



KRITISK FOR KRITIKKEN I DEN NYE KUNSTVERDEN
CRITICAL FOR CRITICISM IN THE NEW ARTWORLD

30.10 & 31.10.1992

Internasjonalt seminar organisert av den norske seksjonen av AICA
med støtte fra UNESCO og Kulturdepartementet

International Seminar organized by the Norwegian Section of
International Association of Art Critics
with financial support from UNESCO and
the Norwegian Ministry of Cultural Affairs



AICA Norge

Ingrid Blekastad
Kristin Laastad
George Morgenstern
Morten Johan Svendsen
Olga Schmedling

Olga Schmedling Norway	Kritikeren - en historisk levning The Critic - an historical relic
Matthias Flügge Germany	Art Criticism - Artist Criticism
Alexander Jakimovich Russia	The Abyss and the Swimming Pool Models and Identities in contemporary Culture
Kim Levin U.S.A.	Identity Crisis or Change of Paradigm?
Jacques Leenhardt France	Changes of Function of "the New" and Art Criticism
Poul Erik Tojner Denmark	Criticism and Crisis - some remarks on on contemporary critical theory and practice
Gertrud Sandqvist Sweden	Jag och en kropp - en fråga om perspektiv
Hélène Lassalle France	Actors without Part: Art Criticism and its Self-definition in Historical Perspective



NORSK KUNSTKRITIKERLAG (NORWEGIAN SECTION)
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES CRITIQUES D'ART
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ART CRITICS
Rådhusgt. 7, Postboks 352, 0101 Oslo 1, Norway.

Internasjonalt seminar i Museet for Samtidskunst, Auditorium 1,
1.etg. Bankplassen, arrangert av norsk seksjon av AICA med støtte fra UNESCO
og Kulturdepartementet

International Seminar in the National Museum of Contemporary Art,
auditorium 1, ground floor, Bankplassen, arranged by the Norwegian Section
of AICA with financial support from UNESCO and the Norwegian Ministry of
Cultural Affairs

"KRITISK FOR KRITIKKEN I DEN NYE KUNSTVERDEN"

"CRITICAL FOR CRITICISM IN THE NEW ARTWORLD"

Freitag 30. oktober/Friday the 30th of October:

9 a.m. Registrering/Registration

9.15-30 Velkommen/Welcome address Karin Hellandsjø, sjefs-
konservator Museet for Samtidskunst, chief curator,
The National Museum of Contemporary Art

9.30-10.30 Om utstillingen "Tysk utakt"/About the exhibition
"Real time", Jan Brockmann, direktør Museet for
Samtidskunst/Director, the National Museum of
Contemporary Art.

10.30-45 Kaffepause/Coffee break

10.45-11 Tema og bakgrunn for seminaret. Utdeling av Nordisk
Kunsttidsskriftkatalog og påmelding for dem som
ønsker kompendium tilsendt/Theme and background for the
seminar. Distribution of the catalogue of Nordic Art
magazines Olga Schmedling, kunsthistoriker, Norsk
Kunstkritikerlag/president of the Norwegian AICA

Innlegg 45 min. hver/Lectures 45 min. each

11.-11.45 "Kunstkritikk og kunstnerkritikk i Tyskland"/"Art and artist
criticism in Germany"
Matthias Flügge, curator, chief Editor "Neue Bildende
Kunst Zeitschrift für Kunst und Kritik", Berlin.

11.45-12.45 Lunsj i Museets kafe Sesam/Lunch at Sesam, the -
cafe of the museum.

13.00-45 "Identitetsparadokser i kunsten og i kritikken"/
"Identity paradoxes in art and criticism" Alexander
Iakomovich, Moskva, Russland, forfatter/kritiker.
Author/critic Moscow, Russia.

13.45-14.30 "Identitetskrise eller paradigmeskifte?
Internasjonalt versus nasjonalt/regionalt perspektiv,
det almenne versus det individuelle" /"Identity
crisis or change of paradigm? International versus
national/regional perspectives, the general versus the
individual" Kim Levin, Village Voice, N.Y. USA

14.30-14.45 Pause/Pause

15.00-16 Paneldebatt/Panel Debate Jan Brockmann/Matthias
Flügge/Alexander Iakomovich/Kim Levin.
Ordstyrere/chairmen George Morgenstern kunstner,
kunstkritiker AICA Norge/artist/art critic Norway
Olga Schmedling, AICA Norge

16-17.00 osv. Dagen avsluttes med Picassoutstillingen på Henie
Onstad senteret/The Picasso exhibition at the Henie
Onstad Centre/Dinner.

If you walk along the main boulevard Karl Johan in the direction of the
castle, you can walk through the park
to

Kunstnernes Hus

The Artists' Kunsthalle
Wergelandsvn. 17

0167 OSLO

Olav Christopher
Jenssen:
malerier/paintings
(Documenta 92)
Alfredo Jaar

then you can walk back across the park to see

Galleri Riis

Kristian Augustsgt. 21
0164 OSLO

Olav Cristopher Jenssen
tegninger, små malerier
drawings, small

paintings

Galleri Wang

Kristian Augustsgt. 11
0164 OSLO

Kjell Erik Killi Olsen
Sao Paulo binnealen 90

In the Frogner area, you will find two galleries:
(you could take the tram to both of them)

Galleri K

Bjørn Farmannsgt. 6
0271 OSLO

Terje Uhrn:
Malerier/Paintings

Galleri Holst Halvorsen

Elisenbergvn. 4
0265

Galleri Haagen

Lille Frogner Alle 6
0263 OSLO

Then there are two museums you can not possibly miss:

Munch-museet

Tøyengt. 53
0578 OSLO
Metro/Subway from the
National Theatre

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter

Henie Onstad Art Centre
1311 HØVIKKODDEN
Bus from the University Square ca 20 min.

Picasso



NORSK KUNSTKRITIKERLAG (NORWEGIAN SECTION)
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES CRITIQUES D'ART
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ART CRITICS
Rådhusgt. 7, Postboks 352, 0101 Oslo 1, Norway.

Lørdag 31. oktober/Saturday 30th of October, Auditorium 2, 2. etg./
Auditorium 2, first floor

- 11.15 "Nyhetsfunksjonens forandring og kunstkritikken"/
"Changes of function of 'novelty' and art criticism".
Jacques Leenhardt, sosiolog, kritiker, Frankrike,
leder av internasjonale AICA/sociologist/critic,
France, President of AICA international.
- 12.-12.45 "Kritikk og krise. Noen merknader om samtids-
kritikkens teori og praksis."
"Criticism and crisis - some remarks on contemporary
critical theory and practice."
Poul Erik Tøjner, filosof, kritiker, Danmark/
philosopher, critic, Denmark.
- 12.45-13.45 Lunsj på Engebret /Lunch at Engebret Restaurant,
the oldest in town.
- 14.00-45 "Resa genom spägeln. Några randbemerkninger"/Looking
through the Mirror.
Gertrud Sandqvist, svensk kunstkritiker, leder av
Galleri F 15 i Norge/Swedish art critic, director
of the Nordic Gallery F 15 Norway.
- 14.45 "Kunstkritikken og dens selvkritikk i historisk
perspektiv"/"Art Criticism and its self-
criticism in historical perspective"
Helene Lassalle, fransk kunsthistoriker, kritiker,
konservator Picassomuseet, Paris/ French Art
historian/critic, curator The Picasso Museum, Paris.
- 15.30 Kaffepause./Coffee Break
- 15.45 Paneldebatt/Panel Debate. Jacques Leenhardt/Poul Erik
Tøjner/Gertrud Sandqvist/Helene Lassalle.
Ordstyrere/Chairmen: George Morgenstern/Olga Schmedding
- 16.45-17.00 Avslutning Oppsummering/Closing of the seminar

EXHIBITION PROGRAMME

Opening Hours are usually: 11.00-17.00 weekdays, 11.00-15.00
saturdays and 12.00-16.00 sundays. (A Oslo-map is enclosed)

In the old area of the capital, Christiania, you will find
the following exhibitions

Museet for samtidskunst:

The National Museum of
Contemporary Art
Bankplassen
0034 OSLO

"Tysk utakt"/"Real time"

Museets samling/The collection
of the Museum

Ram Galleri

Kongensgt. 3

Guri Svindahl: tekstil/textiles

0153 OSLO

Landsforeningen Norske Malere:

The Association of Norwegian

Painters

Kongensgt. 2

Tone Aanderaa:
malerier/paintings

0153 OSLO

Norske Grafikere

The Association of Norwegian

Printmakers

Kongensgt. 6

Knut Tiber:

0153 OSLO

Fotogalleriet

Kongensgt. 6

Bruce Gilden, USA

0153 OSLO

Galleri 27

Kongensgate 7

Tore Hansen: malerier/paintings

0153 OSLO

Tegnerforbundet

The Drawing Art

Association of Norway

Rådhusgt. 17

Yngvild Myhre: tegning/drawings

0158 OSLO

Oslo Kunstforening

Oslo Art Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Tertit Prestegård: tekstil,
akvarell/Textiles/water colours

0158 OSLO

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Siri Kvitvik: Skulptur/Sculpture

0158 OSLO

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Ragnhild Langmyr:

0158 OSLO

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Maleri/Paintings

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Liv Zachrisson: skulptur/sculpture

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Ingrid Book: installasjoner/
installations

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

From here you can easily walk to have a look at the interior
of the Town Hall and the around situated galleries:

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Anne-Lise Knoff: malerier/
paintings

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

sales exhibition

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Arts and crafts in the same
building as

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Norway Information Centre

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

Vestbaneplassen 1

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

0250 OSLO

Oslo Kunstneres Samfund

Young Artists' Association

Rådhusgt. 19

0250 OSLO

THE CRITIC - AN HISTORICAL RELIC

Olga Schmedding

We know it to be the case: the art critic is a relic from bygone times. This fact can no longer be concealed, although the art critic's historical disappearing act is a dragged out affair. The art critic has not vanished immediately like the copyists disappeared with the invention of the printing press, but rather slowly and almost imperceptibly. Only the name seems to remain, the official title "art critic", as in such organizations as the International Association of Art Critics.

The art critic first appeared in a society in which the discussion of cultural norms was of vital importance, namely in Western bourgeois society. Performing as an art critic involved, if not a struggle of life and death, then at least a struggle for survival: as in the case of Andreas Aubert, Norway's first art critic, who was banished from his newspaper because he wrote about a painting by Christian Krohg which had prostitution as its theme and was therefore controversial. Aubert ended up writing for periodicals. With this quick glance at the past, we find ourselves at the very heart of the matter.

The *periodical* was the art critic's media of choice, the *essay* her preferred genre. The critic's object consisted of others' verbal, visual and musical artistic expression. She wrote *about* others books and paintings, but *the original critic was independent*. She never wrote on the behalf of an institution or organization, but expressed her individual viewpoints in a discussion of opinions, a discussion with moral implications.

THE CRITIC'S LOSS OF AUTHORITY

It is obvious that the critic in this old-fashioned sense no longer has a role to play. Even if such critics should exist, endowed with the capacity of judgment, talent and integrity, still the critic's authority is lost for ever. The art critic has become a fifth wheel, there is no longer any use for her because the art she once wrote about has lost its transcendent meaning. Art is admittedly still free, but it can neither legitimize nor cast doubt upon the total state of affairs, upon the whole of society. Even if this ideal and empowered criticism still relates itself to this totality, it is no longer criticism which matters. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger has claimed, the critic's influence has evaporated in the indifference of a pluralistic market that doesn't distinguish between Dante and Donald.

THE CRITIC'S LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE AND LITERARY AMBITION

Artists don't take the disappearance of the critic very hard. On the contrary, for most artists the corrective and free-standing critic represents a threat. The rare, independent critic is a poorly paid freelancer with no status. Regardless of what the critic writes, the text's only status is gained through functioning as the mouthpiece for an exhibition, a gallery, a museum or educational institution.

It is precisely the pedagogue and the publicist who have gone in to fill the empty space that the critic has left behind. The pedagogues are the extended arm of the public institutions and schools, while the publicists are the galley-slaves of the galleries. The pedagogues are the professional guide and the art appreciation teacher with scientific pretensions, while the publicists are those who write catalogue-essays promoting the galleries' artists, in the same way advertizing writers launch new products. One may also mention the trend-setting curators of the biennials and art fairs, who are at the same time professional beggars in the sponsor-market.

Literary proficiency is a relevant qualification neither for the pedagogue nor for the

promotional writer. In their case this skill is not necessary. Trend-setting is more important for the publicist and curator than language proficiency and literary ambition, which involve demands of their own. *What* - the latest new phenomenon - replaces *how* - the way of writing. Consequently, it no longer matters who "reviews" what, how, where and with what purpose. It is not individual critics who are to blame for this. The fault is rather to be found in the very loss of criticism as a special type of activity. This activity is no longer in hope of being saved.

The bourgeois epoch had - in passing - allowed criticism a central place on its public scene. The scene has now changed, while the art which criticism had as its object has become that which it originally was: a marginal matter for a limited few. These form their opinion apart from the media's short-winded reviews.

It is the demise of criticism we shall focus upon during this seminar, under the title of "The Critical Condition of Criticism in The New Europe".

Olga Schmedding:

KRITIKEREN - EN HISTORISK LEVNING

Vi vet at det er slik. Kritikerer er en historisk levning. Kritikerens historiske forsvinning lar seg ikke lenger skjule. Men forsvinningsnummeret trekker ut. Intet brått eller synlig bortfall slik kopistene forsvant med boktrykkerkunstens oppfinnelse, men sakte og nesten umerkelig. Bare navnet ser ut til å være tilbake, benevnelsen "kritiker" slik organisasjonen av kritikerer internasjonalt International Association of Artists er eksempel på.

Kritikerer gjorde sin entre i et samfunn der diskusjonen om kulturelle normer var livsviktig, nemlig i det borgerlige samfunn. Å ytre seg som kritiker var - om ikke en kamp på liv og død, så ihvertfall en kamp for å overleve. Slik vår første kritiker Andreas Aubert ble forvist av sin faste avis fordi han skrev om et maleri av Christian Krohg som hadde prostitusjon som emne og som derfor var kontroversielt. Til slutt endte han opp med å skrive i tidsskrift. Og her er vi ved kilden til vårt lynraske tilbakeblikk på fortiden.

Tidsskriftet var kritikerens kjæreste medium, essavet hennes foretrukne form. Kritikerens objekt var andres skrive- male- og komposisjonskunst. Hun skrev om andres bøker og bilder, men urkritikerer var uavhengig. Hun skrev aldri på vegne av en institusjon eller organisasjon, men uttrykte sitt individuelle syn i en meningsutveksling med moralske implikasjoner.

KRITIKERENS TAPTE AUTORITET

At kritiker i denne gammeldagse forstand ikke lenger spiller noen rolle, er soleklart. Om det skulle finnes slike kritikerer med såvel dommekraft, begavelse og ubestikkelighet, så er kritikerens autoritet tapt for alltid. Kritikerer er blitt overflødig, det er ikke lenger bruk for henne fordi den kunsten hun skrev om har mistet sin overordnede betydning. Vel er kunsten fortsatt fri, men den kan verken legitimeres eller så tvil om helhetens forfatning, samfunnet som totalitet. Selv om den ideelle og adekvate kritikk fortsatt forholder seg til denne totalitet, så kommer det ikke lenger an på kritikken. Slik Hans Magnus Enzensberger hevder går den militante kritiker på tomgang og innflytelsen fordampes i et pluralistisk markeds likegyldighet som ikke skjeller mellom Dante og Donald.

KRITIKERENS TAPTE UAVHENGIGET OG LITTERÆRE AMBISJONER

Kunstnerne tar ikke kritikerens forsvinning tungt. Ivert om oppfatter flere kunstnere det korrektiv den uavhengige kritiker representerer som en trussel. Den sjeldne uavhengige kritiker er en elendig betalt freelanceskribent uten status. Uansett hva kritikerer skriver har teksten ingen status enn gjennom høyskolen, museet, galleriet eller utstillingen, som taler for disse. Det er nettopp pedagogene og markeds-skribentene som har trått inn i det frirom kritikerer har etterlatt seg.

Pedagogene er de offentlige kunstinstitusjonenes og høyskolenes forlengede arm, mens markeds-skribentene er gallerienes galleislaver. Pedagogene er den profesjonelle omviser og høyskolelektor med pretensjoner om vitenskapelighet mens markeds-skribentene er dem som skriver katalogforord til fremme for gallerienes kunstnerstall slik reklameskribentene lanserer

firmavarer. Eller også biennalenes og kunstmessenes trendsettende curators som samtidig er profesjonelle tiggere på sponsormarkedet. Verken for pedagogen eller markedsskribenten er den litterære ferdigheten en forutsetning. Den er overflødig. Trendsettingen er viktigere for markedsskribentene og curatorene enn språkferdighet og litterære ambisjoner som er tidkrevende aktiviteter. H v a - siste nyhet - trer istedet for h v o r d a n - måten å skrive på. Da blir det likegyldig hvem som "omtaler" hva, hvordan, hvor og med hvilket formål. Det er ikke de enkelte anmeldere som skal lastes men tapet av selve kritikken som form som skal fremheves. For kritikken som form står ikke lenger til å redde.

Jeg velger å avslutte med spissformuleringer av Hans Magnus Enzensberger "Rezensenten-Dämmerung Funktion der modernen 'Kritik'". "Den borgerlige tidsalder har - forbigående - innrammet kritikken en sentral plass på den offentlige scene. Den er forlist, mens kunsten den anmeldte er blitt det den opprinnelig var: et marginalt anliggende for noen få interesserte. Disse danner seg sin mening uavhengig av medias kortpustede anmelderi.

Representerer kritikken endringer et tap eller en utfordring?

Det er denne problemstillingen vi tar som utgangspunkt for seminaret.

Contribution on the Oslo symposium of AICA, Oct. 1992

Art criticism - Artist criticism, the title of my contribution may sound somehow sybillinic - but talking about art criticism in Germany at the time, is, as we will see later on, an impossibility. I would like to discuss the specific German situation of dealing with art as a plane of projection of the momentary argument between the former systems and what they have become.

To start with, a comment, that may indicate the background of these thoughts: In a commentary in the "Dagbladet" of Oktober, 5th, that deals with the situation in Germany right now, the author says: "While we hold our breath and hope, that the German problems are not too big for being solved, we can go into the museum of contemporary art and see, that there is a German culture, which is far apart from marching unified." Though not knowing the whole text, it still was a shock to me: Art, described as a last bastion of plurality in a country, in which foreign worker-, immigrant- and studenthostels burn, which is, also in the "poor" east, one of the wealthiest countries in the world and which has nonetheless - or just because of that separated from its own history. Its already stable democracy in the west is thinking seriously about giving in to the street's mob - and by changing the ability for solidarity in the east more and more goes to waste.

Two years after the euphoria of unification Germany is in a deep social, intellectual and especially in the east economical crisis. The "Kristallnacht" of Rostock and its heralds and followers and politics that make keeping of property become the utmost motiv,

are just the most significant symptoms. Their roots are based not at last on the grand miscalculation of the unification's consequences- due to to naivety, lack of information or tactical election-related calculation. And they are based on the sobering-up, that started in as well east as west after the end of the cold-war. Winners and losers are disillusioned just the same. Consumerism and ideology were the weapons, both are useless now. The consequence is fear of a social crash of the middle-class in the west and a depressive tiredness in the east. The populist parables about the "Weariness of democracy" make ground for a new dictatorship. As if democracy was a washerwoman that can be raped, exploited, rewarded or punished. The change in mentality is clearly visible and also threatening, since it shows a german condition, "a whining culture", and in the end also lack of personal responsibility and the fatal tendency, to project one's tiredness on society. Artists and intellectuals constantly moralize, the formerly most consequent pacifists loudly shout for the police and the art critics brought in the honourous term "politically correct", in order to swing it as a stick in the name of moral and decency of art. The "I am proud to be a German"-type has brought the "I am proud, that i am not proud to be a German"-type. As if this was not self-explanatory, it results in a relapse into cultural backwaters, as always, when art and moral are being causally connected. The new confusion of conditions makes a renewed "rappel à l'ordre" more and more audible. A part of art criticism already picked it up and recognized society as being "racist", "sexist", "violence-supporting" etc.. The old instrumentalization of art for political categories with its cruel statement "art is a weapon" seems to rise again, coming from a direction, we would not have guessed. On which terrible level the

debate on art's social responsibilities has sunk, is visible in a scandal that occupied "tout" Berlin this summer. As bearers of the Academic Exchange scholarships at the time, the english artists Hannah Fowles and Glynn Banks work in the city. As a team of artists they call themselves "art in ruins" and they foster a sort of "new socialistic realism" in the safe art-forms of the eighties against Apartheid in form of a direct, agitational and material support to the ANC. Diverse objects, installations and photography works mobilize for the fight against Apartheid and a big amount of the proceeds flows into the ANC. Art in Ruins are extremely successful, the art features in magazines - have praise them, the audience, tired of post modern fiddling around, finally sees commitment for the right cause in art production. Now at the same time, two young artists started a fanzine with the title 241 and published a computer cartoon in it, that mocks the morality of Art in Ruins. The cartoon is as provoking as it is intelligent, it is as nasty as it is amusing. The picture of Art in Ruins refers to Sigmar Polke's work "moderne kunst" of the early sixties, which itself cites Kandinsky and is an incunabulum of referential painting. It picks up a tradition, which had its main importance from Daumier till World War One: Satiric art criticism in the form of caricature. The result in Berlin was the following: Shortly after the appearance of 241 unknown persons broke into the studio of its makers, destroyed technical apparatuses and the remaining copies. Anonymous phone calls with massive threats reached the artists. The makers of the "Künstlerhaus Bethanien" were pressured to give the artists notice to leave their studio. Otherwise Art in Ruins said it would out the public financed artists house in the press as being racist and sexist. Flyers turned up with murder threats. In Berlin newspaper almost all of (West)-Berlin's critics

hurried to dissociate from the cartoon, with -by the most- a little scepticism, if it was legitimate, to answer a cartoon with death threats. Everybody tried to restate how disgusting the joke with the "niggerdick" was and that a limit was reached. Everyone was occupied, to prove his moral integrity. The East-Berlin artists and art mediators were stunned. The staff of the magazine "neue bildende kunst" took out an article on Art in Ruins which was already set. In the 15000-inhabitants city of Premnitz the Treuhand closed down a chemical company and fired 2000 workers. In Kassel the never-tired Jan Hoet repeated his sentences about the mystery of art and the legitimacy of spreading fun through art. And in Rostock citizens went on the streets to cheer, while a mob worked its own fears of existence and weaknesses off on the few who are even weaker. TV had a brave reporter live there, who tried to make up for the front journalism which was missing in the Gulf-war. And a man, employed as a clerk for the city, helped the Vietnamese people to build barricades in the hostel. He recently was highly decorated with the "Bundesverdienstkreuz". Yes, what is up with German art ?

A few words to the past history in the east: When the borders were opened up, only few thought of a fast reunification. In september 89 I gave my signature to the citizens organization: "Democracy Now" only under the condition that the demand for reunification would not be a central point in their program.

Not much later the painter Georg Baselitz called the GDR-artists "assholes" in an interview. He did not make the effort to differentiate between the willing state servants and illustrators of the old power and artists that partly circumstantially and partly programmatically relied on apolitical, conservative

aesthetical positions, that seemed to give a hold in between all the institutionalized lies. The maxime was followed a British philosopher: "People say, life is wonderful, but I prefer reading." Baselitz' verbal attacks was as indignant as it was usefull. It hit the artist right in their hearts. It hit right there, where the artists nurished the belief, that they had contributed something to the so-called revolution of "We are the people". Correspondingly strong were the reactions. But in the end there was pensivness. On the one hand it is fairly easy for artists and intellectuals to compensate the consciousness, to have failed in the resistance against the unreasonable demands of the ancien régime. But on the other hand the culture officials, museum directors and curators step in too self-confident. To small is the sensitivity for the problems and traditions of artistic expression in the East. But almost silent are the ones who until shortly stated, that there had been a functioning culture in the GDR, which then had been destroyed by the west with its colonial masters attitude. The broken identity of german culture has, different from Poland or Chekeslowakia, favoured the mentality of a niche existence. One has got used to welcoming this broken identity in our generation, too. Everything else would have been suspiciously nationalistic, and nationalism has become obsolete due to the formative influence of antifascism. Behind the moral ritualizing of antifascism we hardly recognized the totalitarian tendencies in the GDR's society. Or in other words: The acceptance of the neccesity of a militant antifascism stood in the way of our own democratic action. It is not exaggerated, to say that it was not the promise of communist fortune, that favoured the critical but still stabilizing solidarity of artists and intellectuals with the GDR's system, but exactly the very antifascist,

antinationalistic impetus. No propaganda of the GDR was as effective as the fact that in West Germany many old nazis still inhabited high state ranks at the side of men as Globke, Filbinger, Lübke and Kiesinger. The high authorities in the GDR had noticed this social-psychological vacuum and over years they tried to fill by stating a GDR-nationality to no avail. On the other hand the anti-national did not lead to a connection to the international art discussion. The cultural space GDR was for the longest time hermetically closed. Only little information was accessible through television and magazines. Not until the end of the eighties there were the first exhibitions. Two-dimensional media was not able to sensually transmit the complex conceptuality of the modern western art since the sixties. The autonomy of art as reflexion of art, which has determined debates up until now, was far away from significance, considering the social circumstances in eastern Germany. Because Art undisputedly was a means of communication, it was not only a niche for a somehow safe existence, but the only area for exchange. Proof may be the high developed print graphic techniques, the uncountable amount of artist books and -regarding criticism- the classical opening speeches at exhibitions, which were the only form of uncensored art criticism. Artist freed themselves from being taken possessed for propaganda and ideology mainly in two ways: Either through a hidden critical message, which in Real-socialism was censored not as strict, or by bearing witness to the tradition of the european modern age. To confess to that was already a contradiction in a system of art, which was organized between the polarities of "socialistic" and "bourgeois" and which negated social, scientific, ecological, technological and cultural change and still negated the threats to civilisation after Tschernobyl. Who

could not compensate this pressure, fled and left the country. Others, however, gained creative powers because of these contradictions.

Not until the generation of the today 30-year-olds the spell was broken. Their best forces did not care about the finding of an ideological standpoint. They were looking for a connection to contemporary western european art, even if the results often were not more than epigones. While the repression in the GDR in the eighties, as a late consequence of Biermann's expulsion in 1976, mostly focused the art mediators, the artists were given more and more freedom, but their public was cut down. By following this strategy the danger of an artist-exodus - like after the Biermann-expulsion- was banned. Still many artists left the country, but without big resonance of western media.

The trauma, though, lingers on. An objectification in the debates is not visible. One should rather say that they do not even take place at all. Even in Berlin two art scenes seperately exist at the side of each other. There is hardly any exchange between art critics. Their are no forums, too. In the large daily newspapers in West-Germany, in the "Spiegel" or the "Zeit", no editors from the east are employed that could rejuvenate the discussion. Very rarely you can read contributions coming from east-german art critics.

The traditional East-newspapers have been bought by western publishing companies which exchanged the staff, too. Feuilleton of high quality cannot be found there, and art reports coyly hide in the local news.

Two phenomena of non-existing art criticism meet here: Art criticism's loss of legitimacy in the west, which was removed by the reigning popular culture, and in the east an art criticism

which has not recovered since 1935 under the condition of totalitarian systems. Goebbels decision to replace art criticism by the art report has never been overcome in the GDR. I formerly tried to describe the intellectual and artistic climate of art and art mediation briefly. For art criticism the functionalising of art and media resulted in an existence on the outskirts of society. While in the west the art critics became increasingly stunted in the ramification of galleries and art business the art critic in the east was in a totally different situation. In the first post-war years - up until about 1949 - there was a debate in the magazine "bildende kunst" - influenced by the Soviets -, how to catch up with the utopian and socialistic potential of modern age. With the beginning of cold-war these promising signs broke down, the debate hardened noticeably. It culminated in an argument between the painter Karl Hofer and the theorist Will Grohmann. An artistic controversy about figurative and abstract painting became - due to the coupling with the conception of freedom - an ideological fight, in which Hofer got in between the fronts. The "bildende kunst" was discontinued in 1949 and was newly founded in 1953. Now it was most of all a means of propaganda for state-controlled culture policy. In 1965 the infamous 11. Meeting of the SED central committee took place, which cruelly settled up with the so called reawakening tendencies of bourgeois decadence. In the early seventies things seemed to take a change. New spaces opened for the arts with Erich Honeckers new line of careful liberalization since 1972. The concept called itself "Expanse and variety", the "socialistic realism", formerly a term regarding style, was redefined as a "method of artistic perception from a socialist world view." The official art theory, made by professors, ministerial officials and members of the academy had

sunk down to deepest pragmatism. It limped behind artistic practice, always trying to please the mighty, by bringing the art works into congruency with the dogmatized demands of culture policies - although some were honestly interested to enlarge the artists' freedom. In the spring of 1976 the SED central committee made a decision to support art criticism. They had realized the usefulness of the exegetes, since these neutralized the artists' critical ideas with pleasing statements. According to this decision the royalties for freelancing art critics were supposed to be raised and the centralistic press was obliged to regularly print art criticism. But anyhow, after the Biermann-case in november 1976 this decision was dropped, it most likely would not have brought a substantial change anyway.

When in the 1970's the so-called "problem-painting" predominated the exhibitions art criticism lead its life even more in the shadows. In paintings social problems were discussed and contradictions between ideological proclamation and reality uncovered. The poster painter Wolfgang Mattheuer was a master of this discipline. In front of his paintings groups of people gathered and discussed the situation of retirement insurance, ecological problems, the fake promises of the regime or talked about other things, that moved them. Art criticism celebrated him and intentionally interpreted it in a way that made every critical impulse become affirmation. The agony of the "socialist view of the world" very clearly showed in art criticism. Because of a terminology which had lost its outlines everything fit in the system's ideology. On the other hand this intellectual empty space created the room for an art which could not be assimilated at all. And it made ground for the critical literature of the younger generation, which took the old hope for autonomy seriously.

Keeping the said in mind, the question, how far art criticism in the GDR could have been social criticism, is almost answered. From 1977 on, until my dismissal in 1986 I worked as an editor for the magazine "Bildende Kunst" and I am able to tell you some story about the fights on single words and phrasing, about absurdities which lead to editorial decisions and how one more and more ran the risk believing the misconception, that this was life. When you were able to publish a non-conformous artist in a magazine, it was like a victory, a piece of gained public. Most of the time the price you had to pay was at least a subordinate clause, which said that this artist generally agreed on the social goals of society, too. That was a work basis, but only for a more or less short period of time. But the drop-out was predetermined. Only by creating a counter public it was possible to escape such a decay. It existed in the many original graphic artists' magazines, most of them mainly literary influenced which only left little space for art criticism. Of greater importance were the formerly mentioned speeches on exhibition openings. I wrote more than a hundred of them, none printed them but at least we could distribute the manuscripts. Even that was difficult enough, there were no photocopying machines, no personal computers, just type writers and carbon paper. But still these texts were not independent art criticism in a contemporary democratic sense. They were rather defending speeches for something, of which one thought it was against something, acclaiming its critical impulse in order to become part of it. This created a too large tolerance, or seduced you to be silent. One would have never been against something from a formal or artistic point of view, if criticizing it in effect would have made you a handyman.

So much for looking back. Unprepared like formerly mentioned the east-german art criticism was hurled into the new time. The old functional alliances are gone, everything can be said, done and written. The hopes, that one could base a new understanding of our profession on two fundaments, the explanation of what has been and the curiosity what is to come, turned out to be too naive. Too heavy rest the mortgages of the former time on the departure's impartiality. The german inability in dealing with the past, the inability to forgive and too settle up, the hypocritical pseudo-morality of parts of the social movements, the mystification of the STASI and state art and the fast opportunism of so many profiteers drag a terrible heritage of the GDR into the presence. After the first trip to Mallorca freedom cannot be sensually perceived any more by the people, neither the authority of democratic structures. The consequence is helplessness. During these very days the trial against the mortally sick Erich Honecker will begin. Already it is visible, that this justitial farce will support the decrease of trust in the state under the rule of law. The stronger a nostalgia for a picture of the GDR is regenerated, that never existed, the crueler the west deals with the relicts of the GDR: Museums are being rearranged, Statues reworked, the names of streets are being changed, eastern politicians with all means fought, radio stations turned off, and third-class employees imported by tempting them with a "jungel-bonus". The bad conscience is calmed with the generous support of representative cultural objects: Subsidies of millions for opera and drama-productions facing a hardly existing infrastructure of art mediation. Now and then a raw and wild project is subsidized to death, until its makers have assimilated to conventional art business. But there is a number of very dedicated young people,

who gain their power from these very difficulties, and for who the East/west-debates with their contradictions are the very chance, and who have realized, that art is going to free itself from the weariness due to amusement, even if, or precisely because the social circumstance are starting to boil.

In the end the East/west problems are just a reflex of the world situation. At the end of institutionalized utopia, seeing ecological and economical disasters, it becomes evident, that a utopian way of thinking, - yes-, that the time of a Renaissance is virulent and that it could not be paralyzed by neither censorship and terror nor by popular culture. "The "art system" will redefine itself. The question of the advanced and obsolete media steps to the back. The at-this-time-conceivable seems to be exhausted, but the conceptions change at a rapid pace. There is no alternative to art, as there is none to the articulation of personal conscience in the (art) work. A new generation of artists needs and fosters a new generation of art critics. And this will shape a new language.

In a phrase of Georg J. Appo: "Art criticism is not a job in a boutique, it is a right of personality." Precisely for that reason Michael Freitag and I founded the magazine "neue bildende kunst" - in the east. We just brought the first year to a close, and the development gives us courage.

Matthias Flügge

(translated by Christian Conrad)

The Abyss and the Swimming Pool Models and identities in contemporary culture

Alexander Jakimovich

As is well known, art criticism arrived at being a kind of artistic activity. Descriptions and interpretations of artworks tell us at least not less of the contemporary mentality than artworks themselves do. The new Virgils guide us to the new Inferno, and this is a very strange place.

Didier Semin writes on Christian Boltanski: "Boltanski is a moral artist, profoundly so, but also one who mocks morality because he sees in art no other value than absolute uncertainty". A moral artist who mocks morality is not a very convincing figure from the point of view of logic, common sense, and the moral imperative; obviously we have entered a space where all these things do not stay in high esteem. Art criticism today likes specific paradoxes. So, an artistic celebrity of the eighties is being praised by a critic for what is called the "irrationality in the name of reason". A very telling definition.

The artworld is accustomed to a peculiar language. Nobody is surprised if told that this or that artist aims at beauty which embraces disgust, or maintains ambiguous relations with reason, nature, culture, and history. One must agree that this kind of art criticism corresponds to the real intentions of art itself as it is at the end of the XX. century. An artist like James Turrell achieves the disappearance of the viewer's orientation in space. An artist like Sigmar Polke dismantles the idea of history seemingly evoking it. The desorganisation of the so called reasonable models of reality is being accomplished with a lot of knowledge, science and reason. Magnificent trickstery.

Mike Kelley combines the children's toys traditionally associated with purity and innocence in a way that we recognize mighty male genitals. Many artists practice the aesthetisation of the disgusting, or produce "merry apocalypses" (p.e. Fischli & Weiss). One could cite

* "Parkett", Nr.22, 1989, p.27

* G.Garrels. Mrs.Autumn and her two daughters. "Parkett", Nr.30, 1991, p.57

a lot of other examples of this Protean double-faced spirit. The philosopher Peter Sloterdijk gives them his blessing with his theory of the "cynical reason". Paul Feyerabend approves them by his winking epistemology turning around the famous thesis "Anything goes". And, besides, George Bataille has explained already that the commitment to the evil is connected to the commitment to the good: thus let's not talk about oppositions. The German art historian Wilfried Wie-gand mentioned what he called "postmodernistische Treulosigkeit". The painter and writer from Moscow Maxim Kantor employs the harder term "Juda's syndrom".

Obviously, this line in thinking was anticipated in the "nihilistic credo" formulated by Nietzsche. But his mind is too tense, too hot, too emotional for the epoch of tolerance and pluralism. My contemporaries and Western neighbours apparently want a colder dish and long for solidly scientific underpinning for their satyr's plays about reason and morality. Jacques Derrida supplied it in his theory of writing (that is any activity involving signs). He said that it would be a mistake to think that we are able to track down anything. We track down tracks only. This idea has been prepared by semiotic theory before Derrida, but he managed to promote it in the arts as nobody else.

If we deal with tracks only as Derrida asserts we do, we are truly independent from any imperative of any "truth". Who knows what is "truth"? Anything goes. So, we may head towards the narcotising Duchampians of our time, towards beauty embracing disgust, and irrationalism in the name of reason, etc. We have reached our elusive Elysium, the magic kingdom of permissivity and fallen oppositions.

One of the prophetic minds of Russia, the poet Valery Brusslov wrote at the beginning of the century (I apologize for my awkward English translation):

My clipper led by liberty will go to any sea.

Both God and Devil be my stars, both worshipped by me.

By an apparent coincidence, twenty years later the German novelist and thinker Hermann Hesse put forward the thesis: whoever thinks that people now option for Satan against God is mistaken - the point is they really do not know what is the difference between the two.

Karl Marx saw the Ghost of Communism walking around Europe with his threatening Manifesto. We saw the waning of this shadow - but new ghosts hang around peripatetically with declamations like "track down tracks" and "anything goes". They seem so harmless in comparison to their predecessor, and their philosophical resignation asks for empathy.

However, there is witchcraft there. The deep Wittgenstein and the inexhaustible Derrida brought with them a true ekstasis for many of us. An art critic describes the mechanism of this magic: "Even the most apparently natural and spontaneous of human realities is in fact a verbal and social construction". This is to say we deal with tracks of something never able to know what it could be. The philosophical resignation and intellectual melancholia of our thinkers and artists ends up with a carnival, if not with Shiva's dance. They have their Olympic drug, their ambrosia which fills them with a divine irresponsibility. Our spiritual, intellectual and artistic Pantheon bursts with laughter. Why not? Our idols have overcome the most binding and screw thing, the reality. They demasked this uncomfortable person and found nothing but "verbal and social constructions". So, they say, we are masters at last, not servants. We did it. We shall create our universe, that of endless constructions (words, images, objects), and they will turn all "truths" upside down. It's the play of plays. It's the fun of funs.

This is to say that the post-industrial and post-utopian elite has voted for a certain domination instrument and influence channel. They do not pose as the "truth team" any more. They prefer the "principle of labyrinth", or the model of a lost, chaotic reality (better to say, "verbal and social construction"). The magic theater of tracks employs the couple of melancholic but mockingly dancing fools, Father Reason and Mother Morality. They perform a kind of merry self-destruction with a refrain: "Vive l'annihilation!". This is their way to survive, and even the path to prosperity - if there is prosperity in the dimension of tracks. Maybe the track of prosperity.

* T.Eagleton. Introduction, in: Richard Hamilton. Ulysses. The Orchard Gallery, Derry, 1988, n.p.

4

I am afraid I am a bit too caustic towards the West but there are reasons for that, namely, the new Western mentality plays today an unexpected and surprising role at my Eastern home.

After the fall of the Soviet system new people claim for influence in power centers of art, literature, philosophy. The Western-oriented aboriginals of Russia fully reject the vocabulary of the Communist rulers and embrace the discourse of Wittgenstein - Foucault - Derrida - Deleuze. Now we have to ask ourselves whether we have got the true alternative to the Soviet official paradigm in culture.

The official culture of Homo Sovieticus leaned on a kind of a Protean, ambiguous rationalism referred to as the Dialectical and Historical Materialism. The Left will discuss again and again if the Marxism as such is in any sense responsible for the Soviet ideology. The more essential question is: where is the point for the Soviet ideology to meet the Western mind. The outstanding British art critic Peter Fuller who died in 1990 welcomed the description of himself as "Tory marxist". It's all right. There are psychoanalytical mystics and cynical idealists in the West, and many deserve designations like "Derridean Neo-Leninists" or something like that. Terms like "conservative revolution" speak for themselves. Anything goes, East and West. No wonder that the political life in Russia sees the emergence of "monarchistic communists". The Soviet dialectics made it possible.

They never said that signs or tracks have no verifiable connotations outside the language, or beyond symbolic systems. They insisted on the substantiality and materiality of the real world; ideas and notions were secondary in their view, and dependent on the material and social reality. Nonetheless, what they did in culture was like magic. In their model of reality everything was possible if the Higher Force, the inconceivable True Ideology wanted it. The Soviet official dialecticians were Masters of Reality. They commanded it. The absolute lostness and helplessness of any individual before the all-pervading and non-transparent Supreme Truth which was possessed by its priests was the main instrument of power, and not the direct violence. The killing and the torturing were but a detail of the power machine, its material and fuel being the magic substance of non-differentiation. At the moment when the Western theater of shadows played with images, detached from reality and tried subjects like the meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissection table, the Soviet political scene showed the magical transformation of the Communist leader

5

Trotsky into an "agent of Western powers".

Soviet books taught us that the Socialist Realism was the most advanced style in art, the highest stage in world art history. From these books we knew that we, being restricted in our activities and underlying the strict surveillance of the "competent organs" were in fact the most privileged beings on Earth able to enjoy the Socialist Democracy bestowed upon us by the Party rule. Their inventiveness, their courage in dealing with logic, reason, history, ethics were indeed limitless.

So, when all this is over, I come to know that "anything goes", and I read about the irrationality in the name of reason and about moralists who mock morality. The West tells me this - and I have a strange feeling of a "déjà vu" or "déjà lu". I know already from my experience what means the "anything goes", and what for the irrationality in the name of reason is needed. I feel the taste of the food which gave me nausea before - despite the fact that the new Western cooking is much more refined and sophisticated than the old Soviet one.

There is a thing they call the "nomadic philosophy" today. This is the theory of a mind which never stops, never finds a stable position, and indulges in what is called "ambiguity codes". Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari christened it "nomadic". In a sense, the Russian Communism was "nomadic", too. More than a hundred years ago Dostoevsky described the foetus of the Soviet mentality in his "Demons". One of the heroes of this prophetic novel gets a very significant characteristic: "If he does believe in God he does not believe that he does believe. If he does not believe in God he does not believe he does not". This presentation of the proto-Soviet "ambiguity code" is in fact the anticipation of the official "Marxist-Leninist Dialectics" and its mysterious universe of never ending duplicity and uncertainty of values. The universe of totalitarian repression and manipulation.

The euphoria of liberation evaporates sooner than one might think. So, the problem arouses: how to conceive the immediacy with which the Soviet ideology based on Mystery, Non-Transparency and on the power of the Unconceivable is being transformed into the newly mysterious, post-Utopian pluralism and the "nomadic" thinking, with its total relativity of the True and the False, the Good and the Evil, the Reality and the Fiction. Maybe the success of the change means that the place has been prepared by the former master.

The "ambiguity code" of a "nomadic" thinker or artist is an attempt to proclaim that the dismantling of identity is the new kind of identity. Any former reference point (a single nation, a definite religion, a single language) does not work any more. Optimists say a new identity is being developed. The question is how to assess it. Is it the identity in the former sense of the word? Imagine a German French, an European with the Indian or Slavic background, having more than one mother tongue, and a multi-faceted religious experience. Even the non-adoptive and supposedly native Englishmen, Americans, Scandinavians and other people are now in a sense multicultural - for the simple reason that they read Krishnamurti, see films by Tarkovsky and interiorize the artistic and psychological patterns offered by Picasso, Jackson Pollock, James Joyce, Godard, Milan Kundera, Nam June Paik, etc.

Is there the thing called the multi-centered identity? The linguistic phenomenon known as "Franglais" is the new "tongue" half way between English and French. Is it acceptable as an identity criterion? What is called "Spanglish" is neither Spanish nor English but something in between. An attribute of a new identity, or what?

Maybe we deal with self-dismantling machines whose essence, existence and identity are exactly the process of disappearance of themselves. Dismantling as edification - this is the formula for many sociocultural phenomena today, including art and philosophy. Still, a question arises which is being avoided by the majority, namely concerning the "nomadic" system of logic. If one says "I destroy myself, ergo I do exist", is he a true philosopher, or just a learned fool playing with an explosive?

What is particularly important about the contemporary art and thinking of the West is they are always dismantling the identities and destroying meanings and values without having destroyed them indeed. They are again and again undermining the organized model of reality, inherent in the European tradition. They are introducing a new, chaotic and "nomadic" one, but the point is they never arrive at any definitive point. This is a very singular and meaningful "suspended destruction" never attaining the proclaimed goal, and attempted again and again. They trample upon reason and mora-

lity, but the beaten rivals stay safe and sound, and so, the match never ends. This is a miraculous dismantling enterprise, because the object of dismantling is never dismantled, and the enthusiastic work has a good perspective.

This is a ritual, demonstrative activity destined to show and legitimize some inherent values and principles of the Western civilisation.

The founding fathers of the contemporary Western civilisation - first of all Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud - went beyond reason and morality and questioned the organized model of the civilisation. They discovered and investigated the new space outside the main building from which the latter did not appear the only possible or the only "true". I do not intend to tell stories about the history of the contemporary mind and art. Suffice it to say that at a moment the newly discovered space was transformed into a more or less comfortable playground or swimming pool for champions of the new sport.

Particularly the Paris-based thinkers (Derrida, Deleuze, Baudrillard) felt comfortable in the sector of the abyss rebuilt as a deep hole or ditch for intellectual diving. Falling down into it from their academic tower they experience a moment of Nothing, of Chaos and Senselessness. They enjoy it, these sportsmen of the experimental spirit. They have their records. Nobody of them wants to live in the Groundlessness. The abyss is no home for them. They cross it and report on what they saw and felt. And this kind of activity attests the firmness of the main building of civilisation.

This is what the post-structuralists, "nomadic" chiefs and postmodernist stars do. Artists invade the area of irrationality, nonsense, ambiguity, nothingness and chaos - just to have their records registered. This stance and gesture of a contemporary Western artist is anything but a novelty for art critics. An artist today, to speak with G. Roger Denson, "merely dances gleefully atop the bipolar fences dividing painting from anti-painting, abstraction from representation, history from solipsism, and physics from metaphysics". In the beginning there was Nietzsche's God who enjoyed dancing. Then Fred Astor appeared on the scene. Now we have the skeptical Fence Bailey of postmodernism. This is the evolution line.

* G. Roger Denson. Skeptic and sophist, Sigmar Polke doubts. "Parkett", 1991, Nr. 30, p. 114

8

Joking apart, we witness the credo of a civilisation. This is the credo of superiority. Tricks, attractions and fence dances make clear that the victorious Westerner can travel even to wild and dangerous isles, even to the Moon, to the madness, to any abyss - and be the winner. Even by ambiguous balancing between "yes" and "no".

The Western thinking describe the over-supplied, information-saturated, media-manipulated individual. He is being fascinated by openness, abundance and permissivity deep enough not to take notice of the hard discipline of the prosperous workhouse he lives in.

Ihab Hassan called the Western society the "comfortable concentration camp". This is almost as strange from the point of view of reason as "irrationality in the name of reason", or a song by Michael Jackson about a youngster who is very, very bad - so bad that he is good and admirable. The Western social order now extracts force and stability from a very special kind of mass fascination grounded on a twofold signalisation. The first - and the most loud - signal emitted by the society is "This is for you too", or "This is what you can have or do as well". This is the signal of the allegedly limitless possibilities and perspectives. The second, more hidden but no less insistent signal says: "Work hard, no second lost, display the maximum of what you can, otherwise no success is possible".

Two elements of this binary signalisation obviously contradict each other because the first points to the absolute openness of any life perspective ("everything accessible") while the second affirms only one main line of life, the absolute imperative of hard labor and strain. As in all magic practices, self-sacrifice is being stylised as ekstasis, and the workholics occupy the place of former shamans, corybantes and flagellants.

The duplicity, the uncertainty can be an extremely effective instrument of power. The double signal fascinates minds and destroys the rational orientation. Rationally organised models of reality become questionable. The Western society addresses its members by a "deconstruction" of sorts: one thing is being proclaimed, but something different is being meant. Though, the deconstruction is no destruction, not at all. The deconstruction done in any sign system fulfils the function of the affirmation through negation. It affirms the power of the (Western) reason, mind and culture capable of commanding things and ideas.

Thinkers and artists of the West deal with this fascinated and

9

narcotized consciousness. The mind which stays under the spell of the binary signalisation enjoys the play with rational oppositions. It likes most of all ambiguous situations and positions. Art critics play with aesthetical and philosophical notions, and thinkers play with terms and ideas borrowed from semiotics, information theory, social philosophy, and Marxist political economy. But the rule of the play is: never remove any one playing card. The course of this ambiguous play testifies to the superiority of the Western civilisation, and not any proposition it discusses. It may discuss the proposition of the end and dissolution of the Western civilisation; but the way it is being done - the endless suspended match of "yes" and "no" - is meaningful in itself. Sophistry cannot be defeated in principle.

What is being done by artists and thinkers of the East may appear very similar to what I described above. They deal with a logically impossible universe of lost oppositions and differences. Reason and morality turn out to be madness and vice, even monstrosity (Yerofeyev, Sorokin). Chaos and disorder claim to found their own systems (Kabakov, Orlov). The Paradise is a kind of the Hell, and the victory is failure (Tarkovsky). The abyss of sin is inseparable from the infinity of God (Pomerantz). Are they somehow different from the Western artistic and intellectual elite, or maybe ready for unconditional integration?

Probably every society needs its own system of social fascination based on double signalisation, the first signal indicating benefits (sacrality, freedom etc.) given by this society while the second signal limits the offer and imposes this or that "you must". The totalitarian civilisation of the East developed its own method of social domination. Stalin introduced it in a most hard and direct way. The first signal "You are the master of everything here, all is yours" was being accompanied by the contrasting signal "You are the slave and nothing here, keep silence and be docile". This primitive domination mechanism worked seemingly good for a period, but at a prize which was obviously too high for any society. Political developments between 1955 and 1985 were in fact a chain of reforms and counterreforms in search of a more acceptable solution of the basic formula. After the dramatic events of the Perestroika the Soviet formula of non-market, non-consumerist, purely political fascination was abandoned completely. However, the signalisation of Western-like capitalism does not seem to be effective yet.

What is important the East had its own model of the binary signalisation which is similar to the Western one just as much as any domina-

tion mechanism is similar to another one. The socially blurred mind and an uncertain identity seem to be the end product of any binary signalisation. The question is to what makes the Soviet and Post-Soviet East so Soviet, Post-Soviet and so Eastern.

It is not true that the break with the supposed "firm order" of the totalitarian system and the subsequent post-totalitarian crisis and chaos are the reason of blurredness. To think that we lost the identity because we lost the Soviet system is almost childish on the side of underground thinkers. The Soviet system itself maintained its power thanks to ambiguities and "identity paradoxes". We have had the richly poor state (colossal wealth brought no results, and the majority was - and is - abjectly poor). We have had the catastrophic triumph in the war against Nazi aggression because the glorious Victory brought us no new freedoms but new suppressions and non-freedoms. In fact, we lived in an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty. Self-identification questions posed to ourselves ("Who am I, where do I live, how is my nation," etc.) had no answers but schizophrenic ones. All my life in USSR I could consider myself a rich poor, a free slave, a citizen of a victoriously failed nation. Should I embrace the philosophy and art criticism of the West with their "ambiguity codes"? Many intellectuals in Russia do. But I ask myself: living with this peculiar experience, can I learn to balance on a logical fence and take part in sportively minded "abyss races"? I am not the traveller in the East, I live there.

The feeling of a real chaos, a real abyss around us and in us is now extremely pronounced in Russia, and there are art and thinking there which draw consequences from this experience. In order to understand what the Eastern art and thinking have to say now we should remember an analogy from the past - the "cultural revolution" of 1910 - 1930. This is the crucial period indeed, and we'll never understand the time we live in without an adequate view of the fatal and great time, the time of the upheaval of the Soviet Utopia.

The revolutionary, nihilistic and demiurgical paroxysm in Soviet Russia was a new attempt of a civilisational self-identification. It occurred in the European context and crowned several earlier attempts; in the course of about three centuries.

In 1905 Lev Shestov, the great admirer of Nietzsche and the later friend and opponent of Husserl published his book "Apotheosis of Groundlessness". Another thinker, Vassily Rosanov added his works to this emerging philosophical wave. They terrified the broad public by their alleged "cynicism", but in fact their publications took over an idea present in Russian philosophical traditions since long ago.

They identified the catastrophic situation of the crush of values as the collapse of the European model of mind and reality on Russian soil which was of course a far more dangerous process than that in the West itself. The theory of the Russian groundlessness recognized this crush as a historical chance for the nation and for the humankind. Shestov described a descent into the hell of lost oppositions and of uncertain identities; nevertheless he thought this was not the end but only the beginning. He predicted the Abyss will be the home of humans in future, and we all must learn to live in groundlessness and gain our new identity from being "somebody somewhere".

The Russian revolution and the blossoming of the revolutionary Avantgarde seems to be a commentary to Lev Shestov's intuitions. This is why the Russian Avantgarde was so different from the Western one.

The Western Avantgarde entered with the "Damoiselles d'Avignon" into the decisive phase of dismantling of the old models of mind and reality. But relatively soon (in fact before 1920) this process had the basic characteristics of what we observe across the whole extension of the century. The Western Avantgarde turned out to be the suspended dismantling of values, models and identities. The Post-modernism followed suit, as the programmatic "nomadic" travel in search of ever new paradoxes and ambiguities, as the skeptical balancing on the logical fence. This play with negation can never end, it is like the "evil infinity" of Hegel. But the uncertainty, the suspension testifies to the superiority of the Western civilisation in its play with Nothingness. This civilisation admires itself secretly, at the high level of intellect (and overtly, in mass culture and everyday life).

Once a friend of mine had a drawn game with an international chess champion. He said: "This was a victory". Why, - asked I - wasn't it just a drawn game? Look, - he said, - I played with a God of chess, and I am a simple mortal being; to have a drawn game with him is a great victory. This was a purely Western outlook. Drawn games with God, with the Non-Being, with the Death and the eternity seem to be a victory for those in the West.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno mentioned in their "Dialectics of Enlightenment" the well-known episode of Odysseus and the Sirens as a paradigm of the Western civilisation. They gave it a somewhat artificial interpretation but guessed its importance. Indeed, Odysseus bound to the mast and experiencing the voices of the underworld, of the Chaos from the position of security due to the reasonable calculation and foresight looks like the first European, and, simultaneously, the first Avantgardist. He invented a way to penetrate the Abyss but not to stay there forever. He comes back to the world of life and reason convinced of his victory as every European and Avantgardist is - despite the fact that any success in the play with the Abyss can be only a preliminary drawn game.

In Russia, the idea of being in the groundless and shelterless Abyss lays at the bottom of the Utopian projects of the Avantgarde. The starting point was the experience of a "black hole" we have had reached already as our home. This is why a Russian artist - the "world maker", the new shamane - saw himself able to command the lawless Nothingness and to create out of it, by the miracle of his unlimited enthusiastic will, the new universe thought to be a better one than the crushed lifeworld of yesterday. The demiurgical energy, growing from the "sacral nihilism", was very much pronounced in the works by Malevich, Tatlin, Filonov, Mayakovsky. Their artistic gesture was to create the new world "ex nihilo" - and so, their designs and projects for cities, their theories and programs, their proposals for the absolutely new artistic language were like Robinson Crusoe's projects for an uninhabited island. To do what they did they had to depart from the idea of the absolute desert, of the cultural void in the place of the gone civilisation of the Russian Europeans.

Pavel Filonov described how the true and good painting must be, in the form of an instruction: "bring the properly extracted colour to every atom, maximally to the depth, like warmth to the body. Connection to the form must be organic, like flower to colour relation in nature". After Leonardo da Vinci the West had no such "lessons in demiurgy" as in this Russian message from 1930. It has nothing to do with the "Abyss races" of Breton, Duchamp, Joyce, Beckett.

* Die grosse Utopie. Die russische Avantgarde 1915-1930. Frankfurt, 1992 S.81

In the years of the World War I Alexander Blok wrote several poems in which he identified Russia as the world of wild prairies inhabited by "scythians" - wild tribes of fierce destructors having the zero point of historical memory but imbued by versatility and freshness of spirit. The "scythians" of Blok are an expression of the magical, mysterious Nothingness of the Russian plains able to create a new Universe of nothing, like Sankt Petersburg erected miraculously on the desert and swampy seashore.

In one of these poems the "scythians" invite the old and outworn Europe to what is called the "brotherly feast" - apparently a kind of Russian potlatch. At the same time they prevent the welcomed Europeans that if they avoid coming their bones will be broken. This specific invitation to strangers to have a "brotherly feast" together is indicative not only for its invocation of the prehistorical hospitality rites which are still to see in some remote places of Asia, but also for the newly found cultural paradigm. We new Barbarians recognize ourselves as Barbarians, and address the rest of the world from the position of groundlessness and absence of the so-called civilised codes. What we say may be an insult, a world scandal, but this outrage is a form or a way to make explicit our real self, our "nihil". Denying civilisation, order, reason and logic is the Eastern way to the transcendence, to the magic Higher Consciousness. The Orthodox Christianity, with its strong Oriental flavour of non-European mysticism, can illustrate this mentality as well as the Russian Avantgarde of the first third of the twentieth century.

The luxurious "Socialist Realistic" monumental complexes and decorations of Stalin's era (for example in the Moscow metropolitan) reproduce, on the new curve of development and in new stylistic garments, the idea of a miraculous universe of beauty and perfection magically drawn out of the chaos and desert of the destroyed being by the sacrocanct will of the Demiurg. After two decades of crisis and desintegration of Soviet official art (ca.1955-75) the new stage in cultural self-identification began in the seventies and had been induced by the non-official (underground) art and literature and their satellites and parallels in non-suppressed circles.

The seventies was the time when we felt acutely the new "nihil", the Soviet black hole, the historical void and desert we lived in after the invasion of Soviet forces into Czechoslovakia. The new symphom was we had no Utopian dreams or hopes, nothing like the spiritual im-

petus of the First Avantgarde of 1910-1930. We could not bind ourselves to a mast and stay at a secure distance from our Sirens - dictators, secret agents and Marxist-Leninist dialecticians. What was to do in these circumstances, then? A new parallel might be illuminating.

Art and transcendental practices comment each other, as is well known in art history and in the history of religions. So, a comparison of the contemporary Western spiritualism with the Russian mystical activities is revealing.

The Western New Age blend of religions, cults and beliefs is a truly "championic" enterprise, a veritable record in overcoming the historical borders of confessions and churches. Stars and idols of spiritualism appear on TV screens and in large public places. They are recordsmen of transcendental travels. This is very unusual for the Russian mystical tradition, with its utmost secludedness. Even in the conditions of the new openness, the so-called Catacombean Orthodox Church demonstrates no intention to become open and transparent.

These are in fact two modes of cultural activity. The Western one is something like a festival, a championship, or a fair - a place for public competition and exchange (of ideas, symbols, influence etc.) The Russian form is an underground, a catacombean meeting or performance for the few faithful. Of course the Western forms of a fair, a festival, a show, a match find their way to Russia in time of the disintegration of the Soviet system. Since the beginning of the eighties there were few, if any, practical reasons to stay in the artistic underground, because attempts of prohibitions and pressure were no more effective. However, the so-called "Apartment-Art" movement kept living. More than that, towards 1990 we observe in Moscow a hectic Apartment-Art activity and a variety of deliberately catacombean forms of artistic life hidden from outside. It is a mistake to think that the Russian art is precisely what is being shown in big festivals of art in Moscow or abroad. This is mainly the intermediary zone, the sphere of compromise. The loyalty of many artists to the principle of secrecy, isolation and undergroundness is astonishing, considering the material losses they suffer, and the quick money the West gives to those who adhere to the Western model of artistic life.

After the external urge to clandestinity was gone the paradigm of culture surfaced, namely the existence of an artist in a desert or amidst an ocean of evil - hence the wish to have a small island, a cell to preserve the true message.

Art critics of the Russian underground always describe their own "confession" in terms of a small community, a closed and sacred body of Art and Truth, a "secret brotherhood". Symptomatically, the membership of this or that brotherhood coincides with the circle of this or that author, with his entourage. Closed "secret brotherhoods" deliberately overlook each other's presence and are caught in a sort of solipsism. The non-official culture of Russia is strangely fragmented and unable of unification and compromise inside itself. They seem to reproduce, in a somewhat anemic form, the messianic and demiurgical mentality of former shamans and "world makers" who edified their universe "ex nihilo", only with one serious difference: there is no Utopian syndrom at all. So, they devote their messianic fervour to Anti-Utopia.

In my view we should differentiate the "secret brotherhoods" of Moscow from individuals belonging to the independent culture as such. An analyst not adhering to any group program may be called independent. A messianic community which rejects and mistrusts the outsiders and defends the single truth, is as free from outside biases as dominated by the inner bias.

The romantic image of a few solitary pioneers and martyrs in Russia who challenged the Empire of Soviets will wane sooner or later from the serious art history but will retain its seductivity for journalists because it is simple, moving, and complies to the western formula of the recordsman making the impossible. But the mythology of a heroic few, of a "secret brotherhood" is meaningful in itself as an expression of the mentality.

Sometimes the idea of being existentially lost in the Soviet abyss, in the situation like the Heideggerian "Verworfenheit", put the decisive mark on the imagery of a group. For example, one of the principal motors of the underground art in Moscow, the Collective Actions group,

E.Barabanov: Between times, in: New Realities in Soviet Art and Art Research. Moscow, 1989; B.Groys. Kunst nach der Utopie, in: Ich lebe - ich sehe. Künstler der achtziger Jahre in Moskau. Zurich, 1988

developed in the last twenty years a kind of a "field" or a "forest" performance, with the evident desire to dissolve objects, texts, protagonists in limitless spaces of the wild nature, amongst trees and bushes, in swamps, or ditches - in the wildness, in the chaos of pre-human, pre-civilisational universe. Lately, the most controversial Regina-Art gallery in Moscow organized two remarkable events to elaborate on the idea of "lostness" and "groundlessness" in art. The first event was called "First-Hand Art": pictures of the most prominent painters of Moscow have reposed in hands of people hidden behind walls pierced by holes to put hands through. Pictures vacillating slightly before our eyes, and having no other support than Unknown Hands from behind the Wall were a legible indication of the deep cultural paradigm of Russia - Everything from Nothing.

The second event was a meeting of the invited in an old orchard outside Moscow with artworks hung in the air or between the trees' branches. It was called "On Transparency", but "On Groundlessness" would have been an equally appropriate title.

The Moscow-born critic Margarita Tupitsyn who was the expert of the historical Sotheby auction in Moscow in 1998, and the correspondent of "Flash-Art" in Russia writes that the Russian Sots-Art is an "example of postmodernist practice". She describes it in terms of the Western deconstruction and its binary codes: in her view the goal of Sots-Art is "to dismantle the system of sacred referents of totalitarian culture without abandoning its generic features and mythical language". Many Transatlantic Russians use to think so. They love the idea of Russian art having its own duplicity and ambiguity, like that the West has. This is the typical wish of a colonized nation - to be like the white master, and to have our own idols, stars and even intellectual and artistic champions who can win their records playing their match with the Devil, with the Abyss. If Europeans and Americans can borrow some elements from primordial magic practices, from art history, from religions and metaphysical systems, from mass culture and media, and refer to them with a courage of a buffoon who makes wise jokes about kings and gods, about perennial and last questions of humans, so we should invent something like it. Are we

* M.Tupitsyn. Margins of Soviet art. New York - Milan, Giancarlo Politi, 1989, p.65

postmodernists, aren't we? Everything considerable is postmodernist nowadays. Look, we play with the Soviet propaganda slogans, we put into our works portraits of Communist gods and leaders, we invoke the Socialist Realism. We don't deny, we don't affirm what we bring together. We are as Protean as the white master is, we can dance on the fence of the epoch. Admire our champions challenging the Red Monster!

This kind of theoretical discourse (I show it from within) is not without the sense because Sots-Art is a complex multifacial phenomenon partially transplanted to U.S.A. and Germany, and experiencing the process of westernisation. Indeed, in New York the Russian art tends more to the postmodernist paradigm than in Moscow. This tells us something about the new polyvalent identities in America (Afro-American art, Hispano-American art, Russian American art etc.) but nothing about ones of Russia.

Cindy Sherman demonstrates in her photographs that, in her view, the self of a human being is not a stable, a constant whole. Jean Baudrillard argued that in present conditions of human existence the reality itself, as it was understood before, is questionable or disappearing. Bice Curiger jokes on the pages of "Parkett" art magazine that "Art is such a lie that it becomes truth". They all travel - as they think, rather successfully - through the Abyss of unanswerable problems secured against it by this or that "ambiguity code".

At the moment there are no artists, no thinkers, no art critics in Russia who can or wish to do such things at a comparable level.

What to Sots-Art made by Russians it is closer to Bacchus than to Hermes or Proteus. They reproduce the non-reasonable, the chaotic and insane as such, with a self-effacement and "furia" which excludes the coldly rational, business-like approach of a true Western champion. Russians are too immediate, too unreflected, despite all pretensions to be "deconstructive". In a sense, they are the "primitives" of postmodernism, as they were "primitives" of Avantgardism decades ago. They reproduce the magic unity of the Soviet and Post-Soviet world, its emptiness, its power, its classic ballet, its marmalade and violent dictators, its dull everyday life, its discipline, its chaos. E.Cloran mentioned once that Russian history reminds him not of modern history as such but of prehistoric times, with their specific energy of non-consumed wildness, inhumanity, magic of the first discovery of the world.

He said the Russian history is like geology, with its furious forces and catastrophic processes; a metaphor which brings us very close to the notion of abyss.

The mind which understood Russia, as it seems, best of all in the West, R.M.Rilke, described in his "Stundenbuch" the Orthodox religion and different forms of life and art in Russia comparing them to biological, mainly botanical phenomena - trees and plants, to the primordial living matter which is outside the laws of civilisation. Comparably, I think of magic leaning on extra-human experience rather than of the sophisticated deconstructive mind when I have to contemplate the Russian art, even in its controversial and erring avatars of this time.

As Kipling put it, West is West, and East is East, although he meant India and China rather than Russia. Western criteria are at least forceless in understanding Russian art - but very strong in moulding it on their own likeness. Several important aspects of Russian art stay outside the Western critical vehicle, for instance the "transcendental" painting. Is it important indeed? - the West asks hesitantly. Why? Chagall again, Kokoschka again, Kandinsky again - what is it if not the backyard of contemporary art? In this issue the fence dancers and track-down-trackers gain a certain position at last. What is comparatively Western-like is being considered "elitist", the rest is second-hand and colonial goods. Russia produces a lot of these - strange, anachronistic pictorial production, figurative and non-figurative, very much mystical.

The Moscow art historian and critic Shariff Shukurov defined the message of this neo-mystical art as "emptiness, amplified by colour". Emptiness, because the unseen and the non-definable are the traditional mystical attributes of the Supreme Reality in both Orthodox and Moslem traditions which make progress in Russia now. What they paint is in fact the beneficial Abyss, the salvatory Nothingness - maybe a psychological reversion of the basic existential experience.

Stuart Morgan described the Western art critic as a "double agent" between artist and audience: "the prerogative, even the duty of critics is to change - change of tactic, of allegiance, of orientation". This

* Kunst & Museumjournal, Nr.4, 1992, p.21

is not only a portrait of a single profession, but also a depiction of the Western cultural hero - from Odysseus to Churchill, from Sokrates to Deleuze.

The East produces another cultural hero, from Dostoyevsky to Kabakov. The narrative of an abyss is central to both art and art criticism today. Even the "westernised" author like Viktor Misiano (who is convinced that the catacombean period was only an ugly deviation, so we must think of the integration into the international elite) still make meaningful confessions - for example speak of the lostness and shelterlessness of the formerly underground artists in the new post-totalitarian reality. Short-sighted as it is, he refers to the new openness as to a kind of abyss*. It seems we deal with an archetype of culture.

The independent thinkers appearing in non-academic and non-elitist circles free from the reminiscences of Soviet Marxism and from the post-modernist bias which replaces the former one are particularly interested today in social, historical, psychological processes of "erasing values" leading to the annihilation of personality. Hassan Husseinov spoke of the "linguistic vacuum" in contemporary Russia and adjacent countries. Michail Epstein and Vladimir Ivanitsky pointed to the axiological vacuum, and Leonid Nevler works on a treatise entitled "Neontology", that is the theory of the historical, social, psychological non-being of Russia. Such things as vacuum, groundlessness, non-being, shelterlessness etc. are being referred to not only as impasse or catastrophe. They are being thought a mode of existence and a kind of cultural message. In a sense, they belong to the rubric of "merry apocalypses" known by works of Baudrillard or Sloterdijk, with one important dissimilarity: they do not shake the unshakeable foundations of their civilisation; they paradoxically acknowledge the absence of such foundations, and take the idea of the Abyss for their guideline.

What to a depiction of our cultural hero, I found it in works of Grigory Pomerantz, one of the most significant figures in contemporary Russian thinking. He describes the artist, the mentality which embraces the apophatic mysticism of the East, the paradoxically "nihilistic" position maybe parallel to the Oriental practices of the purification through Nothingness. He writes on Dostoyevsky and

* V.Misiano. Die Poetik der Schwerelosigkeit, in: Moskau - Wien - New York. Eine Ausstellung der Wiener Festwochen. Wien, 1989, S.15

Daniel Andreyev, and he could have written on Daniel Harms or Andrey Tarkovsky. The hero he deals with in his book "Openness to the Abyss" is not splitten, not "nomadic", and not subject to any "ambiguity codes". He departs from the principle of the unconceivable unity of the Being and Non-Being. He belongs to those in Russia who do not accept the tense and nervous intellectual fitness of Western recordsmen and double agents, and keep the anachronistic spiritual serenity.

* G.Pomerantz. Otkritost bezdne (Openness to the Abyss). New York, Liberty Publishing, 1989

By Kim Levin

Twenty years ago, at a moment in the early '70s when everyone was talking apocalyptically about the death of painting and the end of art, Octavio Paz gave a series of lectures at Harvard. One passage has been quoted and quoted by myself and by other critics periodically ever since. In it, Paz talked about the fact that modern art had lost its powers of negation, and no longer had the ability to shock. Then he stated: "We are living not the end of art but the end of the idea of modern art."

Since then, a number of other drastic endings have been proposed by critics, theorists, and artists. Among them, the end of the author, the end of authenticity, and the end of history. I think Octavio Paz's corrective is in order: in each case, it is not the end of the thing itself, but the end of the idea of the modern author, the end of the modern idea of authenticity and the modern idea of history. The end of all kinds of modern doctrines, beliefs, and ideals.

This morning Olga Schaedling proposed the end of art criticism. I would say that art criticism is hardly obsolete. To paraphrase Paz, two decades later, I would say we are now living not the end of art criticism, but the end of the idea of modern art criticism. For twenty years--twenty five actually, since 1968--we have been living the end of the modern era. Twenty five years isn't a long time, considering the length of other major historical transitions. Confused transitional times in the past have sometimes lasted a hundred years or more. But, programmed by ingrained still-modern mindsets, we have grown impatient, even bored, with the idea of the end of modernism. And by now perhaps we are even somewhat disillusioned with the idea of postmodernism. It hasn't quite lived up to some people's original optimistic hopes. It is beset by problematic contradictions and complexities. But transitional times are always addled, hybrid, tentative, vacillating between the old and the new.

Consider this: it took over twenty years for events in the real world to catch up with the theorists. Vaclav Havel, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland this past February, said: "In its deepest sense, the end of Communism has brought a major era in human history to an end. It has brought an end not just to the 19th and 20th centuries, but to the modern age as a whole." Both communism and capitalism have suddenly come into sharp focus, not only as complementary opposites, but as uniquely modern systems. The widespread dissatisfactions and deficits in the United States suggest that in the West our modern system is malfunctioning too. Though the term "postmodernism" has reached the point of cliché, the dismantling of modern structures of thought may have barely begun. Will the world as we know it fragment ever further? Or will it coalesce into some semblance of a global edifice? We don't yet have the vaguest notion what the configuration of the postmodern world will be.

Yes, criticism, in the late modern sense of the term, is probably obsolete. And western Europe may be the last to realize this. At a symposium in mid-October in Istanbul, in connection with the Biennial there, there was a talk by a critic/curator from western Europe. He showed slides of paintings and analyzed them in the old modern terms of color, composition, figuration, abstraction. And it seemed completely irrelevant. Turkish students and critics

walked out, along with half of the rest of the audience. Now, this Formalist lecture was preceded by a talk by a Russian curator about the recent realization among Moscow artists that dissident art had been dependent on official art, from which it drew its oppositional energy and *raison d'être*: he spoke of an unexpected loss of identity. And it was followed by a talk by an American critic about colonialism, modernist ideology, and cultural relativity. Sandwiched between these two timely lectures, the formal analysis of diagonals, brushstrokes, and relations between figures and abstract forms seemed oblivious to the issues of today and was reduced to irrelevance.

Whether this collapse of modernist criticism is desirable or undesirable is absolutely beside the point. Dangers and disruptions accompany collapsing eras. The collapse of a paradigm is accompanied by the breakup--or breakdown--of systems constructed during its tenure. This is inevitable. It's happening all around us. And we needn't get too apocalyptic about it, at least in terms of art. It has provoked a crisis of identity: the individualistic, universalist, modern identity. But new opportunities come with transitions. And the identity crisis that is accompanying the collapse of the old familiar criteria and critical language is only a crisis for those who cling to the old paradigm. Last Friday there was a panel discussion at Kunstverein Haus about the "criteria crisis." As I said then, I don't see a crisis. I see a shift of paradigm which has divided the artworld in two. Those who think art must still be pure, autonomous, and universal. And those of us who feel art must be impure, engaged, specific. In times like these, it is important to remember that the notion of quality is merely a construction based on the values of whoever holds the power. Therefore connoisseurship has become suspect. The criteria have changed.

At this point, art critics are crucial--more necessary than ever. Our task is not--as it may have been in more settled times--to analyze formal devices. Our task is to act as cultural anthropologists, archaeologists of our own vanishing modern culture, examining the shards of the immediate past. Our task is to be detectives, deciphering the present, decoding clues to the future. To be more specific, I want to say something about the role of the critic, and the new issues.

Art criticism has always been an amorphous and problematic discipline. The role of the critic has never been fixed, but has been changing all along, just like art. Back in the 1940s and '50s in New York, when the art world was smaller and there was hardly any market, it was necessary for art critics to play the role of advocate--to anoint an artist or a few related artists, to champion a group or a movement--as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg did. By the '80s, that old role had come to resemble public relations and salesmanship. Advocacy was no longer possible in the face of an expanding and inflated art market. Advocacy had become tainted: it meant collusion with commercial galleries, collaboration with the art market system. Moreover, in the past decade, as art became dependent on critical theory, criticism became more of a creative endeavor. The critic's role is no longer to promote, but to bring focus to the issues.

It is time for art critics to realize not only that their role has changed, but the issues have changed. I don't simply mean from questions of form to questions of content and context, though the specifics of content and the conditionalities of context have replaced the absolutes of abstract form as a

prime concern for critics as well as artists. Identity has become perhaps the major issue in much recent art. This is not identity in the former sense of the term. Because of the loss of the overriding modernist identity, the issue of identity now is an issue of cultural identity, group identity, social or ethnic identification.

In various ways, artists and theorists in the individualistic West have been questioning the individualistic Western self and its ties to consumer society, along with notions of authorship, originality, uniqueness, and the relation to the so-called Other. This has led to the realization among many that they are that suppressed Other. Artists and critics elsewhere, however, have lived with the imposition of a dominant Other. In the former Soviet nations, they have survived totalitarian utopias that denied individualism. In former colonized countries they have experienced the nasty underside of modernism, which meant the appropriation (by the modernists) of their supposedly "primitive" traditional forms as well as the expropriation of their natural resources. In Asia, hypermodernism has been superimposed on traditional societies that were never idealistic. The myth of universality could function as long as art was a matter of the new, the original, and the autonomous individual. But when artists who are emerging from and are conscious of a variety of different pasts confront broader questions of social identity, so-called universal values (narrowly defined by a dominant clique) do not suffice.

Speaking of the "issues," back in the mid-eighties I took one artist friend, a photo-conceptualist, to see the exhibition of another artist friend, a sculptor. The sculpture had to do with flesh and spirit, suffering and AIDS. And the photo-conceptualist looked at it and sniffed dismissively, and said to me, "But my dear, he's not dealing with the issues." For one artist the "issues" might be the ironic and distanced deconstruction of imagery. For another, who was slightly ahead of the times, the "issues" were matters of life and death. As critics, we should be aware that the issues are neither constant nor universal.

Who formulates the issues? Everyone and no one. Sometimes it may be some vague Zeitgeist, other times some very specific event. In the United States, the omnipresence of the AIDS pandemic has rendered autonomous art irrelevant. The attacks on art by ultra-conservative politicians and religious fundamentalists also forced the American artworld out of whatever ivory towers it still inhabited in the '80s. Just when the cloud of totalitarian censorship lifted in Eastern Europe, the winds of change blew it across the Atlantic to hover over the United States, and being self-referential suddenly went from seeming crucial to being self-indulgent. And so, in the United States, the art world has become politicized. The issues, for a great many American artists now, revolve around the crises of the body--AIDS, abortion, censorship, sexism, racism, ethnicity, multiculturalism.

Postmodernism is not a universal panacea. Multiculturalism has different implications in different places. The issue of cultural identity can provoke questions of assimilation in one country and questions of stereotyping in another. At the moment, the issues and concerns that occupy critics and artists in many places around the world appear to coincide because we have all reached a crossroads. We share the perplexities of being witness to a collapsed aesthetic paradigm and a collapsing historical era. But we converge from a multitude of different pasts. The problems and solutions elsewhere are not necessarily the same as ours.

The modern age was an era of doctrines, ideologies, and, as Havel noted when speaking of its demise, "an era in which the goal was to find a universal theory." In the current revulsion against ideals of universality, common denominators are no longer the aim. We seek differentiations, specifics, localized relevance in art. Out in the world, the revolution against modernist universalism has led to divisiveness, to fragmentation, to the loss of universal fundamentalism. Within the limits of art criticism, I would like to hope that it might lead to multiplicity and inclusiveness rather than exclusion, to diversity instead of divisiveness. And a new consideration of the relativities of our own stance, whatever that stance may be.

CHANGES OF FUNCTION OF «THE NEW» AND ART CRITICISM

par Jacques Leenhardt

In the course of my remarks, I will try to show why art historians had necessarily to become formalists. Art critics, on the other hand, waver inevitably between formalism, narration and political interpretation, as we have seen yesterday.

This ambivalent situation can be described as the essence of the crisis of art criticism.

The notion of Crisis, in this context, refers to its etymological origin, *krinein*, that means to *value*, and therefore, since valuation changes with time and culture, criticism is condemned to permanent changes.

How can we make sense of this duality of our function: formal description and political/ethical valuation? The «*Aufhebung*» of this contradiction occurs in the social, and thus sociology is the discourse that tries to speak of the forms taken in life by ethical and political hopes and norms.

A work of art - *though* - is a social phenomenon insofar as it is the formulation of tendencies in concrete objects. And by definition art brings something new. What does this category of the new mean for us, art critics?

The sociology of art necessarily finds itself split between two types of objects, both of which it is obliged to take into consideration. The first one concerns the social life of art as far as practices, institutions, tastes or market strategies are concerned. A large part of art criticism is dedicated to these aspects.

The second one concerns the works themselves and the dual relationship they have, first to society as a producer of mental categories, systems of perception and feeling, and second to the aesthetic and cognitive effects produced by the encounter between different social groups and the cultural objects themselves.

This interrogative duality still constitutes today a dividing line in the discipline, one from which theoretical oppositions and methodological debates have developed.

One could orient research towards the rules of the market, the principles of distinction or the modalities for the social construction of value, in order to find the reasons for the force of the imperative of newness. For my part, I would like in these remarks to take off from the alternative branch, while still insisting on the fact that, to my mind, both alternatives must be maintained at the same time, and neither one privileged to the detriment of the other. I will therefore question the social function of this imperative of newness starting from the artist's practice as it is captured in his works and developed by the critic.

What is implicit in this approach is that New contains within itself some of the reasons which constitute the imperative or the compulsion for newness. My hypothesis will be that there is a social logic of the New, reinforced and made visible by the imperative, and which acts in a determining way on the nature of the works, while the latter, the imperative, gives content to this logic. Newness therefore acquires a certain autonomy in our societies and, as a consequence, finds itself a ready object for sociocritical analysis.

In order to clarify things, let us remind ourselves (if it is really necessary) that the New is not a phenomenon that suddenly appeared in the

world of art at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, but one that has continually surfaced throughout the history of art, each period renewing its forms, its intentions and its functions. As a consequence, artists have never ceased inventing new forms and new techniques within the framework of the specific functions vested in the art form they were practicing. The fact remains that, at the beginning of the 20th Century, we are confronted with a new phenomenon, at the end of which a specific value is added to the newness of the New, and not only to the aesthetic result that this newness, practiced by artists, has brought about.

It is a particularly delicate task to try and characterize the meaning of this new value attributed to the new. It seems nonetheless, that one might be able to compare this phenomenon to the radical transformation that the visual arts undergo as soon as they abandon what traditionally was their object: representation of the world (or the representation of a narrative).

Let us attempt therefore, to discover the effects of this logic, within the development of contemporary art, on the role played by the new. The break in the visual art's mimetic connection gives birth to a dual consequence: ceasing after several centuries to describe an exterior, natural and social world, painting or making art in a sense transforms itself into an epistemological activity, which means that it turns its instruments upon even the categories of its own practice. Its practice can be defined as the act of going to work upon the different forms of feeling. The latter become, from this point on, the object of artistic activity (painting) in what I wish to refer to as an analytic of feeling. What is discovered at this moment in art is what Leonardo da Vinci had already clearly established, but which had never dominated the artistic scene to such an extent:

that art was a *cosa mentale*. It is this «above all else» which, at the turn of the century, made for the principal change in the history of our visual sensibility.

The second consequence of this transformation is part of the nature itself of this new practice. As long as painting described, through forms that were of course continually renewed, an exterior world of objects and symbols, the latter offered a kind of stability. Tradition in painting relied, to a great extent, on the effect of permanence offered by the fruit in their bowl, the village with its church in the landscape, the posture of the young girl whose portrait was being painted, without even mentioning the political and religious symbols whose functions themselves implied a rather lengthy duration.

Stripped of these permanent points of reference, the artist manifests the different aspects of seeing, thinking, imagining in his art-making. Such an artistic analysis of the attitudes of sensitized intelligence, insists on the differences which distinguish each feeling, even if we know that, in daily practice, they are most often articulated together and constructed in a global operation of perception. But as soon as they are the object of a separate, autonomous and specific analysis, and take form within an object, they can suddenly no longer be reduced to the same common denominator. As a prime example we may evoke the autonomy of the touch of colour in pointillism, geometricized volume in cubism, orthogonal surfaces in the diverse versions of constructivism, optical movement in cinematic art etc. The works produced within the framework of this analytic of visual feeling naturally have a tendency to turn the aspect of which they are the illustration, into an absolute. Each work appears inevitably incommensurable to any other work, and the idea of the New - that which follows of course from the competition that occurs between artists and forces them to put a label on their practice - becomes one of the essential dimensions

of the work. The work puts forward its newness in so far as what constitutes the new is only a chosen part of the work, picked out by the artist and materially developed in all of its consequences. In this case there remain none of the points of reference that we knew of in figurative art and which, despite stylistic differences, assured us of a sort of community of facts, linked to the referential world.

It is around these «absolutist» and fundamentally formalist practices that groups of artists began forming, and that critics, more often than not, tied them together under the banner of one «ism» or another. These groupings of artists and of works offer a formal coherency which is that much stronger as it gains its legitimacy through the exclusion of every other form. Formal specialization is the link which unifies the group, and orthodoxy becomes the logical consequence of the exclusivism upon which is based the promotion of a formal «newness».

These group phenomena, as we know, subsequently engender within themselves hierarchies, masters, leaders, models. In the twentieth century, they have also tended to favour the emergence of extra-artistic figures (critics, philosophers, writers) whose capacities to manipulate non pictorial language were able to assure the beginnings of a liaison with the external world at the same time that they were defining the irreducibility of the group to anyone not involved in the same practice. The production of «isms» and of the theories that legitimate them is therefore a direct consequence of these different manifestations.

With the arrival of the critic, an overpass is established towards a second instance of legitimization which is art history. Finding himself at the crossroads between the painters, the historians and the public, the critic

undoubtedly reinforces his mediating position in so far as he is capable of naming the new. It is nonetheless only the academic institution itself, and with typical tardiness that goes along with its pretensions to universal judgment, that will assure definitive legitimacy to a group or a movement.

The imperative of the New as it is imposed on artists, is thus the social objectivation of the logic of Art's autonomy with regards to the different «worldly references». As a consequence for art historians, there is a transformation of concepts which are susceptible to be applied to art and ground historicity. The latter was constructed from the whole visual procedure involved in the transmission of meaning and according to the principles of the tradition of what was painted, and what symbol was represented (role of the theory of genre). Art history found itself forced to become a history of the forms and the attitudes of the visual mind. It was necessarily secured on the variability of the latter, and therefore on the new.

The third sphere of legitimization which finds itself implicated in these transformations is the museum, and its most visible (to the exterior in any case) form which is the exhibit. From the moment when what is shown, in the painting or in the objects produced by the artist, principally offers the analytic and critical aspects of the «formalization» of art, the concept of an exhibit is itself modified. The exhibit is no longer just a space and a moment where the visitor finds himself confronted with a narrative that speaks to him of the world, or of a political or revealed truth. Instead of being captivated by the internal logic of these narratives he finds himself, on the contrary, confronted with the process itself of making visible and making sense of the making visible. He is confronted with the unveiling of each object.

Criticism and Crisis

With the predominance of ideas and attitudes about art, the procedures of exhibiting find themselves replacing the artistic event, from the thing-seen to the conditions of its-being-seen. The transformation of the exhibition into a drama of the visual, in other words, into a «show», is thus the logical consequence of the transformations we are studying. Suffice to note here that the commissioner of the exhibit, the installer, the lighting engineer, in sum the «directors» of art, logically play more and more important roles in the context of these transformations of the artistic act itself.

In and around the act of exhibiting, therefore, develop an entire series of new skills and new professions. The invention of unusual exhibition sites, sometimes quite unique like the *Aurelien walls* in Rome for the Transavant-garde exhibits, the invention of new lighting devices and the promotion of the lighting technician within the hierarchy of museum technicians, and finally, the creation of «exhibit-events», are all symptomatic of the transformations being undergone.

A primordial displacement occurs here, between the New as a category and its actual manifestation, which ever since DADA, has touched the actual practice of art, but which also may become a dimension of the works themselves as in the Fluxus movement. Think for example of putting on the wall a work which is a vital phenomenon, which means it is temporal, in the museum. This artistic act becomes a process of decomposition (Titus-Carmel - Vostel). Such practices tend to bring about a new category, that of the ephemeral as a figure of the New in art. The ephemeral becomes the New *par excellence*, that which doesn't stop changing, a happening that is inscribed in duration, an event from the beginning to the end.

We must therefore tie in the notion of newness to those of «event» and «ephemerality», such that within this triad, a new definition of meaning is reconstructed. It is new in so far as traditionally, meaning was that which was stable and durable through time. Due to its relative stability, meaning was the foundation for the work's identity. From this point on though, if there is any meaning left at all, it is meaning that inscribes itself within a sense of Time as evolutionary. This is what one notices for example in what I will refer to as **post-industrial ready mades**: the little piles of wood that are destined to rot and which punctuate the ephemeral space of Richard Long's walk ways for example.

We cannot draw any conclusion for art criticism from these transformations. They are challenging our traditional way of writing about art because the notion of the **art object** and the notion of the meaning of art have been changed.

How can we deal with the new epistemological status of the work of art that speaks about its capacity of dealing with meaning and no longer of meaning itself? How can art criticism deal with the permanent changes in the **objectal form** that leads to the vanishing of any object? How can we, in the language, deal with the absence of object and with the overwhelming presence of concept? These are but the questions that new art practices put to art criticism as a traditional activity of construction of the meaning of art.

Jacques Leenhardt
Oslo, octobre 1992

Criticism and Crisis

- some remarks on contemporary critical theory and practice.

I've been asked to make some remarks about contemporary art-criticism, that is to say about the present situation or context as one is almost obliged to say in these textualized times, in which we do our jobs.

Let me say, as a reluctant beginning, that part of the problem concerning contemporary criticism - call it the crisis of criticism - is, that it's almost impossible to generalize, to speak of criticism as such. This, however, doesn't make it impossible nor even difficult to speak about what is considered to be a problem, maybe *the* problem - because the lack of general criteria is precisely not only an contingent part of the crisis, it is the constitutive part of the whole thing, of the crisis of criticism.

In other words: There is no such thing today as criticism in the old universalist sense of the word, no common discourse of criticism, no general purpose of criticism, no explicit and totalizing, emancipatory project to be carried out by the critical intellectual in cooperation with authentic art.

The crisis of criticism is the crisis of crisis: the rhetoric of the continental critique of ideology has thus lost its institutional power. Who can define or where do we or they define, what is going to be liberated through intellectual demystifying activity.

What I will talk about for the next half hour will be this crisis of the crisis which I take to be the core of the problem. Hence I can only conceive the straightforward worry about the crisis of criticism as nostalgic lamentation not to say as a golden-age-construction only useful for whimpering and snivelling intellectuals not knowing what to do with their time.

I myself am not worried about anything concerning criticism, although it's my job. That could of course be explained by the fact that my condi-

tions are good. I write for a weekly newspaper, which permits me almost every week to publish whole-page essays on art, from Mantegna and Rembrandt to contemporary art.

It could, however, also be explained by what I take to be a fact, and furthermore the background for this paper: Thus I'll claim that the decline of an common institutionalized powerful critical discourse that matters does not necessarily imply the decline or evaporation of the individual critic. So maybe you could reduce the whole problem of contemporary criticism by saying that the crisis of criticism has only to do with a regrettable situation, namely that one where people don't see their job as part of a whole, as part of a teleological movement.

In the good old marxist days, where many of the myths of criticism and crisis really belong, one called this phenomenon alienation, *Entfremdung*, in *deutscher Sprache*. Maybe the contemporary critic is simply a person alienated from top to bottom and, this being the case, of course it does hurt.

Why? Because the position of a critic doing his job should be the last place for such a vain experience. But the time has come, gentlemen, so prepare and beware. And first and foremost, be critical!

So much by way of beginning. Let us take a further look on the problems and paradoxes involved. And why not start with the situation itself, the fall and decline of the critic, the transformation of the authentic, passionate, responsible, noncorrupt, demystifying on behalf of the people, truth-seeking intellectual into the casual and smart producer of insipid* catalogue texts toady to the brandnewest links between modern sculpture and fractal physics.

I do not wish to develop this point, we all know the atmosphere of fraud and deceit - the crimes of criticism - associated with many many publications in the artworld, associated with many many exhibitions. There is no need to comment on the ultra-capitalist aspects of art, on the mechanical and automatic metaphysics of artindustry, on the intellectualist fetishism concerning the *Zeitgeist*, we are all familiar with this stuff and personally it doesn't worry me. People can spend their money and their brains as they like. We all know these things, why should exactly

our profession be without them. But we also know however that it doesn't have to be that way. Good texts on art are still being written, good books on art are still being published, good papers on art are still being read.

Lets therefore leave the empirical sphere and return to the rhetorical or philosophical. Lets return to the crisis of criticism conceived as the crisis of crisis itself - the thesis of this paper.

As you all know, criticism and crisis are etymologically interrelated. Kant, Marx and Husserl all wrote their critiques under circumstances they considered critical, considered as crisis. From the very beginning critique was as a concept not only a device to cope with a crisis, but was in itself also a symptom of the crisis. In Kant reason is examining itself to find out to what extent reason can cope with the forthcoming modernity, to put it very simple. And this selfexamination is already, I maintain, symptomatic of the traditional relation between criticism and crisis.

As you have surely remarked I now suddenly use the words critique and criticism as though they were synonyms*, which they of course aren't. *Criticism* belongs to an anglosaxon tradition where it isn't so heavily loaded with the ideas of philosophy as intervention as the other word is, the german or continental concept of *critique* - although also criticism in english tradition was directed against modernity. I think we can say that contemporary art-criticism draws on both concepts. It combines rudiments of critique of ideology - subversion and demystification - with the sensibility and the awareness of quality that characterized for example New Criticism in literary studies.

I so far as modern criticism does so, it is almost without any exceptions, but more or less of course, articulated as a critique of modernity. Criticism and art-criticism was critique of modernity before it became, what it is now, a subdiscipline in that relatively closed system we call art.

Here in a way we see a common destiny shared both by criticism and art. The destiny is, what many people call the crisis. And the crisis is that both art and criticism has lost its universalist power and pretention. We have seen an anti-aesthetic reduction of art into just one language among others, and we have seen the de-politicized reduction of criticism into just

one activity among others. This is the common crisis shared by art and criticism - or at least what we *call* crisis.

To sum up in three points:

First: Our modern ideas of criticism as critique of ideology, more or less, and of art as an exclusive and sacred language primordial to other languages and to perceptual as well as conceptual schemes, is dependent to its very end on a critical situation, on a crisis, on the idea of the crisis.

Without crisis there wouldn't be anything to criticize, there wouldn't be any criticism or critique - so goes the logic.

Second: The crisis, that thus was the nourishment of critique and criticism, is over. There is no cultural crisis considered as *the* wound of modernity for art and critique in common to cure. That doesn't mean, of course, that there are no crises in the world - I don't deny starvation, racism, oppression, ecology and the like - but the recognition of these crises do not have any specific effect on art. An effect that once again would make it the very place from where to speak against. Those are political problems that have to be solved by help of advanced technology - the only chance - and no one considers art and or criticism or critique to be relevant here. Not any longer. Thus the relation between art and culture has changed - I'll come back to that.

Third: Given the fact that criticism and crisis are interdependent and that there is no crisis identifiable as *the* crisis of modernity, criticism has got itself as it's crisis.

To understand the implications of this a short historical survey is required. First because it's the only way to see a phenomenon fully unfolded, second because the crisis of criticism is structured as a narrative along the following lines: »Once upon a time« or better: »It has always been so that criticism has had specific criteria and a sacred position from where to talk and to judge, now however, in postmodern pluralist society anything goes and when anything goes a lot goes with that, and surely criticism.«

This narrative is typical of the contemporary clash between modern mythology and postmodern conditions - and I take this clash to be constitutive regarding most of the epistemological problems we deal with in

our practice, if we deal with any.

We have some ideals and some conditions that don't fit each other. And the discrepancy between ideals or ideas and conditions produces a distorted view of our past. It produces a scenario which tells us that in the old days everything was well ordered. Probably structured along foucauldian lines, which means corresponding to specific epistemological frames - as if there wasn't such a thing as the experience of crisis. As if people and critics as well lived under completely dogmatic circumstances without ever experiencing phenomena like the decenteredness of the subject, doubt, sublimity, crisis, incomprehensibility, indecidability, etc.

If you look around in human science today you see this distorted picture drawn again and again with one purpose: The purpose of qualifying our age as something special, as something which has meant a break with everything and a breakthrough to almost nothing compared to what they had in the old days. This dichotomy* is of course naive, but nevertheless it plays a major role in contemporary thinking - or what is labelled as such.

On the other hand there are naturally a lot of specific differences between our situation today and the scene or situation hundred and two-hundred years ago. The most important thing is however not to point that out, it almost goes without saying, but to warn ourselves not to be seduced by that philosophy of history that lies within the construction of a golden age concerning art-criticism and criticism as such. That kind of philosophy of history is a typical product of an age obsessed with the imagery and rhetoric of crisis.

Having emphasized this you can make your comparisons between now and then. And we all know them. One of them has to do with the relationship between the rule, the ideal and the artwork. In the classicist and preromantic ages you could distinguish between an actual work of art and the ideal or the rule behind it. This distinction provided a view of the artist, not as a subjectivist genius, but as a medium for values and structures larger than the artist himself.

Works of art could be seen as fulfillments of existing schemes. Interpretation and judgement was thus two aspects of the same critical activity. To interpret was to place or to classify the work as something, and the aesthetic value - as far as you could have such a thing - was related to

the clarifying power of the artwork. Which means that there was something outside the work to be clarified.

Everyone knows that this stability in the externalization of the form and content of the artwork is what is lost in modern, romantic times. No external standards any longer, instead you get the autonomy of the artwork, which in this case means that the work can only be judged and interpreted by referring to its own qualities. This is the mystifying point in all modern art, the idea of the work that fulfills itself in selfreference - it both contains a modern dream of unity and a modern experience of disruption.

Anyway, when romantic art becomes modernism it is clear to everyone, that any idea of universal standards whatsoever is impossible. You judge what you see, not by referring to what you know, but by letting what you see speak. This is another mystifying point in modern art - its primitivist core!

There might be some disagreement about the time and period in which this transition from external to internal point of view takes place - in Denmark we have art-critics from the beginning of our century who are still measuring aesthetic and artistic quality with reference to external standards, laws, rules and ideas.

But my point isn't this disagreement. It's rather to focus on the fact that the question of criteria, with which you judge and evaluate, luckily disappear within the transition. It's simply no longer interesting, it's not even a problem, the lack of criteria. Critics today do other things - in the least *before* they judge about quality.

What do they do? The interpret. Interpretation has become the main task of criticism as I see it, there has been a hermeneutic turn within criticism. Understanding and interpretation conceived as writing has replaced judgement and classification. That's where we are today, I think, -- criticism as hermeneutical activity.

And, furthermore, interpretation has been given free to some extent. Coexistent with the old external standards there were external allegorical schemes that framed the interpretation with some kind of methodological restriction - also this has melted into air.

Much can be said and ought to be said about the hermeneutical problems of criticism and especially art-criticism. My concern is, however, not the intrinsic qualities of that subject but the functional role that this hermeneutic task or activity plays in relation to art and culture.

Looking at this functional role another word for interpretation comes up, and that is translation - and I take this word both in its broadest sense and in its somewhat archaic sense.

Translation is to move something from one place to another and this kind of transport, however vulgar and banal it may seem, is in many ways what is actually going on in criticism. As a critic you place yourself between the work of art, the experience of it and your readers. The position you take is the position of language. What can be said about what is seen, sounds the question. And what can be seen in what is said, sounds the challenge to the critic.

If you reflect this idea historically you get at least two answers to the question of the legitimacy* of that position. Or to put it in another way: This concept of criticism rests upon a view that regards art as communicative, or in the least permits criticism to be so.

As an example of the latter you could mention kantian aesthetics, which doesn't see art as essentially communicative but regards criticism as a communicative result of a primary social impulse attached to aesthetic experience. If we hold on to this idea of criticism as communication about art and aesthetic experience, we find in the twentieth century two different views. One that would criticize communicative criticism for being affirmative, and one that would affirm communicative criticism without any problems.

Given the fact that criticism translates art into culture and given the fact that there is a difference between art and culture, the two different views turn out to be to versions of the avantgarde.

As an example of the first version I could mention the russian avantgarde from the beginning of the century up to the 1920ies. The translation of suprematist introversion and parareligious sublimity into social knowledge is part of the whole point - in that way, we know today, the stalinist idea of totalitarianism was anticipated by the avantgarde concept of

aesthetic totalitarianism. Art and aesthetics were supposed to penetrate everything, from mental framemaking to concrete design. Of course this isomorphic* relationship between art and culture was bound to a specific historical situation where an old culture was to be subverted and replaced by a new art, in this way becoming *the* new culture. We could call this version of the avantgarde the progressive and optimist version.

Then there is the pessimist version, being what we europeans know as the hardcore modernist movement. Significantly the profile of that point of view isn't drawn by artists as much as by philosophers and critics. I will only mention one name that on the other hand fully represents the view I call pessimist, namely the german philosopher, the king of critical theory in the twentieth century, Adorno.

With Adorno we can stipulate the alternative to the optimist link between art and society, between art and culture. And that is of course the antagonism between the two.

Any kind of criticism that makes the magic-mimetic language of the artwork touch the everyday language of culture is committing the crime of communication. The crime of communication is the transformation of art into culture, the transformation of singularity into instrumentalized and inauthentic usefulness, into the language of *das Man* as Heidegger would say - and he would hardly use the word language for that but the german term *Gerede*, which I don't know the english word for.

My point now is that if there is a crisis of criticism today it has precisely to do with the confusion of the pessimist view on the exclusivity of art with conditions that in no way supports this view.

In more than one way you can say, I think, that the dream of the optimist and progressivist avantgarde has come true in our postmodern society - of course meaning the death of the avantgarde in virtue of its institutionalization.

Today art is no longer a subversive exception to a culture that will not accept any form of counterimagery to its own. Today two things have happened and both has ruined our modernist, that is to say sacred truths about art, culture and the relation in between.

First, art is now seen as a fully integrated part of a cultural system.

Thus it has lost its virginal integrity - the loss can be and has been described in many ways, with Paul de Man we can talk about the deconstructive turn precisely as this critique of aesthetic ideology, that means the romantic belief in aesthetic essentialism. Or, to get closer to the problems of criticism, we can talk, with Victor Burgin, about the end of art theory. That's the first thing that has happened. The revaluation of art as culture.

The second thing that has happened is the revaluation of culture itself. Even if we had this exclusive thing called authentic art, we would not be able to speak about *the* culture into which aesthetic experience should be communicated. Our culture is not one, but many, and here I'm not only thinking about the holy trinity of political correctness - race, gender, class - unspecified complexity will do.

Let me give an example. In golden-age Denmark, that means the first half of the nineteenth century, the relation between art and culture was theolegical. Every work of art, one believed, had and should have a specific theolegical function in the constructing of danish national culture.

Today both that kind of art and that kind of unified and unifiable culture is gone together with the whole idea of aesthetic theolegology.

To sum up: Contemporary art doesn't point in one and only one way. And contemporary culture isn't one and only one place, where such pointing, if it existed, could be received. Therefore the critic in the old sense of the word is dead, the theolegology of his activity has passed away.

Well, I started by making the crisis of criticism disappear, now I have made the critic disappear. Is the answer to all our troubles then, that there is no crisis of criticism because there is no critic - and therefore no criticism? No, I'm sorry. I still have only the point with which I began: There is no crisis. But there is criticism and critics. Some of us are here today.

What then is contemporary criticism? What can it be - apart from the perverted picture of the depraved mechanical intellectual mentioned in the beginning? As a consequence of what I have said, my answer will be restricted in two ways.

First, as I also said in the beginning of this paper, it's part of the situation that you cannot stipulate the role of the critic and of contem-

porary criticism as such.

Second, you can only do so under cover and that means paradoxically by telling what you yourself in fact do as a critic - and here you don't have to feel trapped in some kind of subjectivist abyss, you can of course articulate your activity in general terms. Let me do that.

One thing that went, along with the famous disappearance of criteria, was critical method. T.S. Eliot said, as you all probably know, something like »There is only one critical method, that's the intelligent« and I don't see why this shouldn't hit the nail on the head. Methodological freedom is the startingpoint of contemporary criticism. You can chose from case to case, from exhibition to exhibition on what aspects you want to focus, on what aspects you want to adress your critical, that means communicating activity.

Let me give one example. Adorno, the german philosopher who has been the villain of this drama of criticism so forth, has said many many things that go to the heart of aesthetics, I like to stress that to avoid misunderstanding. So let's use his statement about the work of art as both autonomous and what he calls with a french formula »fait social«. The work of art is both autonomous and a social fact - this means there is nothing in the work that isn't somehow in the world and everything that is in the work is there on conditions put up by the aesthetic form of the work.

Could this definition be useful in your daily work as a critic? In fact I think it can - and is. It gives you two points of view as a critic when you write about the work of art.

You can write about its phenomenology from a transcendental point of view, which means talking about its internal relations, about visual perception as such, about the kind of system the work constitutes.

You can also write about its phenomenology from a historical point of view, that means thematize certain historical and social structures and figurations within the work. Doing the former you treat aesthetics in a kantian way, doing the latter in a hegelian way.

My point is now that the good critic can't avoid doing both. Carrying out what I call transcendental phenomenology is a way of administering

the old modernist myth of critique as demystifying project. Telling people to see pictures as pictures, as pictorial strategies, as imaginary systems, can thus be compared to what J. Hillis Miller, the deconstructionist literary critic, says about the study of literature, that means literary criticism: »It's a demystifying study; it's the most concentrated area where we might be able to recognize the effects of language and learn, in a way, to protect ourselves from its enormous power... It is arming people with the power to read, which I see as an absolute fundamental necessity in order for them to make their way in the present world...«¹.

Couldn't we say that art-criticism could be arming people with the power to see... and thus following the conclusions put forward by Hillis Miller.

Carrying out what I call historical phenomenology is then a way of administering the other modernist myth, namely that of the clarifying transition between art and culture. You can call it selfdeception, but when I write about for example older danish painters I really think the motivation cannot avoid also being the clarification of national selfunderstanding. I cannot avoid being motivated by questions like - what does it mean to live in the danish landscape? which on the other hand doesn't mean that I know what it means to be danish.

Both kinds of questions and answers, which I admit I have made much too simple, play a crucial role in the contemporary administration of the modernist mythology. This postmodern administration which in fact isn't very new, you can find it by Aristotle concerning not aesthetical but ethical problems, this administration can only be conceived as a crisis from a totalitarian point view that still holds theleology as the one and only index of truth.

But haven't we had enough of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. And haven't we had enough of connections between truth and culture. I take the question to be rhetorical.

Poul Erik Tøjner, Ph.D., critic, Denmark.

¹ *Criticism in Society*, Imre Szulc (ed.), (New York & London, 1987) p. 217.

JAG OCH EN KROPP - EN FRÅGA OM PERSPEKTIV

'Il n'y a aucune constante existence, ny de nostre estre, ny de celui des objects. Et nous, et nostre jugement, et toutes choses mortelles, vont coulant et roulant sans cesse. Ainsi il ne se peut establir rien de certain de l'un à l'autre, et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle.'

(Montaigne, Essais II)

Marcel Duchamps konstnärliga testamente bestod av en serie noggranna anvisningar för hur verket *Etant donné*: 1^o la chute d'eau, 2^o le gaz d'éclairage skulle, efter hans död, uppföras i Philadelphia Museum of Art. Verket innebär just en dödförklaring av jaget. Det sker via en demonstration av perspektivets bedräglighet.

Beskrivningen av hur centralperspektivet 'upptäcks' eller 'uppfinns' under renässansen är ett av de konstvetenskapliga bravurnumren. I sin studie från 1925 går Erwin Panofsky så långt att han med centralperspektivet ser födelsen av den moderna människan. Perspektivet öppnar det visionäras domän, skriver han, genom att det mirakulösa blir en direkt erfarenhet hos betraktaren. Övernaturliga händelser blir trovärdiga genom att de tycks utspelas i en värld som genom centralperspektivet blir en förlängning av betraktarens egen. Därigenom är centralperspektivet också psykologins förutsättning, då miraklet finner sin sista tillflykt i människans själ, så som den representeras av konstverket.

Centralperspektivet, som förvandlar verklighet till fenomen reducerar det gudomliga till ett ämne för mänskligt medvetande. Men det verkar också den omvända vägen. Genom abbot Sugers ljusmystik där solens flödande ljus förenar världens alla olikheter till en Guds skapelse i en Guds kyrka i kombination med centralperspektivets fixerande blick kan högrenässansens bild visa det ideala förhållandet mellan Gud och människa, mellan människa och värld.

För Panofsky blir centralperspektivet den symboliska formen för den moderna människan, det centralperspektiv som uppfanns och uppfattades som ett tekniskt hjälpmedel för - ja, vad? Var det redan Vitruvius romerska arkitekter som använde centralperspektiv för att presentera korrekta ritningar för kunden? Var det florentiska artillerister som under 1400-talet experimenterade med kikarsikte? Var det teatern med dess nya inriktning på dramat som krävde en trovärdig scenografi?

Panofskys sätt att citera Vasaris text om perspektivets mästare Paolo Uccello är signifikativt. Panofsky återberättar anekdoten om hur Uccello, då hans hustru bad honom komma och lägga sig genmalde: 'Oh, che dolce cosa è questa prospettiva'. Ja, renässanskonstnären tycks verkligen passionerat ivrig att komma perspektivets hemlighet på spåren. Men går man till källan, Vasaris 'Berömda renässanskonstnärers liv' kan man läsa om Uccello:

'Paolo Uccello skulle ha varit den gladaste och mest påhittige av målare sedan Giotto's dagar, om han hade ägnat sig lika ivrigt åt att måla figurer och djur, som han ansträngde sig och ödade tiden med att rita perspektiv, vilka, hur uppfinningsrika och vackra de än må vara, fresta den som omåttligt ägnar sig däråt, att kasta bort tiden, trötta ut naturen och fylla sinnet med svårigheter. Ofta nog blir begåvningen, från att ha varit lätt och givande, i stället ofruktbar och föga produktiv, och det enda den konstnär får ut av det, som mera sysslar med perspektiv än med figurer, är ett torrt manér, fullt av profiler.'

Det är snarare 1900-talet än renässansens 1400-tal som är besatt av föreställningen om centralperspektivet och dess betydelse för mänskligt vetande.

Det är 1900-talet som uppfattar centralperspektivet som den form i vilken jaget blir till. Jacques Lacan uppmanar inte för inte sina adepter att studera de optiska vetenskaperna. Han jämför de mentala funktionerna med en kamera eller ett mikroskop. Han beskriver subjektet som ständigt fotograferat i världen, då blicken är det instrument genom vilket ljuset förkroppsligas.

Kameran med dess korrekta centralperspektiv etablerar voyeurens perspektiv. Fotografiet blir den mest allmänt förekommande och normerande bilden, inte minst genom dess vidareutveckling i film. Därigenom krymper möjligheterna till att öppna en relation, och därmed en erotik, till den andre. De begränsas till de näraliggande positionerna voyaurens erotiserade blick och narcissistens självbespeglning.

Voyeurens position är per definition utsatt. Den kräver ett avstånd mellan subjekt och objekt, och den raseras av blotta hotet om att objektet kan se tillbaka, kan besvara blicken och därmed göra betraktaren till ett objekt (förstena honom, som Sartre skriver) eller via aktion omintetgöra distansen.

Voyeurens position legitimeras retroaktivt genom att renässansen görs till en utvecklingshistoria om perspektiv. På så sätt framstår en formalistisk beskrivning som den enda naturliga, och via ett lån från darwinistiskt utvecklingstänkande framstår den fixerade och fixerande blicken och den konstnärliga distansen som inte bara normerande utan naturlig.

Men renässansens historia är bara sekundärt en fråga om perspektiv. Vid varje val, vid varje "etappmål" som perspektivhistorikerna stakat ut kan man finna en rad andra konstnärliga lösningar. Det var exempelvis inte den av Panofsky hyllade Jan van Eyck som stilmässigt dominerade sin samtid och sin närmaste eftervärld, trots hans tekniska perfektion av perspektivet. I stället blev den Rogier van der Weyden som av Panofsky döms ut som 'bakåtskrävar' för att han var mer intresserad av emotionellt trovärdiga än tekniskt korrekta relationer mellan figurer, som blir mästaren och vars stil imiteras av mindre betydande konstnärer de närmaste 150 åren.

Det är inte under renässansen, utan under perspektivlärans förfallsperiod manierismen som konstnärer, författare och filosofer 'uppfinner' eller 'upptäcker' subjektet och börjar ägna sig åt självreflektion.

Manierismen är uttrycket för att konstnären förlorat tron, den självklara förvisningen om att endast ett sätt att måla är det riktiga eller naturliga. Han förlorar relationen till en sanning. Utan den förmår han inte passera det moln av ovisshet som föregår och är grunden för ett nyskapande måleri. I stället för en sanning möter han flera, den relativitet som är utgångspunkten för såväl Montaignes filosofi som för Machiavellis politik.

Därigenom förvandlas måleriet till en fråga om stil. Konsten blir en historia med flera uttryckssätt. Konstnären kan välja.

Om nu renässansperspektivet vore, som Panofsky och indirekt Lacan hävdar, den symboliska formen för den moderna människan skulle man kunna vänta sig en attack mot främst centralperspektivet i det manieristiska måleriet. Men det sker bara i undantagsfall. Tvärtom visar de flesta manieristiska bilder ett fullt korrekt centralperspektiv. I stället visar den manieristiske konstnären en kluven världsbild genom att bryta relationen mellan exempelvis ett erotiskt motiv och ett sen-

sueit målari. Eller han förvränger människans proportioner. Eller han bryter normen om ett korrekt avbildande av lokalfärgen. Eller han visar målningen som en konstruktion, inte som ett fönster mot verkligheten. Eller han låter betraktaren genom allegorin tvivla på att vi vet vad vi ser, att vi 'förstår' bilden.

I likhet med Montaigne såg manieristerna jaget som ett flux, en passage, något ytterligt otillförlitligt. För att visa det stabila jagets omöjlighet påpekade de existensen av flera, samexisterande verkligheter, av vilka den av medvetandet uppfattade bara var en: dröm, hallucination, illusion, vision. I stället för mirakler ser vi mardrömmarnas jättar. Men centralperspektivet förblir ett tekniskt hjälpmedel. Voyeurismen tycks vara irrelevant för manieristernas upptäckt och samtidiga ifrågasättande av jaget.

Däremot upptäcker manieristerna språk som något skilt från mening, stil som något skilt från natur.

Genom manieristernas sätt att behandla bilden som ett språk blir det möjligt att uppfatta en bild som lögnaktig, eller sann. Genom att en bild kan uppfattas som ett uttryck för en inre sanning, och således relateras till sin upphovsman, blir begreppet alienation och autenticitet en parameter för att värdera konstverket. Det är i detta sammanhang manieristerna återupptäcker Ovidius Narcissos.

Under 1900-talet blir Narcissosmyten tvärtom en prototyp för spegelstudiet. Psykoanalysens tolkning är ett barn av sin tid, en tid då det fixerade seendets teknik och därigenom en subjekt-objektrelation får företräde framför alla andra relationsregimer.

När Duchamp som den förste 'postmodernisten', i betydelsen manieristisk tvivlare, dekonstruerar föreställningarna om konstens betydelse inriktar han sig således på den erotiska relationen mellan blick och bild, uppfattad genom centralperspektivet.

Vad är det 'jag' ges att se i Philadelphia Museum of Art?

I allt väsentligt är det en rekonstruktion av Dürers berömda träsnitt från 1520-talet, där en konstnär ses teckna ett korrekt perspektiv av en liggande kvinna med

hjälp av ett rutnät. Detta träsnitt har av bland andra Panofsky använts till att dra vittgående slutsatser om den moderna (mannens?) människans relation till verkligheten och bilden.

Rutnätet förvandlas hos Duchamp till en stängd dörr. Dörren är ett verkligt hinder. I dörren finns två tithål. Voyeurens position är den enda som ges. Därefter ett avstånd. Så en mur med en öppning. Och bruden, hon som i Duchamps sista verk som 'autentisk' konstnär *La mariée mis à nue par ses odibataires, même* 1913-1923 är en bild för bilden, hon ses genom muren deflorerad, våldtagen, i all sin naturalistiska nakenhet. Att voyeuren bara ges ett objekt och därför är helt trygg garanteras av att huvudet är utanför synfältet, inte finns – och således inte heller någon hotande blick eller möjlighet till kontakt.

Den deflorerade håller en lampa. Panofsky talar om ljuset, det enande som ger fenomenen mening i den stora illusionen, som bringar klarhet, som uppenbarar. Hos Duchamp uppenbarar lampans ljus ingenting. Den upplyser inte. Sceneriets ljus kommer från en annan plats.

Bakom bruden ett landskap, inte olik det landskap som ofta syns bakom figuren i renässansens porträttmåleri. I det en vattenkvarn, som om det hela vore en illusionistisk variant av det sceneri som utspelas i 'det stora glasets' nedre halva, det som är regerat av ett strikt centralperspektiv till skillnad från brudens domäner.

Detta sceneri, som verkar meningsfullt fast det ingenting uppenbarar och alls inget förklarar är möjligt att se endast ur voyeurens centralperspektiviskt fixerade position. Ur varje annan synvinkel skulle allt falla samman eller isär. Bildens delar befinner sig i verkligheten på långt avstånd från varandra, som tillfälligheter.

Endast på en scen, under mycket bestämda förutsättningar kan det stora symboliska centralperspektivet ha något med jaget och med verkligheten att göra. För Duchamp är det en bland många konstruktioner.

Subjekt-objektrelationen uttryckt som skopisk regim i centralperspektivet förutsätter allas orörlighet. Därför är *Etant Donnés*, denna tvekydiga hyllning till fransk-klassicismiska uppställningar av logiska problem, möjlig endast som testamente, visat efter upphovsmannens död.

Panofskys sätt att citera Vasaris text om perspektivets mästare Paolo Uccello är signifikativt. Panofsky återberättar anekdoten om hur Uccello, då hans hustru bad honom komma och lägga sig genmålde: 'Oh, che dolce cosa è questa prospettiva'. Ja, renässanskonstnären tycks verkligen passionerat ivrig att komma perspektivets hemlighet på spåren. Men går man till källan, Vasaris 'Berömda renässanskonstnärers liv' kan man läsa om Uccello:

'Paolo Uccello skulle ha varit den gladaste och mest påhittige av målare sedan Giotto's dagar, om han hade ägnat sig lika ivrigt åt att måla figurer och djur, som han ansträngde sig och ödade tiden med att rita perspektiv, vilka, hur uppfinningsrika och vackra de än må vara, fresta den som omåttligt ägnar sig däråt, att kasta bort tiden, trötta ut naturen och fylla sinnet med svårigheter. Ofta nog blir begåvningen, från att ha varit lätt och givande, i stället ofruktbar och föga produktiv, och det enda den konstnär får ut av det, som mera sysslar med perspektiv än med figurer, är ett torrt manér, fullt av profiler.'

Det är snarare 1900-talet än renässansens 1400-tal som är besatt av föreställningen om centralperspektivet och dess betydelse för mänskligt vetande.

Det är 1900-talet som uppfattar centralperspektivet som den form i vilken jaget blir till. Jacques Lacan uppmanar inte för inte sina adepter att studera de optiska vetenskaperna. Han jämför de mentala funktionerna med en kamera eller ett mikroskop. Han beskriver subjektet som ständigt fotograferat i världen, då blicken är det instrument genom vilket ljuset förkroppsligas.

Kameran med dess korrekta centralperspektiv etablerar voyeurs perspektiv. Fotografiet blir den mest allmänt förekommande och normerande bilden, inte minst genom dess vidareutveckling i film. Därigenom krymper möjligheterna till att öppna en relation, och därmed en erotik, till den andre. De begränsas till de närliggande positionerna voyeurs erotiska blick och narcissistens självbespeglning.

Voyeurs position är per definition utsatt. Den kräver ett avstånd mellan subjekt och objekt, och den raseras av blotta hotet om att objektet kan se tillbaka, kan besvara blicken och därmed göra betraktaren till ett objekt (förstena honom, som Sartre skriver) eller via aktion omintetgöra distansen.

Hélène Lassalle (AICA-France)

Actors without Part : Art Criticism and its Self-definition in Historical Perspective

What art criticism is about ? What an art critic is ? What is he supposed to do and what for ? Is there any way to change or to improve his problematic position ? While everybody is complaining about a crisis in the arts, the art critic himself no longer seems to know which part he is to play in the new art scene.

In the mid-eighties, the American sociologist Vera Zolberg did not go beyond the concept - somewhat broad and vague - of "art writer". She did not make any difference between history of art, art theory, and art criticism or even art journalism. And so did Lionello Venturi when he wrote his *History of art criticism* in 1936. From Venturi's point of view, art criticism began with the Greeks and Romans. He considered *The Commentaries* by Lorenzo Ghiberti, Vasari's *Le Vite* (The "Lives" of artists) or Alberti's treatise on painting as pieces of art criticism. For him writing on art and art criticism had the same meaning.

In the late forties the situation was unchanged and everybody felt it was a real problem. Newspapers and art magazines were echoing fierce debates between supporters of abstract art and representational art, between nationalism and internationalism, and they were battlefields for the champions of the new "isms" in art which were discovered and labelled everyday. In Paris, the Museum of Modern Art opened in 1947 with Jean Cassou as a director. Jean Cassou appeared to be surprisingly old fashioned and French oriented. No Surrealists, no abstract art, no foreign artists could be seen on the walls. Picasso had to give a few paintings to be part of the show : nothing but the "French tradition". In the rest of Europe, Germany was still under the shock of the war and was hardly recovering from the chasing of the so called "degenerated art" by the Nazis and so was Italy after the fascist years and their pompous neoclassical official art. Meanwhile a new scene had just opened in New York, which Europe pretended to ignore.

UNESCO was founded in November 1945. Mjomin Vanek, from Czechoslovakia, was in charge of the Fine Arts Program which he could not launch for money reasons. Nonetheless, before he quitted the Organisation, he suggested Raymond Cogniat, who was the chairman of the Union of the Artistic Press in France, that he should organise an international conference in order to "discuss the majors issues in terms of methods and of aesthetics that art critics and artists were up to deal with on an international level." Raymond Cogniat, he said, should think about

an international association. This was the starting point. In June 1949 and a year later in July 1949 art critics from all over the world met in Paris at the UNESCO headquarters. By the end of the second conference the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) was born. For the first time aims, methods, ethics, cultural politics were the core of the debates as well as the specific role of art critics in our society towards the living artists and the public as well. It was a stepping stone even though Serge Guilbaut made a bitter comment on those meetings in an essay he wrote for the catalogue of a Swiss exhibition in 1991, *Art curtain, iron curtain, art criticism in 1948*. Guilbaut complained about the participants, officials mostly, or old celebrated priests of the official cult. He noticed how traditional the speakers were. As a matter of fact, if quite a few papers seem to be obsolete or pointless today, they are interesting for us to understand what the art scene of the time was about, how complex it was. The people who attended the conference were curators (of all periods), art historians, professors, classic scholars, writers and poets, editors, publishers, journalists, artists with no distinction whatsoever. When they talked about the building of an international documentation they meant a museum documentation such as the one the Paintings Department at the Louvre was in the process of gathering together as well as a network through which art critics could be provided with catalogues on living artists. Such a network was set up after the second conference and it was to run during several years. Museums or galleries would send their catalogues to the Aica Office in Paris which would charge them for mailing the material to every single critic who was a member of the Association. That meant an average of 20 catalogues a year, sent out to 70 or 80 art critics around the world.

On the other hand - and this is important - a distinction was made between history of art and art criticism. For the first time art criticism was clearly bound up with modern art. Describing and analyzing the past, even a recent one, in retrospect, and promoting the creation of living artists in the turmoil of contradictory tendencies, involved different viewpoints and different strategies, and they had very little in common, as André Chastel and Marc Sandoz pointed out. Many speakers agreed that the critic's approach must be emotional. Some of them added that an art critic might be desoriented or even at a loss. An art critic had to reveal what was new, they said, while an art historian focussed on chronology, provenance, style, schools or groups, filiations and influences, the historical context, and the creating conditions and circumstances.

Curiously enough quite a number of art critics insisted they were a new type of pedagogues, that their main responsibility was towards the public, because the more abstract or distorted, and shocking, modern art had turned to be, the more rebuffed the public had grown. There was far too big a gap between the artists and the public. Art critics, they thought, had

to explain the meaning of the new works of art. Their first commitment was to convert the everyday man to modern art. It was what they were to be accounted for. Such a statement might sound rather strange today as specific means have developed in that respect. Professionals using new technologies of all kinds have made their appearance over the last decades, education people in museums of modern art, exhibitions designers, slides shows, special publications, TV programs, and more recently videocassettes. If Poul Tojner has stressed that unveiling the hidden meaning of a work of art is still the art critic's major task, interpretation does not mean communication nor education, and they do not require the same media. In the late forties or early fifties, the audience for modern art was still limited to small circles and the art critics were the only ones who had the knowledge and who had the power.

James Johnson Sweeney raised an issue which seemed to have become irrelevant in the eighties but which is back on the front page again: "In the world of art once a national interest succeeds in getting a foot in the door, or the liberty of the artist or the art writer is potentially menaced. This, I regret to have to confess, is a fact that we writers in the United States within the past year in particular have become painfully aware." The American Congress' hostile response to a travelling exhibition of American art in Europe called *Advancing American Art* was a baffling example of political censorship and J.J. Sweeney expressed his concern about the "attitude of official hostility to modern art". "I bring, he said, these conditions of the American climate before you primarily to stress the importance of maintaining the Association (i.e. the new born AICA) attitude towards its members as "individuals", not representatives of different nations, or different parties and the avoidance of national involvements". Was not the situation similar at the Biennale in Istanbul, last fall, when the American selection was threatened to be censored, as Kim Levin has reported.

A great deal of the discussions was devoted to the current battle between abstract art and representational art. While the articles which daily came out in newspapers and magazines were passionate and violent (sometimes to the extreme) the lectures at the conference were rather mild and ambiguous. They did not bring much light. Everyone kept a diplomatic reserve. And nobody mentioned a typical figure of the twentieth century art scene, the "fighter", the critic who shaped a group of artists and labelled it, who forged a body of theories as a set of decoding clues to read the art of the newcomers he wants to launch. At the beginning of the century, Marinetti had an in-built sense of provocation and mediation with an immediate international extension through his series of Futurist manifestos. In France, Guillaume Apollinaire and, later, André Breton tried to compete with him. At the time of the first art critics conference, Walter Pach, still glowing with the aura of the 1913 Armory Show, made

the trip to Paris but Clement Greenberg did not. Among the French new "crusaders" who showed up, Charles Estienne or Michel Tapié were surprisingly shy. 1949 was too early. Vanguard art critics set themselves up as leaders one or two years later.

We have to wait 10 years longer to watch Pierre Restany going even further. Restany introduced himself as the creator of artists. Regarding Yves Klein, he said "I think that what I brought him (...) was the opportunity to pin down through concepts and their labels the morphological units of his language. He needed that lexicological support. He used my words to construct his dreams'factory and his intuitions' laboratory." The same goes for Arman. Restany said he advised him to get out of the sheet of paper on which he was accumulating imprints of official seals and "to extend his accumulative gesture to larger spaces". Retrospectively Restany defined himself as a visionary. Michel Ragon put the question in 1961: "Is the critic nowadays more creative than the artist he is supposed to support? After Tapié and Alvard, Restany seems set to prove it." At least, the critic was considered as the artist's travel companion ("compagnon de route" was the phrase in French at the time). He was the guide who also made the break through. In 1972 in *Le Monde* daily newspaper, André Chastel pointed it up: "Innumerable recent movements, American or others, need the life-buoy of criticism. This provides not only the task of provoking in mental space the disposition, the hollow which will be receptive to the acceptance of a work of which impact is not obvious: it directly or indirectly furnishes the operator with concepts which must be exploited. Hence the genuine coupling of intellectuals and artists. This phenomenon will doubtless remain as one of the specific characteristics of our time."

A decade later, in his retrospective analysis of art criticism since Clement Greenberg, Donald Kuspit assigned the art critic a new role: more than the art historian, that unhappy pedestrian dealing with fact and documents, more than the philosopher limited in his conceptual logic, more than the artist himself blind to his own creation, the art critic is the visionary who detects truth in art:

"The aim of art criticism is unveiling the truth in the unexpected collapse of appearances, even though modernity denies any presumption of truth. And Kuspit titled his book *The Critic is Artist* which echoes Oscar Wilde's formula *The critic as artist*. Even more than an artist, the critic is a philosopher of a superior sort "The art critic is a philosopher. In a sense his spirit is more unequivocally and profoundly philosophical-critical than that of the professional philosopher, whose recognition of the critical nature of philosophy is compromised by traditional demands of system building."

Indeed the conceptions of Lawrence Alloway, Joseph Masheck or Robert Pincus-Witten have become the means by which Art History assimilates

the art they deal with, showing that art criticism at its best is the innovating cutting edge of Art History."

As time flies faster and faster, as vanguards turn into historical movements the day after, the history of contemporary art is shaped as it is being built, before the historian has had the time to look back and untangle its meaning. If current epistemology often turns to the artist's intentionality to account for his art, it seems even more obvious that the critic's intentionality, be it overt or not, and the framework within which he expresses himself - institutional, polemical, promotional - determines the content of his criticism. The critic must be conscious of his own commitment to the work and to what extent this may have influence his opinion. Any aesthetic statement is conditional and conditioned.

In fact, has art criticism anything to do with truth? Art criticism is not so much aiming for the truth of a work as for its own efficiency. In Restany's case, for instance, the critic's style with its excesses, its rhetoric more mystical than analytical, its combination of contradictory references and even incompatible concepts at times, gained attention and pointed up a phenomenon. The artists Restany called *Les Nouveaux-Réalistes*, even though they were so obviously different between themselves, had something in common: all of them were radically different from any other artist of the time. On the other hand the dynamism orchestrated around the world was a wonderful promotional instrument of the art market. And the artist's promotion was the instrument of the critic's promotion. Pierre Restany's main work of art is himself. To an almost unique extent in art criticism. In that respect, it might be viewed as paradigmatic. It is the reason why I dare call art criticism a "strategy". Its finality is its audience, dealers, the critic's peers, other artists, institutions, collectors or even the public. However, whatever its period or its type of approach, art criticism seems to have had a double effect of recognition and promotion: recognition of a phenomenon not perceived in the amorphous mass of artistic production, simultaneously with the first outlines of the criteria which will enable to point out the new phenomenon and to isolate it as an object for future analysis.

What about today? The critic's role has developed in a parallel to that of the art market and it has followed its fluctuations and transformations. The gallery's place has been essential as part of the system within which art criticism circulates: the *Kahnweiler Gallery* for Apollinaire, *Cimaise* for Michel Ragon, *Art of this Century* for Clement Greenberg, the *Apollinaire Gallery* in Milan, *Colette Allendy*, *Iris Clert*, and *J.Gallery* in Paris for Pierre Restany. As far as the market is concerned, today consecrated values only still have a chance to survive untouched. I refer to Raymonde Moulin's book which came out in June 1992 ~~Art, Artists and Society~~. Nowadays the institutions have taken over the first place and they

L'artiste, l'institution et le marché.

directly treat with the market. As Olga Schmedling wrote in the foreword to our meeting, "regardless of what the critic writes, the text's only status is gained through functioning as the mouthpiece for an exhibition, a gallery, a museum or any educational institution.". The active critics curate exhibitions. They work either for private galleries or for public institutions. Their role is very similar to that of museum curators. Or they are akin to artists' agents. They no longer are leaders in promoting aesthetic values. In that respect we would rather refer now to professional and highly mediated philosophers who tackle aesthetic matters more willingly than metaphysics. They write about artists in exhibition catalogues, art magazines and in their books (Deleuze or Derrida in France, for instance). They happen to be in charge of exhibitions sometimes (*Mémoire d'aveugle* by Derrida at Le Louvre in 1990) They are interviewed on TV about current exhibitions as Michel Serres frequently is in Paris. In the daily press or in weekly magazines art criticism is nothing but cultural journalism.

Should we say with Olga Schmedling that "the art critic is a relic from bygone times" ? We heard the answer through Kim Levin when she recalled that "the collapse of all the familiar criteria is only a crisis for those who are longing for old paradigms". The role of the critic has never been fixed. Today we are in the process of a shift from a paradigm to another, while networks are changing too, as well as the place of the critic in the system. Borges's metaphor in his short story "The Immortals" is clear about it : where there is no change there is no life.

