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Meaning and Expression in the Art Work of the Individual Creator after Modernism.

by

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INTRODUCTION

Modernism favoured the subjective author. The figure of the artist of Modernism had varied characteristics, but principal amongst them were those of being marginal, oppositional, contrasting with his predecessors, also he was always expressive, spontaneous, uniquely in tune with a higher order of reality and always male.

A Modernist artist's style is somehow 'personal', it originates in him and means something only to him - is a mark indeed of the artist himself. It means that the artist is the only person relevant to the interpretation of the work and unless we 'know what he meant', the work has no meaning for the spectator at all.

The Romantic artist of the 19th century, like the typical Modernist artist after him (Picasso, Matisse, Van Gogh, Pollock) was elevated to a particular status, different in kind from other occupations and endowed with potential for insight into the motions of the soul. He was precipitated by the stirrings of the industrial revolution and the idea that man was becoming entrapped by the march towards standardisation, wage slavery and merchandisation. Romanticism enshrined for the first time a notion of the artist as being largely outside the historical process.

Before the romantic period it was infrequent for 'Experience' as such to be spoken about at all, meaning by this, the idea of experience as an awareness of an inner

reality; that not interacted with via the organs of sense. The contemporary German philosopher, Hans George Gadamer wrote that the modern word 'experience' (in German 'Erlebnis') is a late 19th century formation (Gadamer, 1976, p. 12), that is it is not found until the 1870s, and then significantly, only in biography. Gadamer argues that 'the aesthetic', came to represent the 'essence of experience'. Also what is experienced in the work of art itself, came to be removed from all connection with actuality insofar as this content was framed and hence marked off from reality and so seen as separate from it. The rise of Erlebriskunst (the art of experience) which, according to Gadamer, appears as the only true art of the Romantic moment of the 19th and early 20th, century was accompanied by a decline in the value of allegory. While Erlebriskunst developed into an art of the nature symbol, the allegorical mode of the 18th century fell into relative disuse. Art based on inner unity, connection between artist and nature, won over the prior art of traditional, intellectually constructed allegory.

As well as 'experience', the notions of 'self' and 'empathy' are also of 19th century pre-modernist historical origin. The idea of a dualism of 'mental' and 'physical' aspects of an individual and a general growth of the idea of 'self-awareness' was central to all philosophical and ideological discussions in this period dominated by romanticism.

By the end of the 19th century the artist saw himself (and was seen by others) as an estranged, marginal

being, not always compatible with the drift of rationalised bourgeois culture and having access to regions of feeling where other mortals could not go. The Avant-Garde alone was aware of the 'new' philosophical positions of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Bergson, and sought to find in these a new means of opposition to the normal life of bourgeois middle class. Whether by despair, erotic decadence, the illusions of perceptual reality or the forces of alienation and the hypocrisies of bourgeois values; this Avant Garde was virtualy defied to see itself and its supporters as custodians of these philosophies.

In the case of style or technique, as much as anywhere, it is possible to see how the developing Modernist Avant Garde was intent on defining itself by contrast, by implicit opposition to the optic of power and control possessed by the academic tradition. Equally, one can be certain that Modernism wished to present freshness of technique as a mark of the presence of the individual, as originator of the work. In 1891 Octave Mirbeau wrote of Vincent Van Gogh that the artist "had absorbed nature into himself...forced it to submit to these distortions that especially characterise him". He possessed that which "distinguishes one man from another: style...that is the affirmation of personalities".(Taylor, 1987, p. 26)

Working practices and styles throughout Modernism were extremely varied. What was consistent though, was the characteristic of the authoritorial creator. Artists as diverse as Picasso and Duchamp have in common the concept of an artist as author subject, one capable of creating

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a work- whether through the conventions of brush stroke, hand writing or the metacritical strategies of designation and signing. For both, the concept of artistic subjectivity, the potency of the author creator was bound by aesthetic concerns. Their determining of the relationship between a producing artist and an object was required for the work to obtain the status of 'art'.

By contrast however there is a strain of analysis which runs through the later part of the 20th century's art and thought which is concerned with the cultural production of subjectivity as it relates to artistic authorship. The idea that artistic authorship is not generated through internal genius, individual talent and idiosyncratic thinking, but through the combination of personal circumstances and social and cultural conditions, is a working theme which has come increasingly to the fore. The concept of genius and talent as transcendent has come under attack by critics and historians of the 20th century, who see this construct as participating in the politics of oppression rather then liberation.

These positions found fertile ground in the early Avant Garde of the twentieth century whose writers, artists and theorists were concerned with the social function of art, and who grounded theoretical critiques of representation in a cultural frame. These are fundamentally indebted to the work of Karl Marx.

As a 20th century conduit for and analysis of the Marxist analysis of culture, the work of Walter Benjamin was very important in itself and crucial as a foundation

for the writings of such important mid-century figures as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, who proposed a radical deconstruction of the author-function.

Benjamin embraced film, seeing it as potentially revolutionary. He envisaged a role for the individual artist and liberation for a large collective body of people through access to a new artistic medium. His essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", published in 1936, was grounded in the faith of a possibility of art as an instrument of social change with the artist creator's position altered but still uniquely situated to promote consciousness through art practice. These ideas - of art as intervention and artistic individuality - would be swept away in the extreme rhetoric of Roland Barthes' "The Death Of the Author" from 1968, and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" from 1969.

These two essays formulate very different terms for the conception of authorship then those previously considered, and artists working at the time of their publication had to assume different practices and new methods of expression appropriate to their circumstances.

The publication twenty years later of Jean Baudrillard's "Hyper-Realism in the Age of Simulation" marked another dramatically different departure in popular philosophical conceptions of the individual artist's relationship to their work, and the context in which meaningful work might be produced. Issues such as the meaninglessness in duplication and repetition, the depersonalisation of the artist, the protean status of

'art', 'signs' and 'reality' all seem to have been dictated to Baudrillard by the world he observed around him in the 1980s. In his writings he develops the new relationship between the three elements of the artist, the art work and the potential for meaning, initiated by Barthes and Foucault fifteen years earlier.

Baudrillard wrote that Andy Warhol was the hero of modern art, because of many of Warhol's embodiments of Baudrillard's visions concerning the prospects for art in our time. For Baudrillard, Warhol's embrace of the death of art (as Baudrillard saw it) represented the only way forward. Of course Warhol's work is not without its personal expressionistic aspects, but it was the irony, decadence, apparent boredom and strategies of appropriation, repetition, anonymity and so on that Baudrillard was drawn to.

Faced with what many artists experienced as a mixture of authoritarianism and irrelevance, certain 1960s and 1970s Conceptualists and Minimalists felt impelled to address the framing conditions of their practice, both material and ideological. Could a re-examining of the process of the production of art, the arena of reception of the art work and the construction of the art market initiate real progress in the 'post-author' art world?

Many artists continued the Modernist Avant Garde stance of opposition and contrast in an attempt to create distance, an open area for discussion. But what legacy do these artists leave for their successors? Did their various projects and endeavours grow old and irrelevant

to be replaced with new ones, or did they herald as many believed 'the Death of Art'?

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, a time of thorough re-examination of the established Modernist author's position, the development of painting is particularly interesting. The quests of Modernism for authenticity and originality found their fulfilment in tragic painters (Van Gogh or Jackson Pollock being perhaps the stereotypical examples). As the authoritative hallmarks of Modernism; genius, transcendence, patriarchy, elitism, are brought into disrepute and seen as reactionary and inappropriate, does it follow that painting, their main artistic embodiment, should also be condemned, judged as having no potential for real meaning at the end of the 20th century?

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHANGING POSITIONS OF THE AUTHOR IN MODERNISM

In 1936 Walter Benjamin wrote "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". In it he considers the relationship between the work of art and the masses of viewers and the potential that traditional art might still have in light of photographic developments since 1900.

Even the best reproduction of an original work of art, Benjamin wrote, lacks the original's "unique existence at the place where it happens to be". Due to both advances in technological reproduction and the wide distribution potential of copied works, the original loses something vital, "when it meets you half way". Benjamin wrote, "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art", and this does more to "liquidate traditional values than anything". (Benjamin, 1970, p. 219)

Far from being something to mourn though, Benjamin saw this dissolution of the aura of the original work of art and the implied relegation of the artist's authoritorial position as opening up progressive possibilities. He was one of many Marxist writers who looked optimistically to the potential of modern technology to connect art (especially film) and the people, while weakening the stance of the elitist, subjective artist.

People's perception of their reality changes

from one era to another, Benjamin's thesis continues, and the "decay of the aura of natural things", which he saw in the 1930s, was due partially to people's desire to bring things "closer", spatially and humanly.

In relation to cultural tradition, Benjamin saw photographic reproduction as potentially revolutionary. He wrote of the 'cult value' of art, inherent in its aura since the first pieces were used in religious and magic rituals, and of the "exhibition value" of a work of art, which involves the gradual changing function of the work of art as it became portable and later duplicable - from the fixed fresco or mosaic, to the mobile easel painting and eventually to photography. As the function of the art object evolved, a secularised cult value was attached; religious mystery was progressively displaced by the mysteries of creative genius and eternal value. There were mysteries that could only be interpreted to the public through the art expert and the connoisseur. This secular aura "the unique phenomenon of distance" (of the art object) "however close it may be" (to the viewer), Benjamin saw as a trait of the "constraining discourse that bourgeois society calls cultural tradition".(Benjamin, 1970, p219) The aura of these modern works of art lies in people's inability to get close to them, to understand or accept them.

Benjamin imagined that with the introduction of the possibility of increasingly precise copies of a singular original, the gap would be bridged between the art work and its audience, due to universal availability

and accessibility. He anticipated "a dissolution of the aura" and further of tradition and (from a Marxist point of view) "a radical critique of Bourgeois society", all because photography and film promised to introduce new modes of perception and analysis in ways immediately comprehensible to a mass public.(Benjamin, 1970, p. 221)

Theodore Adorno disagreed. He claimed that the techniques of reproducibility having wholly risen within the frame work of the Capitalist order, were not to be so easily disentangled from their role in the functioning of that order. Adorno wrote that "both **bear the scars** of Capitalism ,both contain elements of change..."(Adorno, 1977, p122)

Indeed more than a trace of what Christopher Philips refers to as "the social and technological romanticism evident in Germany between the wars" in "The Judgement Seat of Photography" is carried in Benjamin's undeniably pioneering work.(Philips, 1980, p. 260) That is, that in fact Photography does not overthrow or provide an alternative to traditional art. Rather it assumes an essential position within the framework of art, and while it does not herald a new freedom, a breaking of barriers or an increased accessibility in the specific way Benjamin hoped, it does play an important role in the development of art and in the resulting crisis in painting evident today. Benjamin's thesis is one of the first of many optimistic anticipations during Modernism of the breakdown of the artist's traditionally unquestioned authority; of the existance of the author.

Modernism in general privileged the author. The twin quests for authenticity and originality find their fulfilment in the quintessential modernist artists. This form of privilege was challenged increasingly in the 1960s with a wave of Structuralist influence which passed across French thought. Primary amongst the figures who all questioned the status of the homogeneous, individual creator were Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. Barthes wrote "The Death of the Author" in 1968 and in 1969 Foucault wrote "What is an Author?"

In "What is an Author ?", Foucault defines the 'Author Function' as a characteristic that some texts and 'discourses' are endowed with. (A private letter has a signer but no author, a contract has a guarantor but no author etc.). He outlines the historical development of the author, stressing that she has not always had the same authoritative position, as one might assume. For instance, Foucault writes, once, a literary work's 'ancientness' was all that was necessary to guarantee its circulation, while at the same time scientific theories were only accepted when marked with the name of their author.(Foucault, 1992, p. 923)

The 17th and 18th centuries saw a reversal of this phenomenon though when the author-function faded away and a scientific theory's isolated existence in a stream of always redemonstratable truth became accepted. "Their membership in a systematic ensemble and not the name of the individual who produced them stood as their guarantee".(Foucault ,1992, p.924) By the same token,

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literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author-function. In our time, the meaning attached to a text of fiction or poetry depends largely on the context in which it was written.

Foucault goes on to outline the way in which we generally define the author and determine if more than one piece of work can be attributed to her. Basically, the author's work will have a constant level of value, conceptual coherence and stylistic unity.

Foucault looks at the ideological status of the author in contemporary society. We see the author as a figure constantly creating meaningful and significant works, as a genius in a perpetual state of invention.

In reality, Foucault says, the author is someone who impedes the free circulation of ideas and significant truths, a conduit or filter through which a few ideas are passed and highlighted. The author is someone, according to Foucault, who we use to minimise the proliferation of meaning because this is something that we as a society fear.(Foucault, 1992, p. 925)

The author function is constantly changing and will operate differently in the future when maybe the individual author as regulator of fiction will not be necessary. Some time in the future, Foucault wrote, the idea of the sole, gifted creator will be redundant. Although the evolution of the author-function is impossible to predict, ultimately, he goes on, there will be the realisation that it is unimportant who is responsible for the production of 'discourses' or works of art, all that

matters is that they are produced.

Roland Barthes, in "The Death of the Author", also wrote that historically, the author has not always existed as we see him now. He is a modern figure who has assumed so much importance in relation to his work that that work is often understood in terms of the author's biographical details.(Barthes, 1970, p. 144)

Barthes also wrote that the author is not a figure who relates an original message to others, but simply someone whose "only power is to mix (already existing) writings, to counter the ones with the others".(Barthes, 1970, p. 144) Because the author relies on already determined and established conventions of language the thing he wishes to express can only be done through other already existing material. We are limited in the expressions of our thoughts by the means through which we must express ourselves.

We might understand the particular leanings of a writing to-day by knowing the personality and biographical details of its author because the former is bound by the latter.

All meaning in writing can only be understood using words from the same limited source so there is never an absolute meaning or understanding:

> "refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truely revolutionary since to refuse to affix meaning is to refuse God and his hypostases -reason,science,law."
> (Barthes,1970, p. 148)

It is on to the reader and away from the author that the multiplicity of a text is focused. A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without a history, a biography, a psychology: he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.

There were a number of artists creating work in the 60s and 70s who followed along the lines of the writings of Benjamin, Foucault and Barthes. Thirty years after the publication of Benjamin's essay, five years before the publication of Barthes' and Foucault's, Gerhard Richter, an artist whose work can be seen to have relevance to their thoughts, started working on what he would later call his "first mature paintings".(Richter, 1989, p. 18)

Richter started producing monochromatic paintings characteristically containing banal subject matter with their sources in newspaper photographs, advertising images and snapshots, seemingly out of a desire to reject the particular heritage of modern European painting derived from Paul Cezanne, as it had existed since the late nineteenth century to the post-war period. Richter believed that this tradition had reached a dead-end and "stood in the way of all expression appropriate to our time".(Richter, 1986, p.184) Richter's photopaintings are significant here in so far as they are the result of the crisis situation that he found challenged painting in the 50s and 60s. He was concerned with issues of authenticity, expressiveness, originality and authority. This is as

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evident in his numerous writings expressing his frustration and realisation of the futility of traditional painting as it is in analysis of his work. On the subject of his source material at the time, Richter said "I was surprised by the photograph, which we all use in such masses on a daily basis. Suddenly I could see it in another way, as an image that provided me with another view lacking in all of the conventional criteria that I had previously associated with art. It had no style, no composition, no judgements. It freed me from personal experience, it had really nothing at all and was pure image".(Richter, 1986, p. 188)

Richter referred to his process of creating the black and white photopaintings of the 60s and 70s as his making of photographs, rather than of paintings; "I do not wish to imitate a photograph, I want to make one... I am making photographs with different means and not pictures which resemble a photograph".(Richter, 1986, p. 188) In this respect the photopaintings can be seen to be at odds with the photographic reproductions Benjamin hoped would rid the work of art of its aura. While Benjamin saw photography as the last step in a process that would demystify the work of art and make it more accessible to the masses, Richter gleans the images back from the masses and uses them as a primary source, a reality on which his work is based. At the same time though, these paintings fulfil Benjamin's expectations for the loss of the artist's aura (as in the artist's elitist mystique) and a bringing closer of the art work and the potential viewers, because

of course in appearance they are just normal banal snap shots, familiar to all.

Richter's method of production is an attack on auteurism; there are only slightly varying results in the appearance and style of the works, while the elements of anonymity and lack of personal expression are consistent. It is difficult for the viewer to engage in any dialogue with the paintings, or through them, contact with the artist. The subjects seem distant, cold, even contemptuous of our enquiry. One feels necessary as an element in the functioning of the paintings, (as it has been said that of some Modernist painting that viewers are not necessary) but only necessary to highlight the work's rejection of an audience. The paintings do in fact express something quite forcefully, and that is "we express nothing."

Richter's photopaintings reveal something specifically because of their uniqueness as reproductions of photographs. In them we get the illusion of coming close to distant events and places. Through nostalgic snapshots the forgotten happening has been brought back to our attention. Paradoxically though, they have been glorified beyond their mundane status through the artist's skill and care for our benefit. Also there is often a voyeuristic element as we look at larger than life, no longer private, family snap-shots. Because of these factors, despite the familiarity of these images they are not comforting.

Richter's characteristic blurring of the image demonstrates the fissure between the reality that they are and the reality that they once were . They draw

attention to our everyday experience of seeing the images they imitate, but in their painstaking reproduction and their glorification they resist appropriation or further modification. The photopaintings are the last time that these images can be reproduced in any meaningful way. They have been recontextualised in an even more empty way than their arbitrary sources.

In 1967 Daniel Buren, a French painter, exhibited with three other artists at the Biennale des Jeunes in Paris. Each adopted a single motif as his personal hallmark, simply repeating it in one work after another. Buren's was alternating vertical stripes of white and another colour, 8.7 cm wide, and he has worked using this motif ever since, exhibiting frequently all over the world. He is interested in a strategy of opposition as a way of opening dialogue concerning people's preconceptions of art and art institutions. His practice has relevence to the writings of Foucault and Barthes in so far as anonymity has always been an essential element in his work. "The producer of an anonymous work must take full responsibility for it," Buren contends, "but his relation to the work is totally different from the artist's to his work of art. Firstly, he is no longer the owner of the work of art in the old sense".(Buren, 1973, p. 38)

As soon as an artist signs a work, thereby claiming it as his, it becomes private property, a commodity which the artist is legally entitled to exchange. By contrast, the anonymous work is not subject to the effects of appropriation entailed by the signature: "it is not

his work but a work...this work being considered as common property, there can be no question of claiming the authorship thereof, in the sense that there are authentic paintings by Courbet and valueless forgeries".(Buren, 1973, p. 39)

In 1967, Buren wrote that the person who must carry out the deconstruction of artistic conventions should not be the artist (as he is known through the history of Modernism as a genius, an author etc.) but the individual, a new kind of artistic creator who is willing to take a back seat to his art work . This distinction is crucial for Buren:

> particularly at this time when the artist is hailed as art's greatest glory; it is time for him to step down from this role he has been cast in so that the work itself may become visible, no longer blurred by the myth of the creator".(Buren, 1973, p. 39)

In 1976, Jean Baudrillard wrote "The Hyper-realism of Simulation". Like Walter Benjamin's essay, it is concerned with works of art and how they are perceived by their audience. Specifically both essays are concerned with the multiplicity of an image and that multiplicity's bearing on the art work. They also both imply that the capacity left for the artist to express himself or herself in traditional terms after certain developments is questionable.

Baudrillard's essay is an analysis of our appreciation of an art object, and indeed of reality, in the age of what he calls "hyper-realism". For Baudrillard

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reality had vanished in the information-saturated, media dominated contemporary world of the 1970s and was replaceed by a world of signs, of simulacrum. He wrote about how we view reality in a unique way since the development of methods of reproduction and duplication.

> "Reality itself founders in Hyper-realism" he wrote. When one duplicates an image (in photography or whatever) one relegates the source reality to a less important place, even kills it, but paradoxically at the same time draws attention to it and so strengthens it, makes it even more visible, more real - it becomes Hyper-real.(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 68)

In writing about the Hyper-real, Baudrillard brings to mind a dizzying cyclical process where the Hyper-real resides in "the real's hallucinatory resemblance to itself".(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 69) In its faithful reproduction of reality, hyper-realism does not merely represent or refer to anything, but copies it utterly and so becomes the reality. In order to escape "the crisis of representation, reality loops around itself in pure repetition."(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 71)

Baudrillard gives the example of the "Nouveau Roman", in which a vacuum is created around the real, all psychology and subjectivity being rooted out utterly, leaving a pristine objectivity- that of the pure gaze, liberated from the object, no more than the blind relay of the look that scans it. "The object attempts a kind of circular seduction in which we can easily mark the unconscious undertaking to become invisible"(Baudrillard 1994, p. 73) In the example of the Nouveau Roman this

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can be seen with the purposeful emitting of meaning in a "blind and meticulous reality", syntax and semantics have both disappeared, there is no longer cloudiness surrounding the object, but an eager examination of it, there is no metaphor or one thing replacing another, "but a successive inherentness of the object beneath the look."(Baudrillard 1994, p. 74)

Viewing objectively in this eager microscopic way the object which is a reality for its own sake, not a referent for anything else is dizzying and upsetting. The viewer's optic function acting on the surface of this object of new reality, not in illusions of depth or perspective as in other reality, become the inherent properties and characteristics of this new reality's existence "As if the gaze had become the molecular code of the object".(Baudrillard 1994, p. 75) Baudrillard seems to relish the fact that with this analysis of life in the 1980s, art works cannot be created or received in traditional terms, there is no room left for expression on the part of the artist, no room for issues such as allegory in art, nor didacticism, reference, ideology, metaphor. In short none of the devices a visual artist might use to communicate to others.

Viewing Gerhard Richter's colour landscape photopaintings of the 80s in the same light, connections can be seen. As in Baudrillard's example of the Neo-Novel, in these paintings "all psychology and subjectivity are rooted out"(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 76), the essence of the works are exposed to our scrutiny. These works contain

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the apparent contradiction of the artist's exceptionally laborious rendering of photographs which have no specific subject matter. Their reality is limited to their boundaries as individual objects, they refer to nothing else. The intensity of colour in the paintings remind us constantly that they are only translations of another reality which they never try to imitate. The smooth surfaces and romantic views are seductive and inviting, but methods of illusion on the part of the artist which might draw us in are foregone in favour of the creation of a reality which excludes us and keeps us staring at the surface. The reality that is these paintings is not as an artificial referent or sign for another reality (a landscape or whatever) but is a new reality which exists only in the space between the viewer and the surface of the painting.

There are various strategies of closure used by Richter in these paintings which make us pull up short. Frequently the landscape views are empty and distant, alternatively our view is blocked by a ridge of trees or a gate. There is an even, uneventful distribution of light and nature is windless and still. A peculiar mood of emotional neutrality pervades the scenes. None of the skills of a traditional landscape painter such as Casper David Friedrich are used to draw us in, that is not the aim of these paintings. The focusing and blurring way in which they are painted does not allow a perfect viewing from any distance and so they almost repel. Attempts to grasp, to understand are frustrated. Revealingly, in 1979, Richter wrote "I know nothing about the real, about

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reality... the only important thing is in the translation".(Richter, 1986, p. 196)

Towards the end of "The Hyper-Realism of Simulation", Baudrillard goes on to write that to-day reality itself is hyperrealistic. As a contrast, he writes that in the era of Surrealism, artists could elevate banal aspects of reality to become surreal but only during privileged moments of the artist's choosing which still derived from art and the imaginary. Now every day reality is "incorporated into the simulative dimension of the hyper-real; we already live out the aesthetic hallucination of reality".(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 77) There is no longer a fiction to be stranger than fact, Baudrillard wrote, there is nothing in our every day lives which we can single out for artistic consideration because everything is mixed together in hyper-reality.

> "To-day the real and the imaginary
> are confounded in the same operational
> totality and aesthetic fascination
> is simply everywhere".(Baudrillard,
> 1994, p.78)

Richter's colour landscapes can be seen as elements in such a reality. Their mundane appearance is an optical cliche. In their painstakingly accurate production they are empty of all expressionistic elements. They do not represent a fantasy, imaginary world or promise the existence of a reality that we cannot already see, they are mirrors which reflect a slightly off centre and unsatisfying reflection of our every day world.

Baudrillard continues:

> "an air of parody clings to every thing,
> as in a game that can not be won or
> lost, it is undecidable but one in
> which the pleasure comes from
> understanding the rules and watching
> the aesthetic game unfold."(Baudrillard,
> 1994, p. 77)

Every day life now has the capacity to become art and the work of art in this situation "very quickly redoubles itself as a manipulation of the signs of art: art is introduced to the sign form"(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 77)- art enters the phase of its own indefinite reproduction, every thing that redoubles itself, even in every day life "falls in the same stroke under the sign of art and becomes aesthetic".(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 77)

In production, Baudrillard concludes, this aesthetic doubling in every day reality is at the point where all content and finality are expelled,

> "it becomes in a way abstract and
> non-figurative. It begins to express
> the pure form of production, it takes
> itself (as art does) as its own
> teleological value".(Baudrillard,
> 1994 p. 78)

So art and industry can exchange signs. Art becomes a reproductive machine without ceasing to be art - and production in order to lose all social purpose "verifies and exalts itself in the aesthetic signs of prestige that are the great industrial combines".(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 79) Endless series of four hundred meter high business office buildings, the statistical mysteries of the 'Gross National Product' - "this vertigo of serial signs" are repeated- shadowless.

Where, asks Baudrillard, is the reality that they simulate? Considering the interchange between reality and the play of reality, Where does the artist fit in after "there is no longer a fiction that life can confront in order to surpass it?"(Baudrillard, 1994, p. 79)

Where art may now occur, he wrote, is no longer a space for creative production but "a ciphering strip, a coding and decoding tape - a place where translation occurs. It is an aesthetic reality but not by virtue of art's premeditation and distance, but by an empowering of the reality or space where this action occurs via the anticipation of the deciphering of the code". To sense the aesthetic fascination in this space, one needs a sixth sense - "for fakery, montage, scenarios and all over exposition of reality in the lighting of models". As Hal Foster wrote in "Subversive Signs" in 1982, "the artist becomes a manipulator of signs rather than a producer of art objects". (Foster, 1982, p,198)

CHAPTER TWO

THE INDIVIDUAL CREATOR AFTER THE DEATH OF THE

AUTHOR

In 1986, Jean Baudrillard wrote about the
contemporary state of visual art in his essay "Absolute
Merchandise". In it he proclaims Andy Warhol to be the
modern hero of the 'Great Modernist Adventure', which was
to highlight the death of art in a "commercial, vulgar,
capitalist, advertising society".(Baudrillard, 1988, p.
9.)

Baudrillard saw a direct line running between
Charles Baudelaire and Andy Warhol, that is their shared
theme of 'absolute merchandise'. It was Baudelaire who
saw, as a solution to the threat on the art work from
consumer capitalist society, the total purposeful
objectification of art on the part of the artist.
Baudelaire saw that where there is a threat that mercantile
value might alienate the aesthetic value of an art work
it is best to alienate all the way rather than try to defend
against alienation, "fight alienation with its own weapons.
To relentlessly pursue the indifference and equivalence
of mercantile value; turn the work of art in to absolute
merchandise".(Baudrillard, 1988, p.9) Baudrillard wrote
that the only avenue open to art to transcend the exchange
value of an increasingly capitalist society is to become
"more mercantile than merchandise itself".(Baudrillard,
1988, p.19) The result of this transcendence is to make

a mockery of attempts to value art works according to the rules of market place speculation. The laws of equivalence have been overturned. In economic terms, the value of the art work is not judged according to laws of supply and demand but sky-rocket due to some economic laws almost exclusive to the art world, impossible to predict or control and not relating to outside factors. Aesthetically, the value seems not to be proportional to any other governing factors either, and Baudrillard wrote " by special dispensation all can go straight in to the hit parade"(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 20), and it is impossible to compare them or to revive any form of value judgement whatever. "We leave behind the realm of value to enter the realm of a phantasm of absolute value, we are in value ecstasy". Here the art object turns into a fetish - an object with so much value that it can no longer be exchanged.

These thoughts were realised first with the invention by Marcel Duchamp of his readymades in 1914. As well as being a negation of painting and a demonstration of the always ready mechanical nature of painting, they importantly also demonstrated that within our culture the work of art is a fetish which must abolish all pretence to use value. That is to say the ready made is an art object through its abstraction from the realm of utility. Importantly, Duchamp's act presented the art object as a special kind of commodity - having no use value the art object does not have any exchange value either.

This situation is one that Baudelaire would have

welcomed in present day art: the fact that art's value no longer means anything. It is now more arbitrary and irrational even than merchandise itself. "Art gains value as quickly as it loses meaning and referentiallity." wrote Baudrillard.

Art has become merchandise and in doing so it has lost a great deal. Baudrillard wrote that it loses its beauty, its authenticity, its functionality. Unlike many who have bemoaned these developments though, Baudrillard neither condemns or condones, he has the attitude that the only way forward for the artist is to take the two diverging branches (the aesthetic and the merchandise) to their extreme, while never indulging in any discourse or relationship between the two. He wrote that "Synthesis is a soft option, dialectic is a nostalgic option". So it is not for the artist to regret the meaninglessness of art in capitalist society or even to refer to it, in fact Baudrillard wrote that the only radical and modern option is to

> "potentiate all that is new, original,
> unexpected, inspired in the merchandise
> object; that is its formal indifference
> to both value and utility. Circulation
> is all. The work of art must acquire
> all the qualities of shock, strangeness,
> surprise unease, liquidity – even self
> destruction, instantaneity and unreality
> – that pertain to
> merchandise".(Baudrillard, 1988, p.19)

The way forward for the artist is to embrace the emptiness of art and glorify that. The work of art must align itself with fashion Baudrillard wrote, in so far as it is a "dazzling, saleable, mobile, unpredictable,

protean, pure object".(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 20)

The art object must work to deconstruct its own traditional aura, its authority and its power of creating illusion so that all that is left associated with it is its status as merchandise.

> "A new aura will be acquired by this
> new art object, one it will derive
> from outside of itself, it will rid
> itself of all familiarity and become
> something monstrously strange which
> will glow with a true seductive power
> because it has transcended its own
> form to become a pure object, a pure
> event."(Baudrillard, 1988, p.20)

Andy Warhol's paintings of Campbell Soup cans were for Baudrillard a sensational coup, both for simulation and for modern art. "At a stroke, the merchandise object or the merchandise sign was consecrated by the only ritual we have left: that of transparency".(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 21) For Baudrillard, these works are the affirmation of his theory because not only was a symbol of merchandise chosen as the pictorial representation of Warhol's reality, but also the concept of merchandise was represented by a sign. The soup cans are presented as an endless stream of labels, their disappearance from the edge of the picture frame alluding to their reproduction beyond number and also importantly their original industrial manufacture. Warhol famously said that he wanted to be a machine and his work including multiply repeated images and grocery-carton "sculptures" relate his work to the writings of Baudrillard about the exchange of the signs of art and industry in hyper-realism.

> "When Andy Warhol insists on becoming
> a total 'machine' - more mechanical
> even than a machine, since he aims
> at the automatic, mechanical production
> of objects that are mechanical and
> manufactured already, whether they
> be soup cans or portraits of movie
> stars - then he stands in direct line
> to Baudrillard's absolute
> merchandise."(Baudrillard, 1988, p.
> 21)

For Baudrillard, Warhol is carrying on Baudelaire's vision towards the destiny of modern art. Through his acting like a machine he negates his own worth while endowing merchandise with heroic stature. Warhol is the hero of modern art because he goes furthest with the ritualised disappearance of art and of all sentimentality from art. He goes furthest with the ritualised negative transparency of art, its utter indifference to its own authenticity.

> "The modern hero is no longer the
> hero of the artistic sublime: he is
> the hero of the objective irony of
> the merchandise world, as embodied
> in the objective irony of its own
> disappearance".(Baudrillard, 1988,
> p. 22)

This is what modern art must do according to Baudrillard, it must celebrate its own disappearance, the difference between this and the uninspired, conventional art which Baudrillard sees being rehabilitated throughout the world's museums is that the former, that is authentic art "almost unconsciously opts for its own disappearance".(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 22) Baudrillard concludes that the re-emergence today of unheroic, official art signals the end of " the great modernist adventure - the disappearance of art ".(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 23). More accurately, what he seems to bemoan is the

disappearance of art which is concerned more or less only with its own disappearance.

Painting has been used widely since the 1950s and 1960s as a vehicle to express artists' creative bankruptcy and paintings' loss of ability to articulate culture's shared beliefs. For a few decades now, the status quo has been painting that is about the death of painting. The notion of a painter communicating a universal truth to an audience about anything except painting's inadequacy is often scoffed at. Two examples of artists who have contributed are Peter Halley's day-glo geometric paintings ironising Barnett Newman's 'sublime', and Roy Lichtenstein's cartoon format 'Big Paintings' which are a criticism of Abstract Expressionism.

The stance of the Avant Garde artist of Modernism has been shifted so dramatically in relation to his society that recent painters who might carry on the role of the Avant Garde painter are oppositional to their predecessors. If the modern artist once embraced Modernism with hope, pride and a crusading spirit of disobedience, the mood has changed to decadence and weary cynicism. Art preoccupied with issues such as its own demise becomes boring very quickly, there is a limited number of ways in which artists can say "painting is dead", and those who do often take the soft option by complying with a generally accepted mode of behaviour while negating any attempts at progression by painters wishing to find an optimistic conciliatory kind of art.

In "Cloning and Coding the Avant Garde", Donald

Kuspit goes as far as to say that there exists an Avant Garde and a Pseudo Avant Garde, the latter being the predominant artist today who has displaced the former as the standard bearer of artistic significance. The pseudo Avant Garde artist is socially entertaining and ingratiating, his art is concerned with a more socially acceptable, less offensive pretence of opposition, without any of the radicalism of the true Avant Garde artist; his art distracts from the devastating reality and truth of our daily lives. Worldly success is the reward of today's psuedo Avant Garde artist. Gone are the more idealistic notions of the artist who wants to give rather than receive: "Worldly power bestows worldly success in gratitude for inducement of the world it has created". (Kuspit, 1993, p. 102) Success is social power's way of giving a share of itself to those who truly believe in it, wrote Kuspit. This is the lesson taught by Andy Warhol's success, because as much as he is remembered for his soup cans, he is remembered for his concept of business art, affirming America's belief in business above all else and for his rich rewards for affirming it.

While what Baudrillard sees as Warhol's glorification of the merchandise object can be seen as commentary on the death of art, it is in no way Avant Garde or anti-bourgeois as Baudelaire might have anticipated, because while it devalues the position of the artist in Warhol's indifference and tendency toward depersonalisation, it is without real social commentary and is reactionary in regard to its social acceptance. The pseudo Avant

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Gardist, wrote Kuspit, is extremely socially welcome while he believes that he is as socially offensive and therefore as critical and authentic as true Avant Gardists were.

Incidentally, Baudrillard's choice of Warhol as the quintessential ' hero ' of art's demise is not really to do justice to Warhol. This is because although Warhol is commonly regarded as having enjoyed the view of himself as being impersonal and machinelike, and his art as being superficial, simulacral rather than referential, it is wrong to think that this was the only aspect of his personality or work. In 1987, Thomas Crow wrote that underneath the glamorous surface of commodity fetish and media stars can be found "the reality of suffering and death". He sees that the tragedies of Marilyn, Liz and Jackie prompt " straight forward expressions of feeling". Also, Warhol's Death in America prints were likely to have been motivated by a very real and human fear of death, his images of the electric chair by opposition to the death penalty and his race riot images as a testimonial for civil rights. "Far from being a signifier liberated from reference," wrote Crow, Warhol belongs to a very popular tradition of " truth telling".(Crow, 1990, p. 313)

Crow also wrote on the same subject as Baudrillard, but in different tones. While Baudrillard sees the glorification of the sign of merchandise in favour of traditional notions such as narrative or figuration as being the heroic option for today's artist, Crow sees it as a sign of today's art's weakness.

This weakness he sees a being "a condition

signalled in the ritual sacrifice of the artist's authorial presence".(Crow, 1990, p. 102) Looking back to the 1950s and 1960s in a more pessimistic way than Baudrillard, Crow traces the origin of the "weakness" he writes about as being the gift of artists who brought to art drastic reductions of the "pictorial and sculptural incident", followed in the 70s by the assaults of conceptualist artists on the "hallowed status of the art object itself". To reduce every conceptualist artist's achievements to merely an attack on a previous and better standard of art practice seems unfair and naive, but Crow does go on to say some interesting things about the responsibility that artists must assume if they are to engage in some contemporary practices.

Where Baudrillard saw that today's artists can use simulation and replication as a way to find an area of genuine progress by glorifying the emptiness of art using signs, Crow wrote that on the down side, a young artist who wishes to return to Abstraction can place his or her work in relation to the last important episode in that kind of art using strategies of simulation and duplication while "simultaneously preserving a safe distance from any of its intimidating claims to authority".(Baudrillard, 1988, p. 120) An artist can pick and choose which movement they want to comment on, he seems to be saying, by simulating images from that movement in relation to images of their own, thereby instantly putting their work into the context of any arena.

In doing this the artist will never have to stand

over the statements being made by such work , somebody
else having already assumed responsibility for their
creation.

The strategy of image appropriation requires
that the artist assumes this responsibility and considers
carefully what images to use and how they are reused.
If this is not done, then rather than carrying on any
Avant Garde oppositional stance the status quo is complied
with rather than questioned. Take for example Jeff Koons's
pornographic photographs. These images are successful
because they cash in on the enhancement of their
sensationalism with their recontextualisation into a fine
art setting – bringing banal or vulgar imagery into the
gallery, making both more exciting than they would otherwise
be. This action of appropriation is a convention of 'pseudo
Avant Garde' success because the visual status quo is not
brought into question, it just reworks the contexts of
pornography and the fine art institution, but does not
rethink them. "The criticality of the appropriation artist
is just a claim to (art-)worldly status" according to Donald
Kuspit.(Kuspit, 1993, p. 102) Irony is a comfortable
form of criticality, with no potential to threaten or
question the bourgeois status quo, there is no risk and
no conscience in it. Aesthetic irony, using appropriation,
is a submission to the visual and psychosocial status quo,
it is resignation to the fact that nothing can be changed.

Unthinking appropriation art is informed by the
'Decadence Syndrome' : the sense of the decline and
impending death of art. In rehashing images it draws from

them any life or ambition they had. Whatever the morbid
nostalgia of unconsidered appropriation art touches, turns
to stone. It loses its authenticity in the translation,
but rather than becoming imbued with any authenticity by
the adoptive artist, it can only function as an art object
with no authority and reinforce its stance as such. This
reduces Avant Garde creativity to an ironic game played
for its own amusing sake. Too much appropriation art has
an ironic ulterior motive which is to convince society
that to be Avant Garde it does not have to be offensive,
only to look offensive.

This negative aspect of appropriation art can
be used to great effect. For instance, in her work, Sherrie
Levine makes a feminist statement on the traditional
patriarchal dominance of the art world. In claiming images
as her own through appropriation, she removes the male
authoritative hallmark of the original artist. Here the
artist turns the tables and uses a strategy, which must
comment on its practitioner's creative bankruptcy, with
great potency.

Another artist who worked positively within the
parameters of image appropriation was Giulio Paolini, whose
aim was to register the disappearance of the author. In
a series of "self-portraits" in 1968 he appropriated
self-portraits by other artists, suggesting that authorship
is an assumed identity. "The point," Paolini maintained,
"was to subtract my own identity and to assume instead
an elective, historical and hypothetical one." (Celant,
1972, p. 74) And at the 1970 "Biennale della giovane

pittura" in Bologna, Paolini exhibited an untitled 1917 Picabia collage, thereby appropriating not another artist's self-image but an entire work.

In his 1981 essay "Last Exit:Painting", Thomas Lawson describes Post-Modernism as a label attached to a number of characteristics which define modern culture. After Modernism, he wrote, there is a period of uncertainty in which artists have a "nostalgic desire to uncover an undeferentiated past."(Lawson, 1981, 43) According to this understanding any art that appropriates styles and imagery from other epochs, other cultures, qualifies as "Post-Modern". Principle amongst artists benefiting from past styles at the time of Lawson's essay was Julian Schnabel.

> "This young painter ingratiates himself by pretending to be in awe of history, his enterprise is distinguished by an homage to the past and in particular by a nostalgia for the early days of Modernism. But what he gives us is a pastiche of historical consciousness, an exercise in bad faith".(Lawson, 1981, p. 43.)

Lawson sees that Schnabel, whether harking back to neoprimitivism, German expressionism or whatever decontextualises his sources and refuses to provide a new critical frame for them, he dismisses the particularities of history in favour of a generalising mythology and thus succumbs to sentimentality.

In a less scathing attack on the integrity of Schnabel's practice, Diane Waldman compares him to Anselm Keifer: In "Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object",

"Schnabel appropriates from history in a manner that is proto-typically American: while he cultivates a system of references to historical events he lacks the resonance of his European counterpart. An innate sense of history and an awareness of the layering of time are fundamental to the work of even the most radical of the European Avant-Garde. Schnabel emphasises instead a sense of bigness and a physicality that borders on the belligerent. In his work, culture and history weigh in lightly against the present and are paired with an overriding directness."(Waldman, 1992, p. 320)

We are bombarded by the scope of material and styles that Julian Schnabel found acceptable to lump together on one canvas. Renaissance and Baroque painting, Indian miniatures, children's toys, antlers, religious artifacts are all included and so become equivalent to each other. All distinctions are merged and so the space in which creative criticism might occur is closed down.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SEARCH FOR NEW MEANS OF EXPRESSION

Whether motivated by desire to remain free from
the realm of consumerism, as a reaction against established
art institutions or as a reflection of the philosophical
climate of the time, there was a proliferation of artists
who were concerned principally with a radical break with
the artistic status quo during the 1970s.

These artist's most important success was to
undermine culturally accepted practices and styles and
encourage dialogue. They reintroduced the idea that an
artist might be more than a sensitive person with talent,
might in fact be both intelligent and articulate, might
have something to say.

Walter de Maria, an American sculptor wrote an
essay, called "meaningless work" in 1960. In it he lists
things which are all clearly pointless activities: "putting
wooden boxes from one box to another and then putting them
back on the original box, back and forth, back and forth
and so on is a fine example of meaningless work". He
finishes his essay by writing "meaningless work is
potentially the most important art-action experience one
can undertake to-day". De Maria championed the useless
gesture, endorsing the non-utility requirement of
contemporary art. He once filled a New York art gallery
with 220,000 pounds of earth. Another sculpture completed
in 1977, consisted of a gigantic hole drilled one kilometre
deep in to the ground in Kassel. A rod one kilometre long

was inserted in the hole, which was then capped with a metal plate, rendering the work permanently invisible, known only through its absence. In 1966 Yoko Ono produced a work entitled Apple, in which an apple was placed on a table and audience members were invited to take a bite. Andy Warhol filmed Robert Indiana eating a mushroom for forty-five minutes. In 1965 Allan Kaprow was commissioned by Florida State University to smear a car with jam and to then take it to the car wash and have it cleaned. There was no audience and the "piece" was only performed once.

Robert Smithson, motivated by concern for decaying modern culture in the 1970s and in an attempt to regain control over his own production, removed his practice from the urban art centres and attempted to engage with non-conventional artsites, materials and objects. "A work of art", he wrote in 1972 "when placed in a gallery loses its charge and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world". In 1970 he oversaw the production of his most famous work, Spiral Jetty. A tribute to prehistoric works of earth art, it was built in the Great Salt Lake in Utah from 10,000 tons of rock in 1970. Joseph Kosuth and the Art and Language group were among the first to work in the mode of art as idea, or information which opposed aesthetic concerns. Their primary practice took the form of conversations, discussions and linguistic and cultural analysis. Kosuth's important early piece "One and Three Brooms", has no object which properly speaking serves as the art. The work consists of a proposition about real objects and their corresponding

representation in images or words. A real broom has been hung on a wall, together with a photograph of it and a dictionary definition of the word "broom". Kosuth has stated that he thinks art should be more like pure science or philosophy, which are totally self-sufficient, don't depend on audiences and have no commodity or investment value.

Ignoring the individual qualities and differences of these various endeavours' and just analysing them as reactions against the ruling ideology of art practice before 1960, a significant problem becomes evident. The problem lies in the impossibility of the artists avoiding co-option into what they try to react against. Any attempts to oppose negative aspects of the art world are to be commended, but when this is the artist's main prerogative , the work frequently only serves to draw attention to the futility of such an exercise. Taking art to exotic extremes (geographically or formally) seems to be an escapist strategy – one designed to avoid confrontation – made to look even more self-defeating by the artist's inevitable need for institutional settings. For instance, Robert Smithson had to exhibit photographs and other pieces of work in galleries just because it is the only practical way for people to see what he did, even though this directly contradicts his intentions. The same thing could be said of Andy Goldsworthy, a land artist who famously only uses found, natural materials in his stunning sculptural work, which in turn is known by everybody except himself only through glossy coffee table books.

It is also difficult to see the artist as a model

of cultural resistance when there remains a conspicuous identification with the financial support system of the art institutions claimed to be opposed. In the case of Walter de Maria's earth filled gallery in New York, the meaningfully worthless soon became the expensively prestigious, since the artist's dealer soon bought the entire building in which the installation had been made in order to keep it there permanently. Likewise the burying of the brass rod in Kassel cost $300,000 and was described by Robert Hughes as an "epigram of waste"- a criticism likely to seem scandalous to an artist who sincerely believes he is dealing in thunderbolts. In attempting to negate their consumer culture, artists in fact frequently complement it. The estrangement effect aspired to by oppositional artists became a luxury occupation.

So too the issue of the empty space left by the author's disappearance was approached from different perspectives by Post Modern artists. Emphasis was shifted away from the artist and the art work onto the frame or context of the art work, either by focusing attention on the location where the art work is encountered or by insisting on the social nature of artistic production and reception.

In 1968, Marcel Broodthaers founded an imaginary museum, the "Musee d'Art Moderne - Department des Aigles", and in doing so was one of the first artists to displace his practice from the object to the context of the art object. The inaugural exhibition contained all the necessary elements for a conventional show - curator, artist, gallery,

shipping crates and so on. But the emphasis was clearly diverted from any finished meaningful piece of art, because there was no tangible art work as such. The shell of a normal exhibition was presented without the normal substance.

In an essay "Beware" written in 1971, Daniel Buren outlined his intentions to reduce painting to an essential state and to create a subject primarily of theory rather than aesthetic contemplation:

> "the location assumes considerable importance by its fixity and its inevitability, becomes the frame at the moment when they would have us believe that what takes place inside shatters all the existing frames".(Buren, 1971, p. 6.)

In Modernist theory the liberating power of art was associated with the internal relations of the individual work and with their potential to completely engage the spectator, thus removing him or her from the contingencies of place and time into a sustained sense of presentness. Buren, on the other hand, proposes a total exclusion of all that might cater to the taste for an imaginary freedom. Given the absence of formal interest or variety, the only relations to which the viewer can attach any significance are those between the work and its context. It is Buren's contention that the work should thus draw attention not simply to itself but the circumstances of its containment. He aims to recast painting as a practice of theory, for "theory and theory alone, as we all know, can make possible a revolutionary practice". Although Buren says himself

that he seeks to create works that are neither purely conceptual nor paintings, it is true to say that what he produces are both. A conventional sense of painting lurks in the background of Buren's work, but only as the image of that which is to be denied and transcended.

A 1973 installation by Buren "Within and Beyond the Frame "in New York consisted of a series of striped banners strung down the middle of the gallery extended out the window and across West Broadway. Similarly, another show in New York in 1975 consisted of an exhibition space covered with Buren's stripes, where a staircase would not allow the wall to be covered, the surplus stripes were posted on billboards in another part of the city. Buren turned the tables: instead of the museum containing the work, the work contained the museum.

For Barbara Rose this was a case of Buren eating his cake and having it too. How, she demanded, could a pessimistic conceptualist whose goal was to undermine the authority of the art institution, of museums, justify having his work exhibited in them? Rose seems to miss the point though, because as Douglas Crimp wrote:

> "It is fundamental to Buren's work
> that it act in complicity with those
> very institutions that it seeks to
> make visible as the necessary conditions
> of the art work's intelligibility.
> That is the reason not only that his
> work appears in museums and galleries,
> but that it poses as painting".(Crimp,
> 1981, p. 4.)

Buren wrote, "As soon as frames, limits are received as such, in art, one rushes for ways to by-pass them". For Buren the "unveiling" of the institutional

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frame can take place only within the frame and not from some vantage point outside it.

Agreeing that Buren successfully undermines the authority of the museum, a more fundamental criticism of his work than Rose's is, whether it was still necessary for him to carry on in the same vein decades after he started. Does it not make sense that he would have made his point after a number of years of creating the stripes, and that he could consider another more creative endeavour? Perhaps a change in style would be too great a compromise to the commitment Buren made in 1966 to paint only stripes. Indeed an essential element of his work was (and is) the fact that it was to be unchanging through the years. Douglas Crimp wrote in "The Death of Painting" that Buren must continue like this until his stripes are considered paintings, that is until they are endorsed by the institutions they seek to undermine. When that happens then the death of painting will finally have been acknowledged. Buren clings relentlessly to his strategy in the knowledge that nothing else can be done and so he represents a nihilistic, digressive spirit in art.

Central to a lot of this work being carried out up to the 1980s is the common factor of opposition. But it was frequently so absolutely and recklessly oppositional that there was a policy of going nowhere, of not occupying a position, of hovering in place, having no positive horizons, no goals, no positive alternatives. The only thing to be done is let it run all the way to the end. However there is a high price to pay in terms of emptiness

and disenchantment.

The distinction has to be drawn between art about art and art about life. The former is a broad category into which all this work fits which has predominantly occupied the attention of artists and public as the most serious part of the mainstream art-historical tradition of the last decades. It had a positive agenda but one which depended upon outside influence, it needed something to react against, and it had a limited life span. By the 1980s it had run its course and had to be abandoned for art which (whether optimistic or pessimistic) had its basis in reality.

In rejecting art which was limited by its reference only to itself, artists did not have to ignore arguments concerning expression, authenticity and so on after the death of the author, they had to consider carefully questions such as 'where do exchanges between a viewer and a piece of art take place?, who defines the codes and conventions of cultural production?, is there a universal truth in meaning of communicable thoughts and what is the source of that meaning, what is its destination?' Some artists successfully based their practice in their every day reality without reclaiming the privileges traditionally accrued to the author by bearing these thoughts in mind.

Regarding choice of materials, post-modern eclecticism meant that an artist could use any means necessary to get a message across. The thing is, as long as there is a message and the artist's prerogative is the

old idea of communication about reality then the materials will be of a secondary value- their new found functionality will determine that they make the most of subtlety and understatement. As communication to an audience became a priority for an artist once again then the materials used had to be only as much as was necessary.

Following a tradition of innovation and subversion in relation to one's immediate predecessors, some artists working at the end of the 1970s found that painting as a medium held great potential as a natural successor to more exotic materials.

One could look at the return to painting around the start of the 1980s and over emphasise the factors of the demand of the market (never to be under estimated), and a desire or even a demand for painting simply because it had been largely ignored for a generation. But this would be a very cynical view and one that would deny that painting's increased popularity at that time represents real creative progress.

Anselm Keifer's paintings from the 80s embody many Modernist characteristics: their attention to surface texture, their size and their allegorical, historically based narratives. A difference to the conventions of Modernism occurs though in the recognition of the role of the spectator. Paul Harrison wrote in "Modernism in Dispute" that the Modernist spectator passively contemplated an art work, aesthetic contemplation being at the high point of Modernist elitism ,which never defined its values. Some socially critical Post-Modern art demanded an active

reader as opposed to a passive viewer, he goes on, the art work acting as an injunction for the viewer to act upon the world. Keifer's work could relate to a third term though - a properly Post-Modern spectator, who contemplates art in his or her time, becomes self-conscious about his or her position in the world and is led thereby to inflect upon his or her inscription upon history.

Roland Barthes wrote that the birth of the reader will occur at the cost of the death of the author, and Michel Foucault wrote that it does not matter who wrote the text, as long as it is written. This new relationship in the example of Keifer's work between reader and author, viewer and artist, where meaning is not absolute nor its origins or destination clear represents a non authoritative, non forceful role for the artist, but one which still assumes the responsibility necessary to appear credible to the audience.

Keifer's work may in fact not be the best example of how painting can create a new relationship between artist and audience. If too much Modernist painting resisted the enquiry of the viewer, Keifer's work may have over compensated and may be too seductive towards the viewer. The paintings run the risk of over-powering the critical reaction they may prompt because of their tendency toward melodrama.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, possibly offering too little scope for meaning, is the work of two American painters, David Salle and Troy Brauntuch, whose paintings characteristically have

multi-layered images and hazy, unspecified boundaries. They defy the audience to find meaning. Every thing is magically obscure, engrossing in its strangeness. Viewers physically reposition themselves as they try to occupy the same threshold as the work, between worlds of immediacy of sensation and the other world of illusion between flatness and depth.

One can not help believing that these incidental images are indeed meaningless, and as such they frustrate, but they also offer viewers ample impetus to consider their position in relation to them. This is close to Barthes' notion that meaning is not communication or signification, but is always in play, always different. Unbalancing the meaning is the only way of avoiding the "tyranny of correct meaning". Art work from which it is difficult or impossible to draw any meaning is a refreshing, provocative source of contemplation for a viewer, however the work of Salle and Brauntuch often runs the risk of looking like there is no meaning intended and so makes it difficult for the viewer to put faith in the work.

A very satisfying balance was struck between the imposed meaning on the part of an artist and the scope left on the part of the viewer to "read in to" a painting by Gerhard Richter (possibly in spite of himself), in his series of paintings completed in 1988 entitled "18 October 1977". The inspiration for these paintings is clear, they commemorate the deaths in prison, either by murder or by suicide, of members of the Red Army Faction, the Baader-Meinhof group. But their meaning is controversially

allusive. For some, by failing overtly to condemn the group, Richter condoned terrorism. For others by failing to condemn their presumed murder by the state, Richter condoned the status quo. These paintings can be seen in a more positive light as a refusal on the part of Richter to conform to the general apathy that the German people displayed towards the whole episode which avoided the profound questions raised. Importantly these paintings also mark a refusal on Richter's part to condone the prohibition on modern painting to engage with modern history. Richter understood that he simply could not return **to pa**inting which addressed history without effectively **under**mining the ethical basis of the modern tradition, hence the 'haziness' of both the meaning and the actual images. In an official culture of conflicting certainties, the product of Richter's refusal to endorse or add meaning through obvious leanings, while at the same time engaging in subject matter that clearly moved him personally is a series of works which the spectator can communicate with utterly, as if approaching a more fundamental source of historical occurrences rather than artistic representations of them.

Conclusion.

A lot of this work of the past four decades, from Warhol to Smithson and Richter to Buren constituted an attack on Modernism; specifically an attack on the way Modernism gave privilege to the individual creator. Its demonstrations of the limitations of Modernism as a culture of art with the heroic male painter at its high point however, far from absolving artists from the domain of creation, expression and meaning have made it incumbent on them to re-invent an appropriate position regarding a means of expression for art after Modernism. Except that one cannot wilfully 'invent' such a thing. What artists must do is work on, or in, the ruins of Modernism until the fruits of that work become subject to significant forms of aesthetic differentiation.

The position where meaning is to be located in the equation between artist, art work and viewer has yet to be defined (if it is to be clearly defined) since the re-examination of that state of affairs as it existed in Modernism. A passage through the critique of authorship, through the implications of reproducibility through the ruin of Modernism has been a precondition of the reconstitution of meaning in that equation.

Modernism has been characterised as a form of authority arbitrating over aesthetic value. The demise of the authority does not mean, however, that problems of valuation are either solved or rendered irrelevant. Also, numerous arguments concerning the alleged 'Death

of Art' must now be seen as more of a distraction than anything else. Revolutionary reactions to canonical Modernism, from the pessimistic prophecies of Jean Baudrillard and Douglas Crimp, via many conceptualists who sought new viable methods of expression in a dramatically changing art world, do not exclude any less drastic, but still relevant art action for today. A more progressive line to take is to learn from our predecessors' actions without imagining that we have to continue their revolutionary practice.

By taking advantage of all the weighty implications attached, rather than either allowing them to force more radical practices or rehash past styles, an artist can use painting as camouflage to position work in an arena of attention and real discussion. Paradoxically painting, because of its assumed exhaustion and redundancy, may be the most potentially subversive medium. For as too many conceptual artists discovered, art made on the peripheries remains marginal. To reopen debate, get people thinking, one must be in view and one must be heard. One of Duchamp's most important lessons was that the artist who wishes to create a critical disturbance in the calm waters of acceptable, unthinking taste must act in as perverse a way as possible. And it seems at this point, when there is a growing lack of faith in the artists to continue in anything other than plagiaristic styles, that a recognition of this state of affairs can only be adequately expressed through the medium that requires the greatest amount of faith.

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