "hairy legs haunt the feminist movement, as do images of being strident and lesbian. Feminine clothing is back; breasts are back..." and the movement that loudly rejected female stereotypes seems hopelessly dated." So it's all about looks, as usual, when women are the question.

The *Time* article is one among innumerable examples of popular culture text's construction of feminism as a unified, precisely articulated attack on the American family.1 This in turn produces the necessity for its obliteration — in order to enable the "return" to a previous state of "simplicity," once feminism's shortcomings have revealed themselves. "Post-feminism" in this context, then, means anti-feminism — the appropriation of feminism as a theme and then its brutal repression as failed and so implicitly over.

Predictably, there are parallels to this dynamic in art writings of the 1980s, where a similarly motivated discursive appropriation and negation of feminism as "post" has also been pervasively deployed. The decade began with Mary Kelly's article "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism" which showed the potential of radical feminist critical theories and art practices to dismantle patriarchal modernist systems of exhibition and interpretation by deconstructing the centered subject from which art historical modernism draws its authority. However, a precedent for discussing feminist art practice as one among several means of critiquing modern-
Danto tells us that feminism required the outside impetus of poststructuralism to make it truly itself but he implies, conversely, that its goal has been not to critique phallically invested hierarchies of art history, but merely to fit art by women into the mainstream "line." And, while he allows that women have "redefined" this mainstream, he claims that men are also "deeply feminist." Through this rhetorical strategy, Danto subsumes both male and female artists into a larger (masculine) "critical" project. Feminism does not, for Danto, have a specific critical position vis-a-vis notions of "mainstream" — it is simply one of many refiti­gurings of this mainstream which is thus left more or less intact. Since Danto’s article appeared, The Nation has printed a letter by Kathy Constantinides criticizing his piece along with a reply by Danto. Constantinides mentions several editorial slights and personal inconsistencies in Danto’s account of the exhibition and she critiques Danto for his tendency to "universalize, which is to say, replicate, the male standard language."

Danto’s reply testifies to his own stake in maintaining his critical authority and dominance over feminist voices. He astutely answers her first complaints, but in response to Constantinides’ claim, phrased in extremely gentle terms, that he has unwittingly reinforced gender stereotypes through his language, Danto replies that: "it is possible to raise consciousness to a height from which nothing said by males can be other than invidious. This will be the case if the very language we all use is, somehow, ‘male oriented.’ This may take an extreme form — seeing, for example, in ‘universalization’ a form of male-centered discourse."

In claiming that language structures “cut across the differences between the genders and touch us in our essential humanity,” Danto promotes the reduction and erasure of feminism as a part of a broader humanist project. His seemingly willful misunderstanding of the gendered nature of language and of the bias of a notion such as “mainstream” allows him to imply that women should feel honored to be considered a part of the humanist project, not as subjects capable of producing their own counter-discourses to it, but as passive objects of its generous (“genderless”) embrace.

Another related means of negating feminism is the appropriation of feminist theory as merely one “postmodernist” strategy among many to critique modernist ideologies. Craig Owens’ often cited article “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism” is an instructive example here. While Owens presents in a concise and polemical way some of the major issues confronting feminist theory, his discussion places it in the same field as the "postmodernist critique of representation": the two discourses have an "apparent crossing," and his essay is thus a "provisional attempt to explore the implications of [this] intersection." He astutely calls for a recognition of feminist art as explicitly operating to disrupt traditional configurations of sexual difference, critiquing, as he does here, writers who "assimilate feminism to a whole string of liberation or postmodern strategies among many to critique modernist ideologies."

And yet Owens’ approach is symptomatic of what must be seen as an ultimately anti-feminist appropriative strategy. He begins by placing feminism and postmodernism in the same space, describing “women’s insistence on incompatibility” as “not only compatible with, but also an instance of postmodern
thought." (my emphasis). Owens then further dilutes feminism's specific agenda by appropriating Lyotard's terms to describe its goal of critiquing "master narratives" as commensurate with (and implicitly included within) the goals of postmodernism: "this feminist position is also a postmodern condition." And finally, he reduces feminism to simply another of the "voices of the conquered," including "Third World nations" and the "revolt of nature," that challenge "the West's desire for ever-greater domination and control." Without seriously questioning his role as male critic, Owens takes up the position he believes to be offered by feminism to empower his own construction of a field of intersection that ultimately subsumes feminism into the postmodernist critique of "the tyranny of the signifier."

There is a complex background for this understanding of the potential of the feminine or feminism to disrupt "modernist purity," understood in most of these texts as the Greenbergian assumption of the self-sufficiency of the modernist signifier to contain within it transcendent meaning regardless of its context or enunciative situation. This understanding has been primary in American art discourse's self-conscious deconstruction of modernism and construction of postmodernism in its place as a radical, feminized alternative to the phallocratic closures of Abstract Expressionist modernism.1

Early descriptions of work that would later be labelled "postmodern" — Susan Sontag and Calvin Tomkins, for example, on so-called "Neo-Dada" art — are structured by gendered systems of oppositions; thus Sontag, in her well-known article on camp, associates neo-Dada with what she calls the "camp sensibility," which she characterizes as a homosexual sensibility of decadence, artificiality, and effeminacy and opposes to the virile certainties of Abstract Expressionist ideologies. More recent theories of modernism — some explicitly feminist in their approach — have identified postmodernism with the anti-phallic merging of feminized mass culture with so-called high art, interpreting this blurring of boundaries and destruction of dichotomies as a feminist-inspired project.

Andreas Huyssen's article, "Mass Culture as Woman, Modernism's Other" (1986), for example, defines modernism as a "reaction formation" arising out of a fear of the feminine "other" of mass culture. For Huyssen, postmodernism is a specifically American phenomenon that began in the 1960s and has the radical potential of dissolving these boundaries modernism sets up between itself, as "high" culture, and what it perceives as a feminine mass culture. For Huyssen, feminism — as the heir of the "avant-garde's attack on the autonomy aesthetic" — is one of many potential forces to produce a "postmodernism of resistance" (those forces include the ecology movement, new social movements in Europe, and non-Western cultures) that will break apart modernism's hierarchies to allow (male) critics like Huyssen a critical foothold.2

While articles such as Huyssen's have been important for feminism's negotiation with modernist art history, unfortunately, these positionings of feminism as a strategy within a larger postmodernist project have unwittingly contributed to the incorporation of feminism into postmodernism as, in Owens's words, an "instance of" the latter. And it is this incorporation that has facilitated the declaration of the end of feminism with "post-feminism" rising from its ashes.

What is "post-feminism" in art discourse, then? Dan Cameron, who tends to slide back and forth between the terms "feminism" and "post-feminism," uses the latter broadly to encompass all art by women in the late 1980s that uses "structuralism to critique social patterns in terms of social domination," and sees it as a result, in part, of "the increased commodification of the art world in the late 70s, and the adjustment of world capital to a global order based on information distributed through advanced technology." Under the rubric "post-feminism," he discusses women artists as diverse as Barbara Kruger and Susan Rothenberg. Cameron even claims that "there is by no means a dearth of male artists working from these identical premises," which he defines as the acknowledgment of the contingency of art as language.

One wonders why Cameron references this art through the term "feminism" at all, and, furthermore, why this feminism is deemed to be "post." It seems to prove yet another example of the use of feminism as a term of radicalization to be subsumed into a broader field of cultural critique. Cameron's "feminism," or rather its reincarnation as "post," is increasingly confused — it appears any female can be (and, perhaps, necessarily is) "post-feminist" just by virtue of her sex. But men seem to be able to appropriate this radicality easily too. Cameron also abounds the explicitly feminist in their work by placing these artists in a masculinist genealogy of avant-garde critique: "following on the heels of Pop," they then become the "sources" for male artists Jeff Koons, Peter Halley, and Philip Taaffe, whose works, Cameron admits, are "more vociferously" collected than those of their supposed mentors (matriarchs?), the "post-feminists."

Andy Grundberg's article "The Mellowing of the Post-Modernists" provides another example of the reduction of feminism messages by their identification with generalized or even anti-feminist strategies. Here, with obvious signs of relief, Grundberg praises postmodern artists as having "mellowed" such that they are "more willing to allow their audiences some unalloyed visual pleasure" with new works that are "more viewer friendly than those of 10 years ago." Lucky for us viewers, then, Laurie Simmons has "polished and refined" her "message" (perhaps that of "hairy-legged" feminism?) to produce "more fully realized" art. These new, "polished" works are her recent photographs of commonplace objects with a doll's clearly female legs (which Grundberg identifies only as "humanoid and endearing").

Again, whatever feminist message Simmons is trying to make is elided: the critique of a modernist notion of the female body as commodified object on display is not new, nor is her approach particularly subtle — how could Grundberg miss it except willfully? Grundberg, who prefers to let these "endearing" objects seduce him with their "more fully realized" voluptuousness, refuses to acknowledge their gender specificity. Furthermore, he conflates the photographs of Simmons, which draw directly on gendered codes of representation, with the overtly non-feminist — the nostalgic macho thematicns of Richard Prince's slick fiberglass re-creations of car hoods, and with a work that deals with patriarchy in a more oblique way — a recent piece installed by Louise Lawler at Metro Pictures in New York.
Grundberg is cheered also by Lawler's work, a series of photographs of paper cups labelled with the names of Senators who voted to support the Helms proposal to block federal funding for AIDS information and prevention. Grundberg sees this work — which was quite muted to this viewer's mind — as evidence of Lawler's beginning "to shed what some consider an icy conceptual re­serve." Whether or not we agree with his assessment of the Lawler installation, we can see that seduction, apparently, is "in" — and the specific political message is erased beneath the overall pleasurable effects the objects provide.

Grundberg seems to deny the possibility of a work of art that is both sen­sual and conceptual or politically critical at the same time — a possibility that feminist artists have continually explored and have a high stake in maintaining, since such a work breaks down the rigid divisions required by modernist notions of criticality. As articulated by Grundberg, this emphasis on seduction serves to produce the (female) artist as sexually manipulative, as a tease who has finally shed her "icy conceptual reserve" (her "strident" feminist ideas?) in favor of acting from her body as a woman should. If the art is seductive, she's seducing. In reading the work this way, Grundberg refuses to acknowledge the difficult conceptual challenges the work poses for patriarchy's formations of power — its criti­que of the government's hostile stance toward homosexuals as Others of the white male heterosexual establishment.

This process of transforming the woman artist into seductress as a means of opposing her to the cerebral confirms the mastery of the thinking male "ana­lyst": it has an accomplice in the criticism that deflates feminist art's disruptions of systems of sexual difference by interpreting the art in other terms. For example, Barbara Kruger's pointed interrogations of patriarchy (as in her 1981 images with texts such as "Your comfort is my silence," or "Your every wish is our com­mand") are often interpreted as generalised critiques of the frame, artistic origi­nality, and modernism's claim for the signifying wholeness of the image. And Sherrie Levine's astutely engineered deflations of overblown masculine myths of authoritative creative genius, her deftly phallic appropriations of works by mod­ernist masters and reinscription of them as her own, are reduced to non-specific critiques of the institution of authorship. Kruger and Levine are claimed only to have used "photography conceptually to ask questions about the source and pre­sentation of images in our culture." And Levine's work is seen as motivated only by a desire to "represent the idea of creativity, represent someone else's work as her own in an attempt to sabotage a system that places value on the privileged production of individual talent."

Even Cindy Sherman's incisive critiques of the visual construction of the feminine — as em-bodied object, photographically frozen within gendered positions of vulnerability in her untitled film stills or, as in her more recent works, monstrously overblown in the very clichéd "darkness" of her sexual unknown, barely visible as reflected, for example, in the lenses of sunglasses, lying on dirty ground strewn with nasty signs of sex and human excretions — these are con­structed as "universal" laments on the condition of humanity. In Donald Kuspit's words: "WOUND is this artistic use — her wish to excel with a certain aesthetic purity as well as to represent inventively — that re­veals her wish to heal a more fundamental wound of selfhood than that which is inflicted on her by being a woman" (my emphases). We are encouraged to assure ourselves that this bleeding WOUND is nothing for us to worry about — everyone has it. And Sherman is to count herself lucky that, in a great irony of misreading, Kuspit employs his great (phallic) authority to validate her works as "aesthetically pure." Then he can congratulate himself as well for "understanding" this art not as feminist but, even better, as moving out of the narrow struc­tures that feminism necessarily enforces, to the wide expanse of the universal. This appears to be the final effect of a construction of feminism as "post."

Through the preceding argument, I have examined the insidious project currently at work to dis-arm feminists, coaxing us into sympathy with the broad postmodemist project by flattery, then extinguishing our tracks behind us. While we are offered a "new subjectivism," this gesture obliterates our sex and anti-sex­ism by so generously/genderlessly including us as part of the "universalist" sub­ject of the art of the 1980s (a subject curiously textually determined in Kuspit's article by the pronoun "he"). We must be wary of this gesture of inclusion, resist­ing the masculinist seduction that produces feminism as subsumed within a cri­tical postmodernist or genderless universalist project. We must refuse what Jane Gallop calls "the trick" of patriarchy, which operates to remasculinize culture by...
reducing all subjectivity to the "neutral subject...[itself] actually a desexualized
7. Fredric Jameson, "Gender and the Vietnam War" (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 139. She sees the past decade as a climax of the increasing "remasculinization" of American culture from the late 1960s on.

1. I take this notion of "heteronormative ..." from Chantal Mouffe, who describes it in these terms in "Hegemony and New Political Subjects: Toward a New Concept of Democracy," in Stanley Gray, Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, pp. 89-101. See also the extended study of heteronormative formations in her collaborative book with Ernesto Laclau, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, pp. 164.

2. Mouffe weakens her call for resistance to hegemonies by conflating different positions of resistance, including feminism, into a generalized notion of "democratic struggle.

3. In her article "Figure/Ground," MEGANUNGE #6 [1989] p. 18. Mira Schor introduces this notion of "aesthetic terrorism," with reference to Klaus Theweleit's theorization of the texts of European Leftist political parties. Theweleit discusses their dependence on exclusion to devalue that which threatened their authors' phallic boundaries of subjectivity. See his Male Fantasies Volume 2, Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 418.

4. This is typified by such critics as Hal Foster, who delineates two clear lines of postmodernism based on an implicit attitude of criticality: a reactionary postmodernism of pastiche usually associated with architecture, and a radical postmodernism of deconstructive strategies. Ultimately his value system is based on circular reasoning. It relies on a notion of criticality implied to be permanent in the work itself, as intended by an absent author, but this criticality is actually determined to be structurally present by the empowered interpreter herself. See "Postmodern Pundits," New German Critique 33 (Fall 1984), pp. 67-78.


6. It has been argued by an absent author, but this criticality is actually determined to be structurally present by the empowered interpreter herself. See "Postmodern Pundits," New German Critique 33 (Fall 1984), pp. 67-78.


8. One way of viewing popular press constructions (or erasures) of feminism is proposed by Laura Kipnis, who argues that it is the left's abandonment of "narratives of liberation..." and its scorning of mass cultural venues as common and so negatively compounded with the capitalist bureaucracy, that has enabled the right to appropriate the popular media for its own ends. Thus the right "has successfully fought on the terrain of popular interpellation..." See Laura Kipnis, "Feminism: The Political Consciousness of Postmodernism?" in Univeral Abandon! The Politics of Postmodernism, ed. Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 164.


11. The image of the woman's responsibility to the family is reinforced in the Good Housekeeping "New Traditionalist" advertisements displayed at bus stops and in upscale magazines such as The New York Times Magazine. In these ads, bold texts — such as "Who says you have to discard your own values to be a modern American mother?" — and "More and more women have come to realize that having a contempor­ ary lifestyle doesn't mean that you have to abandon the things that make life worth­ while — family, home, community, the timeless, enduring values..." — are accompanied by images of a mother in a domestic setting with one or two children. See also Paulette Bates Allen's strange article, "A Reluctant Education," where she writes of her regret at having been encouraged not to have children by feminism's emphasis on the woman's right to "make choices." In blaming feminism for her desire to develop her writing career instead of bearing children, she naturalizes childbearing as "right," while branding feminism as an ideological imposition on this natural state. The New York Times Magazine (Dec. 10, 1989), pp. 44, 83, 85, 89-91.


14. See Jacques Derrida's discussion of the stylus as phallic "spur" in Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, pp. 44, 83, 85, 90-91. See also Paulette Bates Allen's strange article, "A Reluctant Education," in which she writes of her regret at having been encouraged not to have children by feminism's emphasis on the woman's right to "make choices." In blaming feminism for her desire to develop her writing career instead of bearing children, she naturalizes childbearing as "right," while branding feminism as an ideological imposition on this natural state. The New York Times Magazine (Dec. 10, 1989), pp. 44, 83, 85, 89-91.


16. Although, clearly with his own continued use of notions of a priori mainstreams, genius, and simplistic notions of innovation he perceives a system largely unchanged from its Greenbergian modernist state.

17. The Nation 250, n. 8 (Feb. 26, 1990), pp. 258, 288. All citations are from p. 258.


19. I am currently analyzing this configuration of postmodernism in relation to Marcel Duchamp, who is often claimed as its origin, in my dissertation in progress at U.C.L.A. — "The Fashioning of Duchamp: Authorship, Postmodernism, Gender." See also Paulette Bates Allen's strange article, "A Reluctant Education," in which she writes of her regret at having been encouraged not to have children by feminism's emphasis on the woman's right to "make choices." In blaming feminism for her desire to develop her writing career instead of bearing children, she naturalizes childbearing as "right," while branding feminism as an ideological imposition on this natural state. The New York Times Magazine (Dec. 10, 1989), pp. 44, 83, 85, 89-91.


22. He conceptualizes postmodernism in these terms in his essay "Mapping the Postmodern," reprinted in After the Great Divide, and originally published in New German Critique 33 (Fall 1984).

23. "Mass Culture as Woman," p. 61 and "Mapping the Postmodern," p. 220. Griselda Pollock has also focused on the usefulness of the feminist perspective on patriarchy in the project of breaking down notions of originality and modernist hierarchies that invariably privilege the masculine. Pollock sees feminism's project to be the use of Marxist tools to critique modernism as an ahistorical bourgeois and consummately masculinist discourse. Feminism thus becomes the model for postmodernism as a new avant-garde or politics of rupture. Pollock avoids the negation of feminism's specificity that Huyssen's text implies by structuring all of her inquiries in terms of questions of sexual difference; feminism prescribes the set of concerns by which she analyzes art and art discourse. See Pollock's essay "Screening the 70s" in Vision and Difference.


25. Grundberg does mention gender as an issue once, but quickly negates it by subsuming it under a larger critical concept: "Here, as in most of her work, gender is pushed into the foreground: one wonders not only about the master-slave relationship built into the profession but also about its repressed erotic content." Why abstract the messages of these works by referencing "master-slave" relations? These seem to be the only terms by which Grundberg can himself repress their "erotic content," as having to do not with sex but, metaphorically, with economic and/or racial relations of domination.


BOOK REVIEWS

WOMAN, NATIVE, OTHER: WRITING, POSTCOLONIALITY AND FEMINISM
by Trinh T. Minh-ha
Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989

"Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color?" Introducing these three "conflicting identities" at the outset of her book, Trinh Minh-ha proceeds to systematically explore the implications of each of the terms as it attaches to her activity. Emphasizing that writing is "a practice located at the intersection of the subject and history"—she directly confronts the problem of defining her particular identity as a specific (gendered, ethnically identified) subject in this specific (late 20th century, postcolonial) moment in history. Deftly, subtly, she lays bare one after another the constructions which have been placed on her activity as a woman writer of color, as well as on that of others—such as Emma Santos, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara—demonstrating with damning precision the inescapable web of social and rhetorical strictures which assert themselves to constrain, marginalize, and suppress this work. Since each element of her identity is already in itself conflictual—"woman writer," for instance, being by definition an identity fraught with problems of long historical standing—the combination of these three terms results in what Trinh Minh-ha calls a "triple bind."

The interwoven concerns in this text reflect the complex interrelations of gender, identity, race, and ethnicity as they in turn intersect with the institutions of language, of discourse, of political and social practices. Each succeeding chapter takes up distinct issues: "Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box" examines the activity of writing in relation to various assumptions superimposed upon it though critical practices. These include questions of elite activity vs. popular activity, notions of writing the body, the self, and the problem of continually reinscribing identity as ethnic and gendered vs. the effacing of that identity at the price of loss of almost all integrity and effectiveness. The discussion is informed by feminist psychoanalytic literature—Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray—as well as by a rich array of sources in poetry and prose continually folded back into each other in ongoing dialogue. Thus the writers Gloria Anzaldua or hattie gossett express their doubts, fears, frustrations—"Who do you think you are? to be writing a book!" the latter exclaims—while the former says "How hard is it for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe that we can." And Trinh Minh-ha takes up her own discussion:

She who writes, writes. In uncertainty, in necessity. And does not ask whether she is given the permission to do so or not. Yet, in the context of to-day's market-dependent societies, "to be a writer" can no longer mean purely to perform the act of writing.

The second chapter, "The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as a Scientific Conversation of Man with Man," is concerned with the ways in which anthropological discourse continues to position the Other through linguistic construction. Here Trinh Minh-ha puts the language of nativism under investigation, first from one perspective, then another, and another, posing a multifold critique which exposes its totalizing force and insidious instrumentality as these are coded into language as power relations.

And language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility. With each sign that gives language its shape lies a stereotype of which I am both the manipulator and the manipulated. Transposed onto another plane, such is the relation, for example, between we, the natives, and they, the natives. From a voluntary to an enforced designation, the distance is plain but the appearance remains intentionally ambiguous.

The third chapter, "Difference: A Special Third World Women Issue," returns to the central theme of the particular issues involved in writing as a woman of color. Continually naming and rendering explicit the suppositions and presumptions which occur to the reader, Trinh Minh-ha manages to confront those very prescriptive constructions which contribute to the ongoing formulation of these concerns as issues.

"Why do we have to be concerned with the question of Third World women? After all, it is only one issue among many others. Delete "Third World" and the sentence immediately unveils its value-loaded cliches. Generally speaking, a similar result is obtained through the substitution of words like woman for womanist, or vice versa, and the established image of the Third World Woman. Woman in the context of (pseudo-) feminism readily merges with that of the Native in the context of (neo-)colonialist anthropology.

The final chapter, "Grandma's Story," invokes a tradition of storytelling. Pointing out the extent to which the "story" has been devalued in contemporary culture, accorded the status of a suspect, fictional, non-authoritative mode, Trinh Minh-ha goes on to celebrate and promote the form. Stating that "The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women," she proposes that the story form has a regenerative, fertilizing power. She uses this final thematic exploration to return to the prefatory phrase with which she introduced thematically the text of the book. "The story began long ago. . . ."

Well known as a filmmaker with a highly theoretical and critical practice, Trinh Minh-ha has taken images and phrases from her films: Reassemblage, Naked Spaces—Living is Round, and Surname Viet Given Name Nam and interspersed them through the pages of the book. These images reiterate not only the themes of the text, but also convey the structuring operations which she is criticizing as the normative mode of subject/object/other relations normally encoded in representation. (Reassemblage, her first film, was a pointed deconstruction of the conventional anthropological documentary film.) There are no easy solutions, no simple catchphrase propositions to be garnered from this text. It distinctly moots that ap-
proach through its finely tuned complexity, its nuanced and precise articulation, trapping in language that most elusive of figures: the critique of the hegemonic operations which language perpetuates in its structures (intricacies). The dialogue offered by this book is one in which we all, already, take part; the challenge is to be aware of the character and consequences of that participation. There is no way out of these conflicts. As Trinh Minh-ha demonstrates, with her measured thoroughness and considered attention, it is necessary to enter into them.

Whatever the position taken ("no position" is also a position, for I am not political) is a way of accepting "my politics is someone else's") the love-hate, inside-outside, subject-of-subject-to relation between women and language is inevitably always at work.

— Johanna Drucker

IMAGES OF FLIGHT
by Clive Hart
University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988, $32.50

This book is concerned with the images of ascension that permeate Western art. Images of Flight shows the flying theme as a continuous and powerful metaphor in art. Hart reevaluates the spiritual implications of different modes of flight: including upward, downward, and horizontal flight. He also explores the transcendent possibilities of flight in the Judeo-Christian tradition from medieval manuscripts up to Tiepolo as well as earlier examples from Greek vases and Pompeian and Roman fragments. While Hart makes no attempt to apply his insights and ideas to contemporary art, I found myself drawing my own connections to similar modern works such as Brancusi's Bird in Flight among numerous possible examples. Hart examines in detail the sexual symbolism of flight including Roman winged bronze penises, and other manifestations in painting and poetry. He also analyzes such esoteric issues as saintly levitation and the form and function of the various kinds of wings in representations of angels and devils. Unfortunately, the book's illustrations while numerous are small and only in black and white. However, if you are interested in the iconography and ideology of flight, movement through the air, and as the author puts it, "in the vertical plane generally" — this book is for you. — Susan Bee

ASPHYXIATING CULTURE AND OTHER WRITINGS
by Jean Dubuffet, translated by Carol Volk
Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1988, $17.95

JEAN DUBUFFET: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATE REALITY
essay by Mildred Glöckler
writings of Jean Dubuffet, translated by Joachim Neugroschel
New York, Pace Publications, Abbeville Press, 1987, $50

Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) appeared in the firmament of history in the first year of this century, and while inventing his own means and forms in painting and sculpture, he placed himself in stark opposition philosophically to all organized forces within social life which curb spontaneous expression and dictate acceptable behavior. The quality of Dubuffet's written thought is extreme, provocative, and affecting in the way that powerful intelligence transmits directly to the reader in the present. Reading Dubuffet one is compelled to reconsider social and existential realities. What is the relation of the notion of art to that of 'beauty', or the relation of cultural policies and organizations to an individual's creativity within diverse societies? The two most readily available English translations of Dubuffet's writings are cited here, while exhibition catalogues which include his writings from the Museum of Modern Art, 1962 and the Guggenheim Museum, 1966, 1973, as well as those from exhibitions at the Pace Gallery, are out-of-print or available only at libraries. In French, Editions de Minuit has reprinted "Culture Asphyxiante" in 1989, while the two-volume Gallimard edition of Dubuffet's writings, "Ecrits" is now out-of-print.

The idea that we often run into today that culture digests everything, assimilates subversive productions, thereby defusing them, after which they become a new link in its chain, is a false idea. There is no trace of a subversive position in the works of the past that constitute the bread and butter of our culture. Or else it is so mildly subversive — only enough to allow culture to show itself in a welcoming light at minimal cost. Productions containing subversive material were always completely discredited and never received the slightest place in culture. At least until recently, culture is now a bit perturbed, engaged in a path that could soon very well lead to its demise. Aware of the devastation of its ridiculously conservative attitude (conservatism, traditionalism), it has chosen to renew itself, cover itself in eclecticism, judging it to be wise to make innovation its ally, to seduce it and annex it.

These remarks are certainly relevant today, as they were no doubt when they were written in the 60s. The problem described is resolved by individuals taking a position within social structures to defend their basic liberties and freedom of expression at all levels. Interpersonal and governmental policies as well as the acculturated behaviors in the world of the arts and their markets have been, can, and will be continually challenged by these basic realizations. Because he wished to understand the processes of his own creation Dubuffet defined and established what today is called art brut. Cassel's 1970 French-English dictionary provides the following synonyms for brut: "Rough, raw, unshewn, unfinished, unpolished; uncultured, rude, clownish, awkward . . . ." Dubuffet began the processes of collecting works by insane, illiterate, or untrained artists in 1945, exhibiting
them beginning in 1947 and publishing a periodical. Dubuffet and other literary and artistic Parisians formed the “Compagnie de l’Art Brut” in post-war Paris in 1948; lasting until 1951, the membership included André Breton, Jean Paulhan, Charles Ratton, Henri-Pierre Roche, and Michael Tapie. In “A Word about the Company of Raw Art,” a general address written by Dubuffet on behalf of the group and distributed publicly, one reads:

We are seeking artistic works such as paintings, drawings, statues, statuettes, all types of objects, owing nothing (or as little as possible) to the imitation of works of art seen in museums, salons, and galleries. On the contrary, these artistic works should put human originality to use, along with the most spontaneous and personal inventiveness; they would be productions which the creator drew (both the invention and the means of expression) from deep within, the result of his own inclinations and moods, free from the habitual means of creation, and regardless of the conventions currently in use.

In defining the terms and criteria for collection, they excluded the work of folk artists and children, considering that those productions were too susceptible to suggestions for subject matter or other traditional means of expression, thus not springing from impulses outside established values. Some of the characteristics notable in the works include the rendering of visions — sacred or extreme — repetitive marking, enumeration, lineation, horror vacui treatment of surfaces, and brilliant coloration, although these are not the only qualities that art brutist works can have.

The first public exhibition of over 100 paintings and sculptures that had been collected by Dubuffet was installed in November 1947 in the basement rooms of the Rene Drouin Gallery in Paris. It had been at this Gallery in 1946 that Dubuffet’s own exhibition “Mirobolos, Macadam & Cie” was mounted. He exhibited paintings made with thick pastes combining a variety of materials including paint, sand, glass, and string which crudely, with inscribed and graffitied surfaces, depicted the streets and peoples of Paris; the guest book is said to have been filled with insults. A success de scandale, that show resulted in a general address written by Dubuffet on behalf of the Art Worker’s Coalition in New York in the late sixties. All were started “institutes of necessity, Dubuffet suggests that, to unlearn the errors established Westernized “culture” has imposed on expectations, perceptions, and the apprehension of values there might be founded “institutes of deculturation” or “nihilist gymnasiums, in which especially lucid monitors would teach deconditioning and demystification.” To scrutinize the conditions imposed by class interests and to effectively liberate individuals within social circumstances is a perennial goal for many artists. To effectively change the world was also the goal of Joseph Beuys’ “social sculpture,” or “nihilist gymnasiums, in which especially lucid monitors would teach deconditioning and demystification.” To scrutinize the conditions imposed by class interests and to effectively liberate individuals within social circumstances is a perennial goal for many artists. To effectively change the world was also the goal of Joseph Beuys’ “social sculpture,” or the invention of the Art Worker’s Coalition in New York in the late sixties. All were attempts to redefine the terms of reality so that individuals could function freely within organized governmental and social structures. These are the goals which are being renewed and defined today in Moscow, Johannesburg, Czechoslovakia, China, and throughout the rest of the world.

Make no mistake. When the well-to-do, aided by their scholars (who aspire only to serve and fit in, and who are nourished by the culture developed by this caste for its glory and devotion), open their castles, museums, and libraries to the people, they have no intention of inspiring them to try their hands at creation. It isn’t writers or artists that the proper class means painting cycle of 1962-66 come Tremolo in the Eye, The Rich Fruit of Error, Virtual Virtue, Bank of Ambiguities, Err and Deviate, Parade of Objects, Carnaval of Utensils and Counterpoint to the Tools; these are just a handful among titles of works made during that productive period which also included his first painted polystyrene sculptures. Dubuffet worked steadily from before 1943 at the age of 42 years when he began to exhibit his work publicly, until his death in 1985. Working with tremendous daily application, he assiduously kept a chronological record of his works: whether drawing, painting, collage, or sculpture, practically every piece was dated by day, month, and year.

For most western people, there are objects that are beautiful and others that are ugly; there are beautiful people and ugly people, beautiful places and ugly ones. But not for me. Beauty does not enter into the picture for me. I consider the western notion of beauty completely erroneous. I absolutely refuse to accept the idea that there are ugly people and ugly objects. Such an idea strikes me as stifling and revolting. For a ham, beautiful means fat; for water, it means clear; for paper, smooth. But for the products of the mind? In this case it is purely a matter of convention, and it is culture that institutes this convention. Culture institutes it periodically like Chinese emperors, who, at the beginning of each year, used to decide in which key all the music in the empire would be composed. The idea of beauty, replacing the more modest and much more fruitful idea of interesting, of fascinating, is the vehicle for the distinctly cultural goal of granting primacy to certain works over all others that may, in a different form, be interesting or fascinating.
to create with its cultural propaganda, it is readers and admirers. Cultural propaganda aims to impress upon these underlings a sense of the goal separating them from the prestigious treasures to which the dominant class holds the keys, and of the futility of attempting to make a valid creative work outside of the designated path.4

In France one can partake of Dubuffet’s world of things and the mind at the Fondation Jean Dubuffet located in Perigny-sur-Yerres, not far outside Paris. There one can visit the “Villa & Closerie Falbala with the Cabinet Logologique,” a human-scale structure relating in appearance to the Hourloupe sculpture cycle, which is painted, sculpted, and intended to be entered and temporarily experienced. At the Centre Georges Pompidou there is another room-sculpture titled “Jardin-d’hiver,” also a painted and sculpted interior with approach, to be climbed on, and entered. In New York one can travel downtown to the Chase Manhattan Plaza near the stock exchange, where there is a compelling interrelation among Isamu Noguchi’s stone and water garden, sharing the light with Dubuffet’s “Group of 4 Trees.”

While one might make a pilgrimage to see the Collection of Art Brut in Switzerland, or the Dubuffet Foundation outside Paris, his many works remain living in the projections of Dubuffet’s mind, through his writing and his art. Having traveled philosophically vast stretches from an early fundamental materiality to the “mental” intentions of his last works, Dubuffet has left us in his legacy, a vision, marvelously illumined, of individual vitality in artistic practice, and a warning to maintain constant vigilance against those tendencies in the self, society, and what is considered “culture” that destroy spontaneous creation.

I must say my feeling is — always has been — very strong — that the key to things must not be as we imagine it, but that the world must be ruled by strange systems of which we have not the slightest inkling. This is why I rush toward strange things, I am quite convinced that truth is strange; it is at the far end of strangeness that one has a chance to find the key to things.5

— L. Brandon Krall

Notes
4. Dubuffet, Asphyxiating Culture and Other Writings, p. 78.
5. Ibid., p. 93.

ON THE PASSAGE OF TWO CATALOGUES THROUGH A VERY NARROW WOOF IN TIME

An endless adventure . . . an endless passion . . . an endless banquet:
A Situationist Scrapbook
edited by Iwona Blazwick, VersoICA, London, 1990, $14.95

On the Passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time:
The Situationist International 1957-1972
edited by Elizabeth Sussman
MIT Press and The Institute of Contemporary Arts
Cambridge and Boston, 1989, $25

Sitting on a bench inside New York’s spectacular Guggenheim Museum, at the very spectacular installation of a spiraling electronic sign board broadcasting messages of spectacular triviality and terminal banality, I happened to notice a plaque chiseled onto the surface of my polished-stone seat: “Use what is dominant in a culture to change it quickly.” How marvelous, I thought; wouldn’t the metal plaque version of this advice to the artlom, exhibited at the “Image World” show at the Whitney just a few months ago, be the ideal Christmas gift from Roger Ailes to Dan Quayle?

It’s not inappropriate to note that the — what? — 10, 20, 30 thousand that this bench sells for, if you can get on the waitlist, is part of what makes this art spectacular, because its context and content demand that its market value be part of its explicit meaning as an artwork, indeed its relation to market value (which is what is “dominant” in our culture) defines its art value since this work possesses few other apparent aesthetic or political values.

Two recent catalogues of French Situationist writings and art offer a sharp contrast to the militant commodification and aggressive (or hyp) assimilationism of such cultural reificationists as Holzer, Kruger, Kraus, Levine, Foster, Sherman, Prince, Halley, Owens . . . I mention the Blue Chip Conceptualists because so much of what they do is derived from such Situationist techniques as detournement (de-touring of “preexisting aesthetic elements” from the normal course or purpose) and too little from derive (drift: “the practice of a passionate journey out of the ordinary through rapid changes of ambiance, as well as means of studying psychogrophy”). It’s encouraging that Situationist use of appropriation and cultural citation, as well as the playfulness of drift, retains its sharp critical edge more than 20 years after its initiation.

In many ways, the Situationists provided the most trenchant, anyway the most activist, critique of art-making activities since the Dadaists — and the occasion of a major show of the material artifacts of their collective, almost all male, very often self-destructively sectarian, struggle is a good occasion to remember their still relevant contribution. The Situationist show originated at the Pompidou Center in Paris in February 1989 and traveled to the ICA in London and the ICA in Boston. The exhibition was principally organized by Peter Wollen and Mark Francis.

The Situationists argued passionately and persuasively against a society in
which Spectacle tramples over everyday life, burying it under a viral barrage of images manipulated to transform individuals into passive, dazed consumers, dupes of a social machine that strips them of their freedom and sells their labor capacity to the lowest bidder. The society of the spectacle destroys the possibility for human communication, segmenting even avant-garde art into a sphere where its possible social agency is neutralized, a neutralization that demonstrates the Situationist axiom, “Whatever doesn’t kill power is killed by it.”

Situationist art, not to be distinguished from Situationist political action, synthesizes play and revolt, aspiring to replace the alienated forms of the society of the spectacle with an “absolute communication” capable of “rendering sublimity.” Situationist art is in the service of the “liberation of everyday life”; it is a gift exchange or potlatch that actively resists its appropriation as museum or gallery art. For the Situationists, art is active social intervention and critique that has the force to change (not just interpret) the situations in which it intersects itself. Thus, the Situationists would seem to have already denounced developments that seems all too contemporary in art theory: “The critic is someone who makes a spectacle out of his very condition as a spectator — a specialized and therefore ideal spectator, expressing his ideas and feelings about a work in which he does not really participate. He re-presents, restages, his own nonintervention in the spectacle.”

Change not interpret: this is the crucial difference between the Situationist position and that of the many advocates of an antipolitical “postmodernism” who consciously or unconsciously mime — the Situationists would say “reappropriate” — some of these ideas. Mustapha Khattab, writing 25 years ago, could predict this outcome: “Words forged by revolutionary critique are like partisan’s weapons: abandoned on the battlefield, they fall into the hands of counterrevolution and like prisoners of war are subjected to forced labor.” These words ring chillingly true when you consider Elisabeth Sussman’s dismaying attempt, in her introduction to the MIT/ICA volume, to recuperate the Situationists (that is — make them relevant) as precursors to our contemporary Cultural Reificationists.

The most important sources of Situationist writing are inexpensive and easily available: Ken Knabb’s Situationist International Anthology (406 pp., $8.15) from which I have quoted above and Guy Debord’s Society of the Spectacle (unauthorized translation, 221 pp., $4.50). These may be ordered from Left Bank Distribution, 4142 Brooklyn N.E., Seattle, WA 98105.

The MIT/ICA catalogue provides useful supplemental materials to these two sourcebooks. Most notably Peter Wollen has written an indispensable commentary on the Situationist movement, with detailed information on its relation to Western Marxist traditions and its important debt to Breton’s Surrealism and Lettrism. In addition, there is a very thoughtful discussion and summary of Debord’s movies by Thomas Y. Levin. Since (sadly) Debord has withdrawn these movies from distribution, it’s interesting to read how much they anticipate (his first film was made in 1952) many of the most innovative developments in independent or “avant-garde” cinema of the following decades. (From the descriptions and screenplays — I haven’t seen the films — there is strong resemblance to both Godard and Kubrick, among many others; Levin notes that Godard has never acknowledged this precedent. For their part, the Situationists denounced Godard on more than one occasion.)

Unlike the previous Situationist collections in English, the MIT/ICA catalogue is profusely illustrated. In this context, the visual art of Asper Jorns stands out. Jorns was interested in fusing (or getting beyond the division between) high art and kitsch elements, within the context of a revolutionary Situationist aesthetic that had no sympathy for Pop art. To this end, for a 1959 show Jorns painted over a series of kitsch paintings he bought in a market. Jorn, however, was not interested simply in exposing or critiquing dominant codes of European art. He believed that this process would reveal otherwise hidden collective social values — as his comrades put it, “vaster construction[s], a new genre of creation at a higher level.” In his own 1959 essay “Detourned Painting,” published in the MIT/ICA collection, Jorns writes:

Detournement is a game born out of the capacity for devalorization. Only he who is able to devalorize can create new values. And only there where there is something to devalorize, that is, an already established value, can one engage in devalorization. It is up to us to devalorize or to be devalorized according to our ability to reinvest in our own culture. There remain only two possibilities for us in Europe: to be sacrificed or to sacrifice. . . . In this exhibition I erect a monument in honor of bad painting. Personally, I like it better than good painting. But above all, this monument is indispensable, both for me and everyone else. It is painting sacrificed.

Perhaps most impressive of the visual work reproduced in the MIT/ICA collection is the seven pages of reproductions from Debord’s and Jorn’s stunning 1958 visual poem/essay Memoires, composed entirely of prior texts, which, as Grell Marcus notes in his accompanying essay, makes very clear the ways in which the Situationists continued the work of Lettrism.

I wanted to like the Verso/ICA collection more, since any book that has real sandpaper covers, guaranteed to wreck any other books it comes in close contact with, already has won a place in the little that’s left of my heart. It is a scrapbook, like the subtitle says, and it’s charming and unpretentiously funky in design, in contrast to the high-gloss MIT book. Almost half the book is recycled: from Knabb’s anthology (which, in keeping with the Situationist commitment to plagiarism, is not copyrighted and encourages unauthorized reproduction) and from Wollen’s essay in the MIT collection (but not useful here: I prefer the extensive footnotes of the full version). The rest of the book consists of lively, but secondary, materials related to impact of the Situationist International in the UK (which was evidently too little, too late to save the Island from its fate). — Charles Bernstein
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