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Roundtrip

Shortly before his death, the 86-year-old Jorge Luis Borges, who was about to embark on one of his many overseas voyages, told an editor in New York by phone: "Sir, I am a poet, an anarchist and a cosmopolitan. Nationalism is the greatest curse of the modern world."

This, it seems to me, is an exemplary statement of the modernist's steadfast position. No matter where we look in the early modern tradition, artists were declaring themselves free of the suffocating boundaries that nationalism sought to enforce; declaring themselves cultural voyagers who would not be hostage either to history or geography. Picasso insisted that he would choose his heritage, and choose it wherever he pleased. T.S. Eliot lauded tradition, but chose his traditions with immense latitudes. Neither time nor place would constrict the unfolding of ever-broadening horizons.

And yet, if we go back to Borges: he was a citizen of Buenos Aires. He took coffee in certain cafés which we know so well through his words. He strolled through certain streets whose peculiarities he recorded. He peered into certain gardens where trees grew in a certain way. He was always aware of the great river separating his city from another country, and of the great ocean separating him from Europe, the source, he felt, of his great love of literature. He belonged, in short, to a distinctive culture that expressed itself through him as certainly as it did through the false gaucho poems that he attacked in his great essay on the colonial frame of mind of the American writer.

If the expression of a culture is still best understood through works

of art, the definition of culture remains a vexing problem, and the mapping of cross-cultural influences is a hazardous undertaking. Cultures travel like pollen. Few have ever been able to trace their routes with any certainty, and the whole enterprise is threatened at every moment by the caprices of the tradewinds. In many ways the story of the translation of cultural characteristics from one place to another is like Schnitzler's La Ronde, or perhaps like one of Buñuel's witty depictions of the constant reiteration of an event. Each circuit is slightly different, and so much is dependent on the fortuitous and the contingent. I don't want to become too abstract here. I'll give an example (a kind of American fairy tale): In the early 1930s a certain Baroness Rebay met, and apparently fell in love with an epigone of Kandinsky. A wealthy American, Mr. Guggenheim, met and apparently fell in love with the Baroness Rebay. As a result, he wound up buying a lot of paintings by Kandinsky's imitator, but also, a huge number of works by Kandinsky himself. These works were shown to aspiring young artists, such as Gorky and Pollock, who occasionally swept the floor of Mr. Guggenheim's new museum, before the Second World War, and so were subject to a vision that their fellow artists in Paris could not share. Out of these fortuitous facts came an undeniable intonation in American painting.

When Burckhardt wrote his preface for his wonderful book on the Italian renaissance, he wisely suggested that he was going to put forward a group of facts that could well be interpreted--with justice--entirely differently by another historian. I shall try to suggest the character of the complicated relationship between the United States and Europe with appropriate humility for it is a long and tortuous story whose unhelpful title will have to be: AMBIVALENCE. On both sides.

It is distinctly cross-cultural, especially in the United States where so many protagonists were formed in the mythical melting pot. The melting pot is an old cliché, and like all old clichés, it has amazing endurance even when it is cloaked in the high rhetoric of intellectuals. The American situation was seen by Europeans as privileged by its youth, its diversity and above all, its primitive vitality. The Americans in turn saw Europe as old, worn-out and monolithic. Conversely, both sides on occasion saw the other side in reverse terms. Reigning clichés were and are hard to expunge: Ambivalence in its literal meaning--everything seems to cut both ways--prevails. Specifically, now: I will cite one example from the formative years of the American movement known as Abstract Expressionism, illustrating divergent impulses and pronounced ambivalence.

One of the prime modernist movers during the 1930s was Stuart Davis, an American who could trace his ancestry back many generations. He was a bluff, intelligent painter, always rolling the tart American vernacular on his tongue, and inflecting his paintings with American motifs. He befriended the exotic, Armenian-born Arshile Gorky. The two met on the grounds of their admiration for Cézanne, Picasso and Léger, and They both felt the need for solidarity in the face of proverbial American philistinism vis-à-vis modern art. They were like a good vaudeville team: Davis, combative, conscious of his pioneering heritage and keen to preserve the frontier mentality and the best of the indigenous tradition. Gorky, elegant, debonair, an admirer of continental poets such as Eluard, and a very busy weaver of a personal myth rooted in his childhood on the shores of Lake Van. When Gorky's exoticism got to be too much for Davis, especially when he was wailing his native folksongs, Davis would turn up the radio loudly, drowning out

the alien, minor-key lament with good American jazz. Gorky, Davis insinuated, was trading on his exoticism, for which there is always a good market in the United States, while he, Davis, was fighting the good fight on native grounds. Yet, Davis knew full well that his art was beholden to Europe, and Paris especially, and that American jazz had its roots in Africa. In each of these artists divergent impulses warred. One valence offered the promising thought that in America, there could be a fresh start, even in modern art. In a certain way, America was a tabula rasa. The other valence represented the firm notion that modern art was born in Europe and that the basis of its development was transnational, and that they could be a part of it.

Now, I have in this example tried to portray two artists in whom certain elements of cultural interchange were marked. There were two aspects that I wanted to put into relief. The first is the role of exoticism which I beleive is one of the authentic motivating forces in modernism. Or perhaps, in the soul of almost any artist. The craving for that which is outside, away, different, and if possible, mysteriously inaccessible in terms of its significance, is constantly expressed throughout the modern era. Davis was both inspired by, and wary of, its presence in his friend, but like many of the artists of the 20th century, he, too, had been marked by the need. I am not speaking of the obvious here; not of the visit by Picasso to the Musée de l'Homme to discover African sculpture, or Nolde's trek to the South Seas, although they matter, too. I'm speaking of the taste for cultural expansion; for assimilation of the alien in order to refresh an idiom. When Davis made jazz his territory, he was doing the same thing as his friend Gorky, who was imagining a place far from his Manhattan studio in order to be free; to be, as Borges said, anarchic and cosmopolitan.

The other elements in my little account of Gorky and Davis are obvious, including that of the competitive streak among artists and cultures. There is no question in my mind that Renato Poggioli was right when, in his history of the avant-garde, he stressed the element of contest. The rivalry between the two artists was minor compared to the rivalry in their breast that made them wish to compete in the biggest Olympic games of art. Not only that: the agon was at once transnational and transtemporal. Gorky was competing with artists of previous generations, some as far back as the 15th century. The contest was transcontinental, a huge tennis game with the ball being smashed back and forth across the Atlantic.

Was there a possibi ity of defining its cultural underpinnings? No doubt. But only with the most provisory arrangement. When I was a student there was a book published by an anthropologist at Harvard in which he listed some four hundred definitions of the word "culture." If we are to understand the way these cultural elements drift, we are obliged to turn back to try to find consistently stated attitudes that shape their reception, or, as the art historian of of African culture, Robert Farris Thompson says we must seek the "cultural preparation."

Begin, for instance, with the perceptions of America in Europe from the 18th century, when, on the one hand, fictions were multiplying about the American Indian, and on the other, Benjamin Franklin was the darling of French salons. Go on to the 19th century where European ambivalence found specific spokesmen. There is Baudelaire finding his great semblable in the dissolute genius Edgar Allen Poe whose great flight from the narrow mores of the Eastern coast in the United States took him to supernal

realms that Baudelaire dearly wished to share. "All that we see or seem/ Is but a dream within a dream," said Poe, and He seemed to Baudelaire the greatest dreamer of all. Not only to Baudelaire. A century later, I met two French-speaking artists of great stature, Gaston Bachelard and René Magritte, both of whom told me that Poe was their dearest source. Baudelaire was also sensible enough to admire a rather more down-to-earth transcendentalist, Emerson, who [illegible]ly defended intuition against its stuffy detractors in American culture, and who was an intrepid opponent of any [illegible] orthodoxy. For all his admiration of these eccentric--or so he thought--Americans, Baudelaire also quite easily dismissed America as a technocratic nightmare, or as he sometimes said, a zoocratic disaster, and whenever he wished to scourge his own philistine country, he said it was becoming like America.

Later generations in Europe followed Baudelaire in his uneasy [illegible] flirtation with the exotic, and came to admire Melville and Whitman. Where Poe stood for the vertiginous flight from the ugliness of the commonplace to a relatively static paradise in dream, Melville represented another American -seeming tendency. For all [illegible] his play with great and archaic symbols, Melville was a man of action, a true adventurer, putting out in ships [illegible] from the New World to still other new worlds. His philosophy (for he had one) brought that action into subtle play: Ahab says:

> [illegible] "All objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask."

Eventually, D.H. Lawrence would make a brilliant apologia for American literature in 1923, writing: "The furthest frenzies of French modernism or futurism

have not yet reached the pitch of extreme consciousness that Poe, Melville, Hawthorne and Whitman reached. The European moderns were all trying to be extreme. The great Americans just were it."

These superb extremes touched by 19th-century American writers, and it should be added, a few painters from Kensett to Ryder, were certainly in part achieved because of the peculiarities of American culture. All artists in the United States were born into a situation of cultural ambiguity. They were always the offspring of Europe, the colonial remains of the jewel of Western culture. From the early stirrings of national aspiration, the difficulty of the colonial psychological state of mind was cited. Noah Webster, preparing to compile his dictionary, in 1785, felt compelled to declare:

"America is an independent empire, and ought to assume a national character. Nothing can be more ridiculous than a servile imitation of the manners, the language, and the vices of foreigners...nothing can betray a more despicable disposition in Americans than to be the apes of Europeans."

The great fear of apery sat in the heart ofevery American artists right up through the Second World War, and who knows? perhaps there arestill traces. It was enough of a menace to creativity to push them very far into the extremes so admired by Lawrence who, himself, fed upon the exoticism he found in both North America and Mexico. And it was this fear of apery that Borges found in the Western hemisphere writers, and despised, for it made of them false folk artists and self-proclaimed provincials.

During the early 20th century many of the ambivalences and conflicts became acute, and commentators tried to give them shape. Americans still made the obligatory obseisance to Europe, but they were also restive and anxious to find an identity of their own. Before the First World War some gifted and noisy American painters resolutely decided to paint the American scene, or at least, urban scene which, to them, wasthe epitome of America. They were not really offended when the journalists gleefully calledthem the Ashcan School. Others, fearful of the specter of American provincialism, revolted. They organized the great Armory Show in 1913 to bring all the European innovators into a public situation. They listened to Alfred Stieglitz, who had studied in Germany, and whose conviction that what is American in American art would somehow emerge nolens volens and needed to be fed by many sources. They bemoaned the indifference of their society to the contribution of its artists, and some of them took themselves off, right after the First World War, to discover their artistic roots which they believed were burrowing somewhere on the Boulevard Raspail. The great effort on the part of American artists between the wars was to reconcile their intense need to forge a separate identity by avoiding apery, and to join thegreat movement called modernism that denied national identities, at least in theory. Out of this bracing conflict came something that can indeed be called American art, if by that we mean works that have an elusive savour, a faint accent, a wafting smoke of specialness that comes not so much from subject-matter (although that, too) as from an attitude toward subject-matter. I speak of William Carlos Williams' bold essays in "In the American Grain", and his own insistence on local intonation. I speak of the paintings of Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward

Hopper, those first-generation Americanists whom Stieglitz nurtured as much as did the European masters.

In Europe, and most especially in Paris, Americans cut a swath that has many implications. Although the visitors from that largely unknown continent (unknown at least to most European intellectuals, although the tradition of Toqueville had found a few successors) were still regarded with a bit of condescencion, as wild and woolly, and to a refreshing degree, uncultured, the generation of Hemingway that invaded Paris made its impact. Gertrude Stein and John Dos Passos, two writers who owed little to Europe stylistically, were carefully examined and in some cases, carefully adapted in European literature. There were Americanophiles, as there still are, who despised high French culture; defended the speed, variety, and technical virtuosity of the United States, and even thought, rather romantically, that there was something in the democratic organization of American society that was lacking in Europe. Of course, there were Americanophobes also. Céline, in one of the most important works of literature between the wars, Voyage au bout de la nuit, takes an agonizing stroll in the streets of Manhattan. He described the suffocating loneliness of the canyon-like streets, the grayness of its denizens. Here is Céline's Broadway:

> "We went along in the twilight below, as sickly as that of the forest and so gray that the street was full of it like so much dirty cotton waste...It was a valuable district, they told me later, the home of gold: Manhattan. You only enter it on foot, like entering a church. It is the very core of the banking center of the world today...The crowds rolled forward in the direction of the sky signs high in the darkness, like twisting multicolored snakes. More people flowed in from all the surrounding streets. 'They're worth

a good many dollars,' I thought, 'a crowd like that, just for their handkerchiefs alone, or their silk socks. Even for their cigarettes."

This description, recoveringthe 19th-century tradition in France in which the United States was portrayed as a technological monster, drowning all decency in its gross materialism, contrasts with Le Corbusier's description of the same city, which h[illegible] in its title confers a beauty , a purity on the same city, and speaks rapturously of the same high rising buildings in "When The Cathedrals Were White." Another European, (if you think of the Soviet Union as part European) Mayakovsky, had a difficult time in theUnited States, and also despised its materialism, but he could not help admiring the industrial profficiency and the great structures [illegible] it sponsored. He wrote about the Brooklyn Bridge in 1925, saying that if the end of the world would come, and what would remain would be this bridge, and a geologist of centuries will succeed in recreating "our contemporary world," a world Mayakovsky saw as a [illegible] fight for "construction instead of style, an austere disposition of [illegible] bolts and steel." "I am proud of just this mile of steel" he sang. But of course, he was not only a European. He was a Russian, and his own culture had n t yet learned how to tame the technological behemoth, and such [illegible] a mile of steel was unknown to it.

Those living in the land of bolts and steel had many misgivings about it, as had their transcendental ancestors. They worried a lot. They worried about the technology that developed not only bridges, but also The Big Sell,and made everything in America a part of a vast system of money changing. And here I must modulate my adcount by calling upon those great public events that we call history,and that alter or sometimes break the steady evolution of the arts.

There were great public events that affected everyone on both sides of the Atlantic, but elicited entirely different ways in responding to them. I think, for instance, of the First World War and its impact in Germany. Just before, there were painters sitting in their storefront studio intoning Whitman--Whitman, the great singer of America and things American, but, at the same time, the great universalist whose song could travel with the speed of Orpheus and be heard all over Europe. Whitman himself had been greatly taken with Herder's idea of the Volkgeist, so, in some way, it was an idea that floated across the ocean and returned home, altered and newly accessible. After the war, the same Volkgeist animated the revolutionary members of the Novembergruppe, but eventually, was altered yet again to serve the insidious ends of the National Socialist artists.

When thegreat Depression hit, responses in Europe and those in the United States diverged, but not totally. There are many subtle indications that the cultural isolation imposed by the Depression only heightened the need of American artists to look elsewhere. I think of artists such as Guston, Motherwell and Pollock who avidly studied the periodicals from Europe, and who were as much interested in Valori Plastici as they were in the latest feint of Picasso. Still, there was great and significant turmoil in the United States during the Depression years that differed entirely from that in Europe. Lawrence was right when he said the Europeans were trying so hard to be extreme. The Americans just were.

What the pre-World War I generation had brought back from their forages in the arts of Oceania and Africa was augmented in Europe by searches for still more exotic sources. André Breton wasquite clear about that. In his magazine, he published photographs of New Mexican Kachina dolls, andeventually,

followed in Lawrence's wake, visiting New Mexico on the great quest for otherness. The surrealists were faithful modernists in the sanse that they despised nationalism and rightly descried the horrible consequences in Indochina, Italy and Spain. An American, Man Ray, enjoyed full privileges as a member of the group, and most of the surrealists were quite free of inherited perceptions of the New World. In fact, in their morem chichi moments, they were fatuous Americanophiles, never tiring in their eloges for Charlie Chaplin as the expression of America, or of certain other popular heroes. This made them feel democratic, and open to the voice of the people, although, aswe all know, they were rather remote in fact. And even among the surrealists there were cargoes that went back and forth across the Atlantic, sometimes unnoticed. For instance, the American writer, S.J. Perlman had been in Paris in the Twenties, returned to America,and among other things, began writing film scripts for the Marx brothers. The surrealists discovered the Marx brothers and were ecstatic, thinking they discovered natural surrealists, uncorrupted by European culture. But Perelman, of course, had been influenced by them!

The story of the Depression and its unusual events during the 1930s is too well known for me to recount, but it is important to bear in mind the extreme cultural turmoil it produced in the United States. Artists, like everyone else, were confronted with exceptional circumstances and had to respond, one way or another. When the government stepped in with an overall plan of economic rescue, many artists saw an opportunity to win a place in American society. The "alienation" of the American artist was in the marrow of his bones; it was no psychological or romantic myth sustaining his artistic revolt, as it was

in so many cases in Europe. Those American painters and sculptors who had been to Mexico or seen the Mexican muralists at work in the United States were willing to dream of a great rapprochement of the artist and his people; willing to explore American history and local circumstance with the intention of offering it back to Americans in readable images. In 1934 an important administrator in the WPA arts project wrote: "American art is declaring a moratorium on its debts to Europe and returning to cultivate its own garden." That garden, as it turned out, was soon over-run with weeds, choking off its healthy growth. The weeds included an institutionalized social realism called American Scene painting, and an institutionalized patriotism that rationalized itself even to districts, giving rise to a bitter and chauvinistic movement called Regionalism. The dismay of young artists who had thought of themselves as "progressive" and who yearned to develop in the grand tradition of modernism was intense. Not only were they torn by their political allegiances, which were almost uniformly on the left during the Depression, but they were jostled by their own ambivalence, wanting to be part of the great American experiment during the days of the Project, and wanting not to be part of the inevitable nationalistic posturing that engendered. Their reaction was to cling ever more fiercely to the idioms they perceived in the important sequence of exhibitions staged by the young direcor of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred Barr. In these astounding compendia of the history of modernism in painting and sculpture, American artists could get an overview that even Europeans had not been able to achieve. These were events with incalculable consequences. One other event of signal importance must be noted : the exhibition in

in New York of Guernica soon after its showing in Paris. American artists who had had the courage to accept the Picasso influence earlier would find in Guernica a perfect antidote for their malaise. It was at once topical and universal, readable and abstract, formal and ambiguous. An artist wavering between social responsibility through his art, and the freedom of the avant-garde, could take consolation in the great mural and find for himself a new track. This event, and one last important addition--the appearance in New York of many stellar artists from Europe in their very persons--seem to have had an extraordinarily salutary effect on America's artists. Those who came to be known as Abstract Expressionists , at any rate, had found their way out of the maze of contradictions, at least for a time. Europeans, on the other hand, bedevilled by the tragedies of the historical slide into war, and then by the war itself, had little thought for what was going on in other places, above all the United States, and there was, in general, a hiatus in cultural import and export that would be important for both entities.

I agree with Jan Bialostocki's definition of art offered in a recent article in Diogène: "an ensemble of objects of a certain type, produced by human industry, with the materials, utensils and institutions and the people who relate to them--producers , mycenases, amateurs--as well as the technical means and the secrets of the métier that artists possess." Bialostocki includes institutions in his definition, which can cover a multitude of subdefinitions. Although it grieves me to truncate my adcount of the intersection of the two cultures--European and American--I must confine myself here to a discussion of a much-disputed set of events following the Second World War in which various institutions play important roles. At the outset, I want to reiterate my opinion that since artists of the postwar

generation had all drunk from the same fountains of modernism, the variations that appeared immediately after the war in European and American works (and I could include even Japaense work here) were not nearly so distinctive as American art historians are wont to assume. When Sir Herbert Read wrote an introduction in 1960 to the epoch-making exhibition, Antagonismes in Paris, he was, in my opinion, quite right to see similarities rather than differences. He wrote: "We have not known since the Christian art of the Middle Ages an art so stripped of chauvinism." In its style, its subject-matter, its techniques, the art of the postwar world had been faithful to the international aspiration of the whole modern movement, and that was apparent to Julien Alvard, the Parisian critic who was so quick to understand the affinities of the Americans and his French friends among the new generation of painters, and whose writing has been unjustly ignored. While other critics were busy tallying the borrowings from Europe amongst the Americans, and defending the hegemony of Europe in the face of the onslaught from America, Alvard was pondering the deeper sources, right back to Nietzsche, and accurately describing the effects. Sir Herbert, seeing the ensembles of works in Antagonismes noted with satisfaction that it would be impossible to perceive national characteristics in the show.

That was in 1960. Both before and after, however, the institutions on both sides of the Atlantic--by which I mean museums, publicity departments, dealers and universities--were confecting quite a different approach which again played on motifs of national pride and a kind of horse-race mentality.

I must be clear here: I am not suggesting that there were no differences. It goes without saying that because of all the subtle forces and particular cultural mores, there would be differences, not only individually, but in the larger sense. It is a fact that American painters during the war

felt a sense of community, and part of that sense of community arrived when they suddenly realized that they had successfully sprung free from their exaggerated reverence for the European masters of modernism. Furthermore, the tendencies in the American culture that perhaps had traveled through the centuries from the earliest Puritan settlers--tendencies toward a metaphysical approach to life, and toward a certain earnestness and even , I might say, humorlessness--served to differentiate their works from those of the Europeans. I think of Gorky who was so much beholden to European surrealism, but who finally, had more in common with his American colleagues. Gorky in some of his last letters emphatically rejected surrealism and could speak for many others, including Rothko, who also rejected it on the same grounds:

> Surrealism is an academic art under disguise and anti-esthetic and suspicious of excellence largely restrictive because of its narrow rigidity. To its adherents the tradition of art and its quality mean little. They are drunk with psychiatric spontaneity and inexplicable dreams...Really they are not as earnest about painting as I should like artists to be....

Here I must remind you that Breton was still alive, and with his younger acolytes, was active in Paris re-defining the surrealist movement. An artist such as Alechinsky owed little to the American abstract expressionists: he was in the very place that had first spawned surrealism and could easily assimilate the new propositions to his own tradition of expressionism.

Yet, there was a general sense of European exhaustion which was legitimate enough given the monstrous effects of the war that had left America untouched and prosperous. Even those who were sheltering in the legendary Paris of the avant-garde were looking elsewhere, outward, andsome of the glances certainly fell on the United States. Pollock, for instance, was enthusiastically ~~reduced~~ received

by the coteries of young artists in Paris clustering around the new art journals, and when the Facchetti Gallery showed Pollock (in the early 1950s (the same gallery that showed Wols) it was thronged . These artists, I must insist, were responding vigorously because they were well aware that French chauvinism was their own enemy and that nationalism could only be detrimental to their own liberties. They had had ample demonstration when the first exhibition of Picasso after the war was desecrated by angry rightists, ~~and when Dubuffet was made the butt of all newspaper accounts.~~ Up to around 1960, then, there were certain shared interests that overbridged national rivalries.

In my experience, Europe showed exceptional receptivity when the first important international exhibition of what Barr called "The New American Painting" toured in the late 1950s. The responses were important to American artists who still had traces of the old colonial inferiority complex. The cordial reception in Europe was still the confirmation to them that they were really artists, really professional, as they had so longed to be for so many decades. What was later unfortunately seen as the conquest of Europe or rather, what was advertised as a conquest , was at the time not nearly so combative. The responses of Europeans are instructive, and I want to cite just a few.

Will Grohmann, at the time the doyen of German art critics wrote:

> They all use vast dimensions, not from megalomania, but because one cannot say these things in miniature. Klee was able to do just that; his world was not smaller because of it; he was a monk and wrote the psalter of our saeculum. Americans are world travelers and conquerors. They possess an enormous daring. One proves oneself in the doing, the performance, in the act of creation. In the United States, one

one speaks of Action Painting. We speak of Abstract Expressionism...We cannot forget, we distill the conceptions of longexperience instead of creating new ones. In any case, these young Americans stand beyond heritage and psychology, nearly beyond good and evil...."

There is a tone of both respect and European disdain, here, and yet, the note Melville struck with his emphasis on action has been discerned, as has the boldness of the approach toward the large work--surely an area won by the Americans through their access to another culture (Mexico) denied to the Europeans.

The response of a British painter and writer, Andrew Forge, was more nearly like that of progressive artists throughout Europe who saw in these American travelers the qualities peculiar to them:

> When I first saw the canvases by Pollock, Still, Kline, deKooning, Rothko, it seemed to me that painting had made a totally new definition of freedom. The structures I was looking at owed nothing, or so it seemed, to the closed, self-contained, self-consistent notions of composition and pictorial syntax that my experience up to then had taught me to regard as mandatory...For all their abstractness, these canvases seemed nearer to the great figurative traditions than anything that was being done in the name ofabstract art in Europe..nearer to the figurative tradition not obviously , in terms of spaces filled with seen forms. The very terms ofvision seemedto be recreated here--even in the matted cats-cradle of Pollock, even in deKooning's reversals of figure and field.

Forge rightly made the observation that the Americans had gathered up the great figurative tradition--by which I'm sure he meant the Venetians--

and had made haste to resolve the problems, still lingering in Europe, of formal versus informal approaches.

Finally I offer a response tendered just three years ago by the Italian painter, Emilio Vedova, which , I think, puts into relief the genuine issues amongst artists themselves, as opposed to institutional perceptions of cross-cultural influences. Those of you who know Vedova, a kind of monument of Venice, will remember that he has always said that he was born under the beard of Tintoretto. When an interviewer asked him about the influence of the Abstract Expressionists, whose first appearance as an acknowledged movement was in the Biennale, he answered: "They and I had the same grandfathers." Don't you see, he asked, "the arabesque of Pollock and of Tintoretto are the same, and so is the rhythm." Baroque. He pointed out that Pollock had indeed worshiped? at the shrine of Tintoretto as a student who was encouragdd to make copies of reproductions and drawings in the United States. For that matter, Boccioni also was the son of Tintoretto, he said. Finally--and this is the telling remark: "They talk so much about American painting, but where shall we place the European diaspora? Why must we be the debtors?"

That question: why must we be the debtors? became urgent only in the 1970s in Europe, although it had been raised earlier. The urgency was the result of forces that I would call institutionally instigated, and that can be crudely summed up in the phrase: cultural imperialism. I say crudely because there are too many issues subsumed in the phrase that deserve closer scrutiny than I can offer here, but it is undeniable that both political and economic forces had conspired to flood the world with American products, including culture, and that a certain sense of triumph had restored unseemly nationalism to the American art vocabulary. This provoked Europeans who responded in kind. The ugly

issues raised in the squabbles over Biennale prizes, and in the columns of newspapers defending European culture from American onslaughts, is well known to you, as is the boastful stance of Americans after a few years of exhilarating success in Europe. The American conquistadores, of course, lost their booty, as all conquerors do. Nietzsche's famous account of the Germans after they won the Franco-Prussian war can stand for all such accounts, even of cultural wars:

> It must be said: a great victory isa great danger. Human nature bears it with more difficulty than defeat, and it even seemsto be easier to obtain victiory than to carry it off in such a way that it is not changed into defeat. Of all the dangerous consequences following upon the late war with France , the most dangerous is perhaps the widespread, even general error that German culture has also been victorious in the battle and that it has a right to the palms awarded such success. This illusion is extremely harmful, not because it is an illusion--for there are some beneficent illusions--but because it is one way to transform our victory into a complete defeat." (Thoughts Out of Season, Part I)

When Americans began to see themselves as the biggest and the best; when during the 1960s and early 1970s they could withdraw into the celebration of American knowhow through Pop Art, they lost their rewards from Europe and endangered their own culture which was no longer as open to the influx of other values. The intensity of their movements was dispersed and the onset of the kind of rudderless sequence of movements, with brief and quickly forgotten successes, overtook them. ~~The kind of breakdown in genres, and in energy, has been widely remarked on both sides of the Atlantic.~~

But what of Europe? It seems to me that we are once a ain in a situation comparable to that described by Sir Herbert, in which the whole Western world is more alike

than different. It even has a name: Post- Modernism—a product of the earnest endeavors of both European and American theoreticians. Although all the defintions of post-modernism that I have seen are scarcely different from definitions of modernism, reminding me always of Borges' wonderful character comparing Shakespeare with another Shakespeare who is more like Shakespeare than Shakespeare, they do differ in one respect. All critics trying to discern fin-de-siècle characteristics in western art are forced to take into account certain social and political forces that are clearly menacing all cultural structures. There is no way any longer to talk about this culture or that culture, and its art and artifacts, without talking about such shadowy things as transnational companies, corporate collections, and various kinds of international skullduggery thatcan no longer be subsumed under the simple rubric: internationalism. The arts have not been immune. If I look in the gallery district in the Bastille or the East Village scene where I live, I find similar symptons of transnational malaise. The whole rush toward a neo-primitivism can be seen perhaps as a defense system set up by young artists who are reluctant to be packaged for the transnational market and try, as once modernists tried, to find a kind of lingua franca through what they perceive to be primitivism, with all its myths and stories. This neo-primitivism is not truly a cultural exhcange, or a cross-cultural phenomenon, I suspect. It does not have its source in the kind of yearning for primitive utopias and utter emotional simplicity that all earlier artists investigating primitivism from Diderot to Picasso had shared. Rather, it is the result of the wider and wider field of the telescope that describes cultural evolutions. Europeans and North Americans are no longer confronting

each other with their anxieties about cultural borrowing and their secret desires to differentiate themselves, and their ambivalences. Rather, they are , little by little, becoming an indistinguishable unit within a world scheme in which there are now other mirrors and foils. That world is gradually defining itself artistically,and is, in turn, going through all theagonies of identity versus globalism that once the Europeans and Americans had known. I do not like to call it by name, and certainly I find the terms third world or fourth world ludicrous, but I suggest that it will be important in a cultural history, and very soon. For the time being, I will limit myself to observing that the Western tradition is still vital both in the United States and Europe, and that even now, there are distinctions--thank god,-- to be made, andvalues to be assessed that grow out of both European and American contributions to modernism. If Anselm Kieffer appears to many percpetive critics to be an important artist, is it possible to evaluate his contribution without recourse to the peculiar circumstances of his birth, that is, his national origin, and also, to the formation in postwar Germany that included conversance with such American artists as Clyfford Still and Rabert Rauschenberg? If, on the other hand, Philip Guston is perceived as having contributed to the so-called post-modern style in painting, is it possible to evaluate him without bearing in mind his decision to school himself in European old masters; to appropriate the accent of popular arts in America, such as comic strips (which after all meant something to Picasso himself); his profound response to the European phenomenon summed up in the word holocaust; his refusal to accept the terms of American approval? In the light of the importance of such artists, it seemsto me that the search for signs of old rivalries and stale rhetorical juxtapositions is futile.