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**SCIENCE WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE.  
ART WILL GLADDEN ITS SOUL.**

To build a bridge, to play a fugue, both are art. Both science. Each shows a different side of people being their very best.

We applaud the one, and just as surely, we applaud and support the other.

For as long as the human mind and spirit are encouraged in extraordinary endeavor, the world will see progress, intelligently planned.

That wonder we know...as telesis.

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I am fully conscious that, not being a literary man, certain presumptuous persons will think that they may reasonably blame me; alleging that I am not a man of letters. Foolish Folks! Do they not know that I might retort as Marius did to the Roman Patricians by saying, that they, who deck themselves out in the labour of others will not allow me my own. They will say that I, having no literary skill, cannot properly express that which I desire to treat of; but they do not know that my subjects are to be dealt with by experience rather than by words; and (experience) has been the mistress of those who wrote well. And so, as mistress, I will cite her in all cases.

Leonardo da Vinci



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## PREFACE

The impulse behind the essay which follows stems out of a concern with the language of art criticism and the evaluative processes which validate art production. Having previously dealt with assessments of feminist art by various critics writing for catalogues and art periodicals, it became apparent that contemporary French critical thought, be it, feminist, philosophical, marxist, psychoanalytic, was producing language which was easily appropriable into more widely published and read criticism in English; in America, Britain and in Ireland.

It was, in particular, the vocabularies of psychoanalysis and the influential post-structuralist critiques which appealed to a sensibility which subtly replaces the traditional descriptions of the ratified artist and art back into accepted discourses on creativity and originality. The legitimating role of the ensuing criticism cannot be denied or underestimated.

Psychoanalysis' determinism of the individual steeped in biography as history, experience as theory, and the access to language and speech (i.e. authority) must be handled with care if art produced outside the perceived Centre is to avoid the description as a, "periphery of the right".

However, it is the desire for cosmopolitanism which has overtaken plainly metropolitan aspirations which leaves art production outside the mainstream and begging credibility. It is the simple mimicry of theoretical vocabulary that fails to position itself as mockery which allows for critical lessons in Ireland to adhere to rules without naming the game.

The limitations of an essay such as this is the presumption that the reader already has experience of the texts and situations alluded to. I acknowledge that an academic essay on Hegel's philosophy of art and of science may have been more correct as a thesis and I regard this essay here more as a synthesis; not in as much as it is conclusive, but rather as an ongoing beginning, a syn-thetic weave!



## ONCE UPON A TIME

The esteemed Critic had a good family background, and generations of received good taste ensured by his class allowed him the right to Know. The origin of this Epistemology lay veiled in a lexical crib, once upon a time. Inheritor of an infallible Sixth Sense and a private income, something between Dandy and Mystic, this Man was as good as his Word.

Any resemblance hereafter to persons living or dead, to real events or texts, is no more or less scientific, no more or less creative, no more or less a selective history than any representational act allows for.

So it is with a good deal of self consciousness that I choose examples of authors and texts, sharing the attitude of David Carrier, stated at the end of his book Artwriting<sup>1</sup> that narrative should function as an unauthoritative cipher! It is my belief that Artwriting is a significant documentation (document for that matter) of the swell in critical rhetoric which has become abundant in contemporary critical publications. Rhetoric has always been there but its appeal to the more art market orientated magazines as legitimating highly desirable consumer products (art) is something which backgrounds, for example, the recent issue of Art In America<sup>2</sup> dedicated to Art and the Market. Artwriting concerns itself with these issues in the late 1980's but what equally and more essentially reflects in my concerns here is the explanation of the phenomenon of critical assessment surrounding the visual arts. This role is no longer limited to the (art) critic or the (art) historian, per se. It is an outcome of the combination of academic and exterior political motivations to rearticulate the value of art. I will return to David Carrier later, but first ...

1. David Carrier, Artwriting, Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press; 1987.
2. Art in America, July 1988.



"Do you remember in the book Trattato della Pittura (Treatise on Painting) that Leonardo da Vinci himself said that one of his characteristics was to produce a picture with the brush instead of the point"

"No, I don't remember anything about it."

"Don't you remember his book?"

"I remember his book."

"You don't remember that statement by Leonardo da Vinci?"

"I don't regard his book as very important; I regard his work as very important. I am not a man of letters, I do not spend my time reading his books but looking at his pictures."

"You don't consider that Leonardo da Vinci was as able a writer on art subjects, for instance, as yourself?"

"Not quite."

"Didn't he say ... that he painted all his pictures with a mixture of walnut oil and not with linseed oil?"

"I will certainly take your word for it; it is of no interest for me."

"Can you tell me the difference between a picture painted in walnut oil and linseed oil?"

"I certainly can't .. humbug ..."<sup>3</sup>

The criterion for establishing the value of art and art criticism has been sensitive since the professionalisation of the art market and the people involved in attributing cultural and financial value to art. As the buying and selling of art left the Court and entered the hands of the monied bourgeoisie, an entirely new pressure came to bear on quality and authenticity. The bourgeois collectors, collected at first, in order to have the semblance of culture and of a genealogy so long imbibed in the aristocracy. The modern bourgeoisie in this way, by buying Old Master art, accrued the aristocritical<sup>4</sup> standards of "taste" used to

3. Excerpt taken from the chapter, "Leonardo's Libeled Lady" : in Laurie Adams, Art on Trial, New York : Walker : 1976.

4. I coin this phrase in order that the desire for acquisition by the modern bourgeoisie of the Old Master's art be metaphorically described as aristo - and do not mean to suggest that here is a direct corollary between their conditions as classes.



define good and bad art. At this time, that is, early this century, contemporary art did not sell for large sums of money. It was the Old Master's aesthetic assets which froze and thawed each fiscal winter and spring into newer rounder and ultimately more attractive figures. An excellent example of the new attribution of value in an art market place served by these conditions is offered by Laurie Adams in her book Art on Trial. There is an account of how an alleged Leonardo da Vinci painting became the focus of a court case which sought to establish its validity.

It is not necessary to go into the detail or theatricality of the trial but it is worth noting the note made of Sir Joseph Duveen, who brought the allegations of inauthenticity against the painting, by his contemporary biographer:

"Early in life, Duveen, noticed that Europe had plenty of art and America had plenty of money, and his entire astonishing career was the product of that simple observation."<sup>5</sup>

Joseph Duveen (Sir) was a close friend of Bernard Berenson, the top art expert of the day, and between them they managed the American art market, by and large.

Duveen's witnesses to the falsehood of the picture's origin included Berenson himself and, among others, Roger Fry, the British formalist critic. Berenson's testimony echoed the residual qualities of an authentic<sup>6</sup> aristocritical sixth sense. Fry's aesthetic description and formalist analysis used a language which, like Berenson's, was so far removed from the scientism of legal terminology that the defence of the painting relied on discrediting the reliability of the two experts' testimonies. Their justificatory language was decided as mystical, magical and metaphysical. It is the derisory reference to the "fine discourse on Metaphysics" and the constant allusions to the painter's "unconscious" which reflect the problems of critical interpretation which face "artwriting" today. It is often said it is the psychological persona<sup>7</sup> of the artist which is the legitimate scene of readings of the artist's worth as an individual social subject involved in producing cultural artefacts.

5. Taken from Art on Trial, op cit, no. 3.
6. I use this word in the sense an auctioneer might and, in this case, it is little to do with Heidegger's philosophical concept of Authenticity.
7. The word 'persona' will reappear in the rest of the text and so that its relevance be fully appreciated I offer the reading that 'persona' suggests an assumed character or a mask. The persona exists as a construction externalised where perhaps the 'unconscious' has moulded the super ego. This 'unconscious' is extended to include the forming influence of an 'other' or the make up of the 'persona'. The notion of the mask may be coincidental to the idea of Masquerade in Lacan's readings of feminine sexuality but it does kindle the idea of Fromm's culturally useful individual as one who is ordered by a 'performance principle'.



The conflict between creativity and scientificity as the purveyors of truth and critical virtue is mirrored in that they are the dynamic behind countless biographies of Leonardo da Vinci himself and his will-to-art and invention. The frictions between the court of law's terminology and that of the art experts in the excerpt from the trial transcript above questions the proving ability of cultural connoisseurship. Fry is singled out during the trial and targeted for his personal shift from a painting practice to a critical one. He admits that he himself stopped painting because the public seemed to appreciate his writing more. He is further cast under suspicion for the change in direction of his formalism:

"I understand you (Fry) to say that, in the beginning of your career you had one definite opinion and now you have a different one. Is that correct?"

"... At that time, I really believed there was a right and a wrong way of painting. I honestly confess that I have changed my mind."<sup>8</sup>

Following the First World War, Fry sought escape from societal disintegration using a formalist aesthetic which denied the connections between life and art. By the time of the trial Fry saw art "as a 'spiritual exercise' as remote from actual life as 'the most useless mathematical theory". Fry's eclectic sensibility is reflected in the quotation;

"What a rarity the individual is ... more and more I understand nothing of humanity in the mass and au fond ... I only believe in the value of some individuals ... I have never been able to believe in political values."<sup>9</sup>

Clearly the court of law called into question the infallibility of that which is claimed to be theory, something above and beyond an "educated opinion". The essentialism of Fry's theory would appear to be "essentially" not too removed from the desires behind the phrase, "art for art's sake". Fry's disillusionment after the First World War was emphatically to push him into further erasing the connections between art and life. So if Fry saw the stilted post-war paintings of still-life and post-impressionism as something "revolutionary" and chose to ignore the war paintings he was steadfast in advocating an escapism to pure form and technique.

8. op cit no. 3.

9. Cited in the account of Fry's Formalism, Marxism and Modern Art, by F.D. Klingender, London : Lawrence and Wishart, 1977.



It is these neo-mystical qualities of Fry which allow me to sweep over history to see that "essential" moment once more in the post-World War Two neo-mysticism at the hub of Clement Greenber's employment of Modernist theory. Modernist theory lost its oppositionality as soon as its success was guaranteed. In explaining the culture and in explaining avant-gardism it overtook its own raison d'etre as a theory of disturbance in modern culture. Modernist theory was part of the "revolution which became the institution", as Ad Rheinhart was wont to say. Neither was so, in fact, and both maintained the official cultural atmosphere of complacency. Although Fry may be seen by some as an interested amateur, as indeed might Bernard Berenson, it is rather closer to the truth that their self-perception was nothing of the sort and the implications of their activities were certainly more public and political than that. In 1913 Fry sees himself as "developing a theory", and Berenson's adjudication of art's moral and financial values throughout the 1920's and 1930's places him outside the role of the amateur. The commissioning of Berenson to perform judgements as an art expert on issues of value is not unlike the sponsoring of amateur athletics in return for athletes advertising sports products - the amateur with the trappings of the "Pro"

One further interesting aside before I finish with Art on Trial is the record made of the regional American painter, T.H. Benton, in a comment in his preface to the book, The Rape of La Belle.<sup>10</sup> (The book is damning of Duveen's interest in the art world as purely that of a business man). Benton shows anger at the art business for its role in importing Old Master art from Europe into America and, "thereby surpassing the reality of American Art".

The Rape of La Belle was published in 1946 nearly twenty years after the da Vinci case went to trial in 1929. The rest is History.

10. The book was written by the husband of Mrs. Hahn, the woman who had gone to court against Duveen. The title suggests several readings. On the one hand it could refer to a woman, the portrait of whom is the subject of the painting. On the other hand, it could refer to Mrs. Hahn's out of court settlement of 60,000 dollars to settle the matter. But at that stage the possible value of the painting was greatly lowered, and Mrs. Hahn's credibility and reputation.



Benton's statement does seem to pre-empt the direction of official cultural critique solidly prevalent in America in the 1960's. The main author of the legitimating criticism was Clement Greenberg who began to write cultural Modernist theory into history throughout the 1950's when the Cold War strained political relations between post-war America and Russia, and consequently European diplomacy. Following the Second World War America had become the creditor nation for Europe (Axis and Allied), shifting the economic centre securely to itself. Complicit in this credit shift was the shift of the centre in art from Europe, particularly the traditional centre in Paris, to the land of the free. The ticket to the centre court of art making previously ensured for Spain, Italy, Germany and France by the Old Master pedigree was ignored and void. It may have been embarrassing, in the light of their war history. Contemporary American art became more valuable - realising its reality, its place in the sun. But if Modernist theory showed a potential to guide Modernist culture which reflected it's own disturbance and could build upon it in order to activate a revolutionary culture, it failed in its subserviance to political pressures on its very own conditions of production and survival. Its reality becoming coercive historicist affectations.

"Tension between theory and culture is necessary for the maintenance of critical potential".<sup>11</sup>

What else then is avant-gardism? What else can the avant-garde be except temporal? And when the time is up, the avant-garde is either successful or fails. That is to say, either it changes the terms of the hegemony or is appropriated and so institutionalised, and affectually coercive. The official line on Abstract Expressionism viewed it as a healthy expression of an intrinsically (humanist, consumerist) morality of the post-second world war self. If this art, this symptom, appeared odd, at odds, it was made to seem really nothing to worry about and would soon go away. While it might be said that Modernist theory avoided metaphysical associations to abstract psychological explanations it certainly did not in effect disturb the metaphysical removes contained in the technocratic keywords to understanding; lateralness, horizontality, unbrokenness, openness, etc! The philosophical metaphors changed by name but not by nature. Nothing new, that is, no radical re-representation. Patriarchy self-deceived, self-assured. Whatever of Greenberg's personal ethics, it is undeniable that he inclined towards the old critical insight business, the sixth Sense. When the theory on application to the practice left room for doubt, the critical gap was sutured by Greenberg's positive nodding Know.

11. Charles Harrison, in "Expressionism and Exhaustion", part 1, Artscribe, (Feb/March) 1986 pp 45 - 49; see also part 2 of essay in the following edition.



Originality was high on the agenda too, privileging the historical moment in the artist. Greenberg insisted that his artists were professionals and knew what they were about every bit as much as the professional Modernist critic. The artists needed buckets to articulate their surface while Greenberg, realising or not, entertained the palette for connoisseurship. Infallibility is the myth of the Popes and Kings, authority, investment and divinity attributes shared with the critical bankruptcy of such Modernist criticism. Theory need not contain an inherent self-destruct, there is something inherently complicit in theorizing. The latter is a social initiative whatever the product may come to be perceived as. This is what is inescapably political about the position of the theorist.

Rosalind Krauss in the Introduction to The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths writes:

"Greenberg vigorously (denied) that it is in the method rather than the content of the judgements that the interest of criticism lies."<sup>12</sup>

Krauss' structuralist background informs this assessment and will feature later, not particularly for itself but in the irony of its virtuous choice. The content of judgement mentioned above alludes to the physicalist interpretative model received by the reader - cum - listener of Modernist historicistic explanations of art's production. The analogy between the art and the artist is not that of the work and the worker. The artist escapes alienation whereby the act of making an art object gives the art object a kind of soul, and the artist the persona of a public human object. To say there is great "depth" in a painting is to say there is a spiritual physicalist transference of personality from the maker to the object. The biography of an artist serves, to various willful degrees, to write social/ political history. In the same way the pseudo-biography of the art serves to underwrite much art history and exists as one of its most abused conventions. The imperative to narrative as biography and vice-versa may be innocent enough but as formal method it assumes a highly significant role. The biological and personable narrative is one behind many contemporary radical theories and its own conventions based on lived experience make it a site of desires which are all too easily socialised into coercive, doctrinaire social myths.

12. Rosalind Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths.



Let me take a break at this point to clarify the three terms which centre the questions at the core of this essay. I will borrow the definitions as they appear in the Introduction to Feminism and Methodology edited by Sandra Harding.<sup>13</sup> Although Harding is writing in the context of the "add women" policy of some existing theory to critiques within the social sciences, it shall be synonymous with the policy of just add psychoanalysis and stir policies within art criticism. Thus, the definitions are:

Method ... discussions of method (techniques for gathering evidence) ...

Methodology ... methodology (a theory and analysis of how research should proceed) ...

Epistemology ... epistemological issues (issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justificatory strategy) ...

Harding also identifies the procedure for gathering evidence in three categories:

1. Listening to (or interrogating) informants.
2. Observing behaviour.
3. Examining historical traces and records.

These categories may be read clearly as just as pertinent to the practice of psychoanalysis and it is this shared importance on issues of method, methodology and epistemology as the object of critiques which creates the links and the problems between psychoanalysis, structuralism and the development thereafter of a method of art criticism.<sup>14</sup>

Briefly, we can take it that structuralism identifies methodology as the object of its critical theory and that this object is then the form which mediates interpretation and this mediation is the basis of content. The methodology in effect is the content of that which is analysed. Psychoanalysis exists on two levels, as a practice and as a critical theory. In practice psychoanalysts address an analysand, the person undergoing analysis. The analyst's mediation - interpreting the stories, behaviour and biography of the analysand - thus becomes the content of the analysand. As a critical theory, psychoanalysis affords the same relationship to its object of analysis, e.g. art and art history/criticism. Because of its methodology of gathering evidence as a practice it cannot escape the same privileging of individuals and the specific subject when discussing history or explaining the production of art and cultural artefacts.

13. Sandra Harding (ed.) Feminism and Methodology.

14. Greenberg rejected the emphasis that is the method rather than the content of judgements which is the interest of criticism. Greenberg's position is encapsulated in his book, Art and Culture, London : Thames & Hudson, 1973.



Art criticism mirrors the emphasis on biography and the writing of biographies of particular and 'great' artists as individuals who define specific moments in art history and this has a long tradition as the presentation of art history. Art criticism is also the site where interpretation is effectively either descriptive or prescriptive. Description suggests an activity which is absolute in its correctness and claims for only one narrative and by proxy owns that narrative, that history that 'truth' of interpretation. Prescription on the other demands authority but while its control acknowledges a number of possible interpretations it privileges one as correct in that it relates to a moral virtue which should be reproduced throughout social production.

With this in mind and the warning in the following quote from Sandra Harding in her Conclusion to Feminism and Methodology, I will go on to give evidence of the confusions which now exist in formulating an epistemology for critical art criticism:

"The critics respond, but perhaps 'reality' can have 'a' structure only from the falsely universalising perspective of the master. That is only to the extent that one person or group can dominate the whole, can 'reality' appear to be governed by one set of rules or be constituted by one privileged set of social relations?"<sup>15</sup>

15. op cit no. 13.



Structuralism, a discourse developed in France, rooted in linguistics and semiology and inspired by Ferdinand Saussure, threatened the fixity and universality of any representational method. It presented cohesive and authoritative codes of meaning and exposed them as codified myths. Structuralism and its appendix, post-structuralism, provided the sophisticated challenge to the historicist readings of culture lumbering in the darkness guided by the Name-of-the-Father (Greenberg) and of the Son, (Modern Theory, Son of Greenberg). The challenge to the coherent self was not a revelation peculiar to the post-Second World War period. It was not news, it had happened before, but not with the same ferocity towards all accepted notions of expression, representation and interpretation. But language getting the last laugh as articulation is inherently elusive and illusionary. European avant-gardism housed figures and events made Text which were embroiled in the description of a Fragmented Self and the delusion of recognisable identity.<sup>16</sup> (For example, Antoin Artaud, his lunacy transformed in hindsight to aestheticised madness and his biography appropriated by art history: his personal institutionalisation giving way to the asylum of the French avant-garde after his death. But wait, it is not my ambition to make a hero of Artaud).

To mention psychoanalysis in the same breath as structuralism moreover post-structuralism is the ambiguity upon which a particular type of art criticism exists - putting those two critiques into the realm of theory and criticism of the visual arts and playing a part in cultural activity. While the idea of a complex, sometimes disturbed psychic unity was theorized by Freud, it resisted in its dogmatic identification as complex, the more threatening suggestion that there is no fixity at all, no coherence of the psyche intrinsic to the human mind and that a human mind not organised like this, is sick, abnormal, anarchic and valued less. If thought in spasm was the outcome of freaks of nature, the insane, those who lacked chronological, controlled thought patterns would include sufferers of physiological diseases and body in spasm without control would do just as well to condemn sufferers to the perception that they were psychologically unsound. Where Reason was found lacking so also civilization was presumed to be. Body in spasm could

16. However, it is in the contemporary writing of Julia Kristeva that we can see her identification of Post-Modernism as providing the conditions necessary to go "a step beyond the idea of the avant-garde as it (post-modernism) imposes a content and the elaboration of a mediation (intervention)".



not perform social etiquette. The Victorians capitalised on the display of asylum inmates, allowing the pay-in public to view the spectacle of anarchic human collapse. Perhaps I am digressing, but the atmosphere of catastrophe perceived in the Victorian lunatic was challenged by Sigmund Freud's assertions of a logic behind mental abnormalities. That is what was radical about Freud's theory, once upon that time. And, in further questioning the traditional view of authorship, post-structuralists ask;

"Whose writings are specified by the name Freud? Freud's only?..."

What does Picasso mean for his art - the historical personality who is its "cause", supplying the meaning for this or that figure in this painting?"<sup>17</sup>

The account of the Leonardo da Vinci court case is a useful reference in introducing the contemporary difficulties of critical assessment and the need for legitimation, the role of the 'original' and also just what it is that's in a name.

17. op cit. no. 12.

18. Kristeva has often been included in anthologies with a diverse array of other women writing feminist theory, e.g. Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Irigaray and Kristeva have most notably been involved in discourse around representation and art. However, regarding Kristeva, her cultural critique must be read in the light of her critiques on sexuality. It is by no means accidental that Kristeva, above and beyond other so-called 'New French Feminist' writers, should have become the more available in the U.S.A. Kristeva's writing contains serious implications for gay men, lesbian women and women who-are-not-mothers. Kristeva's radical method veils the 'functionalism' in her regressive admonishments of the groups cited above. The political climate in France shows little difference to American right wing governmental legislature. Kristeva's disillusionment in the late 70's with left politics followed her visit with the Tel Quel group to China to see the effects of the Cultural Revolution. Kristeva regarded any movement which concerned itself with the prioritising of the group as censorial of the individual's rights in society. It is easy to deduce why somewhere like the United States should find her fit to balance the Nuances of radical method with fundamentally conservative drives towards the cult of the individual.



Freud has become the populist of psychoanalysis and his biologism has been used to legitimate many regressive social attitudes. It also reinforces the naturalness and inevitability of fixed dualisms and binary systems of explication. Intrinsic also to the practice of psychoanalytic theory as Critical Theory is the inclination to physicalist readings of history through the life stories of individuals. In particular behaviourist psychoanalysis reproduces notions of 'origin', 'evolution' and 'determination'. However, it is the theorizing of the Self by post-Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis with which I am concerned. Julia Kristeva<sup>18</sup> is in my mind, the theorist most at issue as well as her relationship to 'New French Feminist' writers. Kristeva studied under Jaques Lacan and both are generally accepted as post-structuralist in their approach to critical method. The radical politics detectable in Lacan's theory was its interrogation of the bourgeois 'myths' supporting 'individualism'. In order that psychoanalysis detach itself from accusations of conservative 'functionalism' it moved in its theory to incorporate sociological theories of not only gender but its and every representation expounded in language - thus satisfying one claim to the post-modernist canon of re-politicising its philosophical subject. The fluid and erratic construction of identity and self-recognition as (mis)recognition complemented the structural allegory of Roland Barthes' story of the ship, Argos. Barthes offers this reading of the story;

"It affords the allegory of an eminently structural object created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions (which cannot be caught up in any mystique of creation : substitution (one part replaces another as in a paradigm) and nomination (the name is in no way linked to all the parts) : by dint of combinations made within one and the same name, nothing is left of the origin: Argos is the object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form".<sup>19</sup>

19. Roland Barthes, cited by R. Krauss in The Originality of the Avant-Garde, in her Introduction.



Barthes describes a condition of language but that language under Lacan is entered into through the 'mirror' phase to produce only one plausible if inherently fantastic social intercourse. Kristeva elaborated on this to suggest that there exists another 'language' which is more like Saussure's synchronic axis of meaning. The gaps and spaces in 'language', properly, thetic is the place of meaning which Kristeva privileges to avant-garde art practices and the advancement of post-modernist undertaking of deconstruction. In the mid-1970's Kristeva was, with the parameters of structural theory, making a critique of itself and not simply deconstructing the metaphysical biases of the theory but involved in what she calls the 'dynamic' of producing and conceiving language and representation produced by the play between the speaking subject and his or her unconscious experience as well as the pressures of other social structures. However, the point not to be missed is the fact of analysis and the institution of psychoanalysis in its privileging of the individual in consultation sessions which instigates the prioritising of the needs of the individual above the undifferentiated group. It is this which allows the complexities and subtleties of contemporary psychoanalytic theory to be distilled into a potent reinforcing of the bourgeois capitalist desire for the privatisation of society embodied in the mythical private individual.

Psychoanalysis, in that it accounts for the injustices of patriarchal culture as a trans-historical, cross-cultural force, became popular with many feminists.<sup>20</sup> I am thinking in particular of English writers who saw this as as much of a challenge to the deficiency on the left to understand the patriarchal trappings of marxism and left theory and its political agendas which perceive the 'question' of women as the next-step-after socio-economic liberation. This is an important and on-going struggle within debating, a method of social change, and should not be tangential or give room to the just - add - women syndrome. Nevertheless there is a myriad of complications. Two branches of this use psychoanalytic explication are universalism, which denies the particular, or else the cul-de-sac of having no position of being that is conditioned by historical and political events. Arguably, what has happened is that this development in a critique of patriarchy has led to its political value existing (not exclusively but strongly) in liberal feminist discourse. So within the culture industry these effects are seen to reinforce the enabling hand of liberal democratic capitalist culture and politicised women in the arts who function as such liberals and dilutes the oppositionality of using psychoanalysis in the first place.

20. For example, see the arguments by Jaqueline Rose in 'Feminity and its Discontents', contained in Sexuality in the Field of Vision, Verso, London, 1986.



So it is a physicalist reading of history which attributes to it a coherency and linearity of time accordingly given to the Self of the individual.

It is essential to realise the relationship at this point between the traditions of a writing practice, i.e. literature and the methodology of post-structuralism. I think it is fair to say that the latter augmented a repoliticisation of form as much as it strives towards politicised criticism and I suspect that in the visual arts the methodology of criticism became the content of the art. I will give reasons for this a little later. For the moment, regarding structuralism as philosophy as claimed by Jaques Derrida, it is essentially a spoken thing mediated by language spoken but by necessity represented by language written and this is the simple connection to the literary.<sup>21</sup> The privileged novel then, I assume, lays down the reading rules of prose writing and the production of a prose style, a poetic prose style more "correctly". While the prose aspect is properly an allusion to the mundane dull and everyday the poesie of the poetic keeps away the plain smell of overt dogma or religious scientificity. It is the complications of using such a style of writing coming out of radical theory such as structural psychoanalysis which are highlighted in the application of that theory to visual art, on the one hand, by its own practitioners, and, the irresponsible appropriation of psychoanalytic terms by art professionals.

21. Culler, On Deconstruction, 1983.



Echoing the essentially spoken imperative to philosophical representation and communication of thought is the analyst's practice of communication to the analysand by talking. Also:

"The Seminar is the crucible in which Lacan's theory is forged, and in its most exciting sections one has the impression of encountering thought in the making, thought in search of a discourse adequate to its objects ...

The style is also a reminder that teaching was probably his (Lacan's) true vocation, and that speech, rather than the written word, was his natural habitat."

This and other clues to Lacan's method and speech preference are contained in the review by David Macey for Radical Philosophy on the publication of two more of Lacan's Seminars, given in France in the 1950's. I would appreciate in the light of the evidence that the difficultness of Lacan's texts was/is not the same product as the difficultness of Kristeva's texts. As I see it, Kristeva is deliberately stylistic in a manner received to be 'difficult' by way of producing play in the text which can incorporate her admissions to paradoxes which deny contradictory invalidity. This is what is particular to a strategic politics of writing residual in the texts of other writers such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, etc. Without bunching Kristeva into a new French feminist group of writers, as publishers seem so easily to do, she shares the attitudes to narrative, the reality or whatever of meanings and the privileging of the male term, for instance, although she weaves her way through the text struggling also with her academic debt to the philosophical tradition. She in fact distances herself from feminism per se.



What has come to be called philosophical art criticism relies heavily on Derrida's suggestion of an understanding of philosophy as literature and ultimately the ambiguous contemporary understanding of what is philosophy. As a cliched thing alone it is weighted firmly to the clouds and shuffles from side to side in the creaking leather seat of the best cigar smoked metaphysical intellect. The cerebral housing of the cliched thing of philosophy removed its pursuits from the possibility of it wandering lonely as a cloud into the vacuous female space between the ears. Although the fact is that women, elevated women, during the Enlightenment were seen fit to entertain as well as emblematised philosophy. Strange, nevertheless, that this thought thing be cognitive of the biological place.

Philosophy of course is not a singular definitive thing. It seems only possible to accept it as something which is the sum of a number of things under the generic term "philosophy". Philosophies are plausible insofar as the content of any philosophy is at one and the same time form/method, methodology and an epistemological direction. That philosophy is suggestive of master - narrative, access to wisdom and produces an aura of elitist intellectualism is consequent to it being a site of exchanges on logice, ethics, and indeed legislature. The three areas function as the Trinity of Order which authorises social behaviour. That the debate on these issues is in the hands of an elite is for similar reasons as to why women have historically been excluded from their commentary. The entry into these dialogues requires education in their mode of production and once that is understood the initiated are able to produce and expand the Word. Obviously access to these was guarded. Now though, due to more liberalised education more people can learn the terms of these discourses and following on from such an atmosphere the thing of philosophy gets onto T.V., usually very late at night when most decent people are in bed.

To live the lie of the mind/body split is to accredit it once more with an ethereal, metaphysical, trans-historical, -cultural, -narrative, you name it, existence. The body as general metaphor must be avoided and a materialist analysis co-operate with the playful over-tones of a productive philosophy in the denial even of itself. That is a 'body' politic.

So far it may appear I have been elusive in naming names. The relevance of the critique is not simply to the individuals I cite but is basic to the problem of many and much criticisms. It is to avoid individualism of the problem that I decline to be hasty in proffering my own concrete legitimations.



It is important to every culture and state that an ideology be developed which can contend with crisis. The academy, the community of academics, is needed to maintain the dominant state hegemony. The ideologies at play legitimate the semblance of something liberal and democratic in so far as issues peripheral to the state's agenda are pseudo-centralised. Oppositional theory and politics are diffused into 'alternative', (I use the word advisedly, cautiously, and if only it were funny, ironically). The state language as such, then, is one of plurality and control. With control comes Ownership. Money changes hands. The State in effect owns the Rhetoric which explains history and justified thus can explain it away. Critical Rhetoric enters the public culture as nostalgia. The insurance against these explanations becoming disruptive relies on theoretical language's adherence to its own terms of reference and the delusion that the history of theory and criticism is as autonomous and transcendental as the Modernist art object of Greenbergian pastures.

The cultural artefact exists as effect rather than cause, as symptom not disease. In any event curable by modern science. Through articulation in abstract notions and as symptom, the boundaries of experience and action are drawn up in physicalist metaphors, making sense of them. This way, the more obvious political and social imperatives are obscured and denied priority. It is tempting to imagine a 'body theoretic' which is (de)composed of parts remembered. Something familiar yet existing only as figurative imagings of suprasocial thoughts.



It is no accident that academy employed criticism is in the main published in the in-house journals of the universities. Clearly there is little space in that arena for a pragmatic criticism which is not restricted by institutionalism and its confusion of education, knowledge and power. Left critics and theorists are entirely awake to this problem. In the Function of Criticism, Terry Eagleton illustrates this pessimistic overview regarding criticism as engaging, "at no significant point with any substantive social interest and as a form of discourse is almost entirely self-validating and self-perpetuating"<sup>22</sup>. This comment prefaces that by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh published a few years later.

"For the most part artists themselves have assumed the role of legitimist... it is therefore no longer required of the critic to provide ... empirical proof of artistic competence or historical parameters of evaluation ..."<sup>23</sup>

This statement is just short of appearing ignorant or naive. What preserves this sulk in the face of history is its probably defensive character. Surely the specific critics to which Buchloh refers are contained in the numbers which were, like him, bank-drafted into the service of the academy. What Benjamin H.D. Buchloh neglects is the throbbing gristle of mainstream art criticism. In being so bloody-minded Buchloh's comment hints at the very 19th century attitude of the art critics and the journalists. It is these journalists who increasingly determine the art market, the art fashion, the trends in art colleges, therefore ultimately the bulk of art production. Subsequently, there is no lack of similar, but novel rehashes for the market.

22. Terry Eagleton, The Function on Criticism, see Preface for properly contextualised account of his view.

23. Contained in the collection Discussions in Contemporary Culture, Vol. 1, Dia Art Foundation, Seattle : Bay Press : 1987



Nothing new here in the capitalist marketplace. What might be regarded as the latest thing is the commodification of intellectuals' neuroses.

The fact that the Buchloh quote stems from "a collection of edited texts and transcripts" of a live spoken event might I add, is indicative of two things. First that:

"The Dia Art Foundation continues to programme events centred on thought and discussion. Many people who attended this first series commented on the general need for broader commitment to organised intellectual forums outside the academy. We hope that this publication will be the first of many documenting events of this kind at the Dia Art Foundation."<sup>24</sup>

Fair enough, the book sees itself as a documentation of an event. However, through the intervention of editing, the product is a packaging of art practice and criticism without the academy, involving personages on the American Left, and to different degrees, of Centre, including Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss and Douglas Crimp. To what extent the ambitions to being discursive outside the academy are satisfied is limited, once again.<sup>25</sup>

Without wishing to be a downer, the book is certainly a useful reference, even entertaining at times! All the same, the perpetual trap of packaging the crisis snaps shut on this one. A sense of role playing and staged relationships between the two dimensional speakers and issues produces an uneasy overall feeling, in this reader. That is to say, to me. This sensitivity magnifies at times (particularly in the section 1967/1987 : Genealogies of Art and Theory) to a feeling of eavesdropping, or as the documentation is written, voyeurism may be more correct, if you see my point! Perhaps it is because I am without that community that I can suggest that the discerning group is presented in a manner reminiscent of the therapy group, - where did we go wrong?

24. *ibid.*

25. To be without that community is to mean that I am not part of that official discourse, not because of any topographical critical distance between Ireland and America, but rather a critical distance allowed in so far as I need feel no loyalty, as such, to a shared experience of academic placement and stature within the pedagogic system or the University.



The notion of a Cure follows hot on the heels of this metaphor.<sup>26</sup>

The problem with the Dia Art Foundation book is that it is indicative of the desire for evidence of critical thought which is somewhat spontaneous, real in so far as it happened and that it was an event. Similarly the 'happenings' of Performance art in the '70's did not side-step commodification by the artefactual status of their documentation. Photographs and videos became the documentation, became the evidence and thus the desirable collectable.<sup>27</sup> The difference to the Dia Art compilation is its own unignorant historicity and its claim to historical facts in its overall plain prose language. This is the importance of using the book in my evidence and is not an attempt at a book review.

26. The Cure assumes for Lacan and Kristeva a method of reading, that which is achieved through interpretation - mediation. For American psychoanalysis it is more crudely associated with the idea that there is a 'norm' a 'control' against which aberrations can be measured. The 'norm' is something idealised and picturesque but it is fiction - similarly the 'cure' connotes a fantasy at the bottom of its own construction.
27. Is it a coincidence that Joseph Duveen condemned the Hahn painting as a fake only on the basis of seeing a photograph of it? - such was his evidence until the French Government ordered that the Hahn painting and the existing Louvre painting of the same subject be placed side by side in the courtroom.



I promised to return to David Carrier's Artwriting. Published in 1987, the same year as the Dia Art Foundation collection, Artwriting includes several of the characters included in this narrative also. Moreover, David Carrier joins the list. Carrier's claim to levels of arbitrariness and artificiality in his "selective historical representation" of an art history narrative is an attempt to avoid a voice of authority over history. The order and control of argument usually alludes to a definitive logic in the responsibility of history writing as such. Carrier reminds the reader of his honesty in producing self-conscious analytic narrative representations. He lays claim to his book as definitive in this sense alone. All the same, alongside this lies the suspicion that his narrative is little more than an exercise than anything else. The hypotheses are virtuous in the author's pretext of an honest approach, he tells us so. The contexts for Carrier's discovery are justified in so far as art history is his critical history of art criticism. The book's function and the author's own role are shaped by the pressing outlines of other actual texts, authors and historical narratives; acknowledging a degree of subjectivity which must be part of an objective relationship to one's material. If he cannot see beyond the limitations of a traditional involvement of the philosophical discipline with art, it is because he fails to see its full political implications. This does not satisfy its blinkered rejection of a North American urge towards a universalism defined by the contours of that continent.



The closure of the historical narrative which he has constructed is, he tells us, the closure of art critical history at 'this' point in time. The critical time here must be understood to be fluid as is philosophy's debt to a metaphysical past. He does not terminate but does fix time in the manner of an exercise with a conclusion following the formula of thesis - antithesis - synthesis.

Structuralism too has its metaphysical qualities. It is these which become problematic, serving to reify theory into acceptable levels of public irrelevance. Carrier's closure is reminiscent of the claims for the "death of painting" and the "end of art theory" coming out of the engagement with theories of representation in the 1970's. The intervention of feminism with Modernism was largely responsible for the reassessment of methods of representation but ten years or so hence that involvement has given rise to a new sophistication of theory. Sophistication lends itself to further complication and difficultness in texts and there is a case for style's ability to 'hide' political implications and inclinations towards the maintenance of conservative social moves swinging to the right rather than the left.

Feminism's encounter with Modernism brought about a reappraisal of Freudian psychoanalysis and its possibilities for explanation of the creative process and ways of representing. I have already intimated the appropriations undergone between psychoanalytic theory and theories of culture and art making and criticism. I will reiterate that it was the project of post-structuralism, to deal with a more social subject (in contrast to structuralism's metaphysical subject) which through the process of 'deconstruction' sought to use psychoanalysis' theories of the subject to buoy the structuralist narrative. The physicist model and the Law-of-the-Father merged, inaugurating the psychoanalytic discipline into Critical Theory and the understanding of art. Most importantly for all, this was the breach of a gap which had disallowed psychoanalysis the recognition it needed as a critical theoretical science, which had existed since Freud's struggle with the Austrian academic hierarchy. These are the conditions which produced the criteria for what is the named thing of contemporary philosophical art criticism.



To illustrate this point, it is worth mentioning David Carrier's involvement with a journal which maintains the philosophical canon in its criticism with the juxtaposition of essays on technology in the arts -'inventive' art if you like - and those of someone like Carrier dealing with art. The journal of the suspiciously familiar name, Leonardo superficially rekindles the validity of the true Renaissance intellectual.<sup>8</sup> The publishing of essays in Leonardo which are adapted by Carrier from essays in Artwriting must make concrete Carrier's own place in a philosophical tradition with the pretensions to the persona of a virtuoso of genius. It can only be hoped that Leonardo finds more critical respect than did the Trattato della Pittura - perhaps it is all in the name.

If Leonardo suggests one paperback persona, October suggests another.<sup>29</sup> Rosalind Krauss, a co-author of October is chosen by Carrier to represent the best of the Octobrists project of re-politicising cultural, critique and the adoption of a way of writing which mirrors that of philosophy. Leonardo's left handed mirror-writing metaphorically describes the content and style of writing in October. The combination of empirical scientificity and psychoanalytical explanation provides for the usually difficult language of articles in the magazine. The revised, some would say, post - Freudian theory of Jaques Lacan punctuates the discourse. It is my contention that the problematics of using such inter-textualised terminology often make it difficult to see the wood for the trees. October quite correctly sets out to counteract "an art history that has itself become increasingly historicist in the last several decades and is pursuing questions of origins and authorship as though no critique had ever been advanced about the methodological status of these concepts".<sup>30</sup> Descriptive criticism that operates on a level which refuses the conditions of art production above and beyond the artist's psyche and persona is affirming of the regressive conditions of historicist accounts of art's social relevance. At best, it is the consequence of an absolute idealism or else an indifferent ignorance.

28. Leonardo (U.K.) ed. Rudolf Arnheim, see especially Vol 19, pts. 2 and 3, 1986. pp. 170-4 and pp. 241-5 respectively.

29. October Eds. Joan Copjec, Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss. The advisory board includes Benjamin H.D. Buchloh as well as Joel Fineman, Fredric Jameson, Laura Mulvey and others. A quarterly magazine which is sub-headed, Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics. It is published by M.I.T. Press.

30. op. cit no. 12.



The counteraction to the critical project of October and the artwriting of its contributors is embodied in the article titled, The 'October' Syndrome written by Roger Kimball for The New Criterion. The magazine and its editor, Hilton Kramer, have long been recognised as bastions of right wing cultural criticism. The tone of the essay runs along these lines:

"Few things have contributed more to the debasement of contemporary cultural and intellectual life than the honoured place now accorded to deliberate obscurity. Deconstruction and semiology, structuralism and post-structuralism; those and kindred obfuscatory theories imported from the continent are furrowed staples in much of what passes for intellectual discourse today. Combined with the unexamined assumption that the realm of high culture - indeed, that the very idea of high culture - is irredeemably tainted by political interests, this triumph of opacity has largely succeeded in transforming serious discussion of art and culture into a congenes of hermetic language games."<sup>31</sup>

As if this attack was not aggressive enough, Kimball loses the head altogether and suggests that there is something sinister inherent in the decor of Rosalind Krauss's loft. A vitriolic onslaught more in line with 19th century social column art criticism. The trivialising of his own argument does not however undo the seriousness of Kimball's allegations. It is reminiscent of T.H. Benton's annoyance at the importation of that which is Continental as undermining American reality. Kimball suggests that October's editorial initiatives may have been redeemed had the editors proceeded with a liberal humanist historicist policy and instituted a pluralist rhetoric into the in-house writing method. The return to the

31. Roger Kimball, The New Criterion, October 1988, p 5.



biography of the artist as the priority of history is, I suspect, not far off. All these desires lending themselves to the veneration of the individual as chosen - it follows that it may not be too long either before we have the serious use of words like 'genius' once more without causing acute embarrassment to the gathered company,

"... concepts 'like' genius, 'inspiration', 'determination' and 'evolution', by which works of art are embedded within the conditions of their own creation ..."<sup>32</sup>

may indeed leave the sanctuary of professional biographer's vocabulary and energize the vocabulary of once upon a time radical enquiry.

It is true, of course, that such terminology never left the realms of popular art criticism practiced in the glossy magazines such as Flash Art,<sup>33</sup> Arts Magazine and more recently Artscribe International as well as in national newspapers. The appeal for most people in these jaded cliches is their familiarity and romantic overtures to artists as misfits, romantic heroes and sensitive souls. The fact of all this is that it is complicity restating the male artist as that misfit and the attitudes of Kimball and his ilk threaten feminist theory and practical advancement equally if not more damagingly than they do the theories of structuralism and linguistics. It is the woman who dons the mantle of the male ego in order to produce, to create which is now still favoured by the columnist critic - cum -<sup>34</sup> journalist. A final point on Kimball's reference to the style of October essayists as 'tangled and jargon riddled' is that it hints again at the root of the problems for a style which is the site of a political method.

32. op. cit no. 12.

33. Flash Art has carried an interview with Julia Kristeva, one of the few times Kristeva is encountered in such a way, on such a platform, in English, and in the context of her theory and conclusions the, on visual art, medieval and contemporary.

34. D. Kuspit - Artform no. , 1980, pertaining to the work of Nancy Spero: "One critic has commented on the radical nature of the art for a woman, without however, noting the universality of the conception of suffering self-hood that facilitates Spero's temporary adoption of the male ego". (my emphasis)



The descriptive phrase 'philosophical art criticism' is the name tag attributed to a tangled and jargonesque theoretical genealogy of terms sprouting from the search for a language - a written language - which has greater representational capacities than did any before. The nitty gritty of the problem may be, on the one hand, in that access to translations of material by European writers is limited and erratic (take for example the delay in English publications of Lacan's Seminars of the '50's). On the other hand, that a style invested with a concerted methodology which is its meaning became the vacant simulacrum of Donald Kuspit's vocabulary. Jargon adrift. The meeting in the night of the two ships, the Argos and the Ego, may be the superficial romance of adventurism in the pay of the official line - Kuspit, a prime mover in the legitimist stakes.

It is the about timely mention of Donald Kuspit which illustrates the pitfalls of popularising a style and jargon used by the aforementioned philosophical art criticism. I chose Kuspit as an example due to his ubiquitous presence in countless art periodicals in American and often British and European magazines. Kuspit's complicity with the commercial and economic superstructure of the art market relies I suspect upon a dilution of his own procedure of Hegelian dialectical analysis. Kuspit typifies an academic to whom employment and publication is synonymous in that success is one is prestige and basic security on the other. Nevertheless, I would regard Kuspit not as a victim of circumstantial capitalist economics but as a resigned functionary in that economy's generation. I suggest again that Kuspit be regarded as a proper noun, and my naming him as the naming of his artworld persona.

If Kuspit's ethics are sagging his paradigm of virtuousness is ultimately destructive to art which is approached by his critical descriptons. Perhaps it is synchronicity at play which provided for Kispit's importation to Ireland in 1987. His visit preceded his commissioning by the Douglas Hyde to write the catalogue essay for a retrospective of work by Brian Maguire early in 1988.<sup>35</sup> Brian Maguire obviously chose Kuspit due to the latter's espousal of new expressionism, particularly the quality stuff he identifies with the germanic sensibility. Kuspit was not only desirable for Maguire in that he seemed fitting to critique Maguire's expressionist style but he was also credibility for the galler and his kudos would not go amiss for the curatorial prestige of the Republic's most professional showing gallery. It is that the Douglas Hyde does not sell on the floor, does not display the prices of works which further enhance it's pseudo-museum status. The trompe d'oeil here entails being seen as exhibits rather than commodities. The small private galleries unabashedly display prices and might be open to flattery for this honesty. However, the Douglas Hyde's pragmatic gallery policy can and has led to reproachments of tokenism in its sanctomonious if mortal urge to educate its public.



And so Kuspit wrote the essay. Public attendance totalled 14,000, on a par with a show of Roy Lichtenstein's work. The essay which Kuspit produced is arguably a poor effort when compared to other critiques he has published in catalogues: I can particularly think of two artists, both women involved in a feminist art practice, Nancy Spero and Adrian Piper. For a graphic if sometimes excessive account of Kuspit's critique of Piper for her catalogue essay, consult Real Life Magazine (No. 17/18) and the open letter Piper addresses to her critic.<sup>36</sup> Kuspit seems to excel in psychologizing the work of women especially. This is undoubtedly due to the need for Kuspit to refit his criteria for assessing art during the 1970's when the women's art movement must have forced his hand. Kuspit alludes to hysteria, case history, her problem - filled life, a microcosm of the female problem - problematic and symptomatic of sickness, and on and on. But I have to give space to Piper who blows the whistle on the cataloguer's transferral of charges to the artist;

"On the phone you emphasised repeatedly that I should not take what you said personally, and that you meant to be discussing my 'artworld persona', not me. But you do not make this distinction anywhere in your essay."

However, if Kuspit's dealings with a periphery of the female is found lacking, so too is his articulation of Brian McGuire's "artworld persona".<sup>37</sup>

Again due to the pressures to produce accomodating criticism, Kusput got together a technique for discussing feminist art. If his evolved critique in this area is traced from the beginning of the 1970's to his recent writing on feminist art, it is glaringly obvious that his attitudes to creating were pushed by pressures of secure employment and publishability. Psychoanalysis saved the day for Kuspit, but no more than that, as he has never got away from a limited and limiting post-Freudianism.

But it surely is here that Kuspit's backing of expressionist art takes an ironic twist. I am reminded of his suggestion that Nancy Spero adopted the male ego in order to produce her Codex Artaud. This masquerade continues to be emphasised by Kuspit with regard to successful feminist art. So it is of no surprise that Kuspit should reduce this male ego back into the legendary male tractitia of expressionism. In interview with Joan Fowler for Circa magazine in 1987, Kuspit clearly states than an optimum understanding of Expressionism is psychoanalytically orientated. His simplistic Freudian beliefs that the libido is the driving force behind all social human activity - including art making - resolves experience to representations of repression and expression. He further emphasises the reverential individuation of psychoanalysis by telling us, 'Expressionism is unique ... a single 'visionary' image". He may well show some self-consciousness in his use of parenthesis on the



questionable term 'visionary'. With great authority, he sums up Maguire's will-to-art as 'an allegorical struggle between life and death forces .. (which) .. is overlaid with the struggle for individual self expression in a repressive society".

35. Donald Kuspit, Brian Maguire, catalogue essay, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin 1988.
36. Adrian Piper, 'An Open Letter to Donald Kuspit', Real Life (17/18)
37. Ecoing ... "she uses Artaud's persona like a tragic mask. The critic has missed "psychodrama" in Spero's method, the analytic method in the so-called madness of her becoming a masculine being". op. cit. no. 32.



Kuspit is not simply alluding to a 'repressive society' which is a western capitalist white androcentric society. Or if he is, he is neglecting to include the context in which Maguire's 'persona' comes in contact with the cultural forces of violence which are politically particular and complex in Irish culture and society. He attempts to locate the local in his appraisal of 'Portrait' (1984):

"Without the gun, the figure would be a cipher, even with its beret and sunglasses, which make merely bohemian sense without the gun".

Kuspit is endeavouring to involve theories of cognition and the production of signs. For Kuspit the presence of the gun in this one painting signifies the violence, "in the more inherently dramatic figures ... without that indwelling violence - that identification of violence - they would be non-entities". So also, Kuspit would suggest the anger in Brian Maguire as that which lends to him the persona of repressed drives and the cipher for, 'the lie (of) the happiness of Irish life, (betraying) the fabled Irish romanticism. In this, they are violently adversarial".

"Incidentally its catalogue and bookshop sales generated £10,000 worth of business in 1988, a neat figure in these stringent times".

(Brian Fallon, Chief Critic of the Irish Times, assessing the success of the Douglas Hyde)<sup>38</sup>

For more insight into Kuspit's attitude, the interview conducted by Joan Fowler for Circa magazine in 1987 is helpful although Kuspit still manages to beat around his personal burning bush. The Word is accordingly flappant. Kuspit reacts to the assertion that many left wing critics accuse him of hedging his bets. The reason left wing critics would be interested is presumably the shared point of historical placement for Marxists in Kuspit's reference to Hegel's dialectic and philosophical thought. However, D.K. accuses much left wing criticism of being dogma and the description of this dogma as 'symptom' castrates its ultimate art interest' (my emphasis).

38, Brian Fallon, Irish Times, Wednesday, 11th January 1989.



When asked by Joan Fowler about the role of art criticism as a platform used by art critics, Kuspit is cynical of the assertion that art criticism could function as a platform or indeed should function as such a site.

"... there is no text without a context. I am interested in psychoanalytic orientations as an extension of dialectical thinking but not exclusively ... You've (the artist) got to know the history of modernism and know the history of the 'Old Masters' and there is no way out of that".<sup>39</sup>

Well now, the 'Old Masters' are alive and kicking. Let me put forward this quote from Berenson in Art on Trial:

"... you must in art criticism distinguish between the instantaneous impression, then, the attempt to control it by all sorts of other detailed evidence and then further effort to get a kind of evidence which would appeal to the other man, after you have convinced yourself ...".<sup>40</sup>

39. Donald Kuspit in interview with Joan Fowler, Circa no. 33 (March/April 1987) pp. 13 - 18.

40. op. cit. 3.



Fowler's suggestion that Kuspit "shape the art to fit the theory" may be answered better by Berenson quoted than Kuspit seems able; "I, (Kuspit) accept the fact that I am an active receiver"<sup>41</sup>

Kuspit appears to use the paradoxes or 'dynamics' of philosophical art criticism in order to escape being cornered into a position where the method of interpretation itself is the content insofar as it is the mediation of meaning.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Kuspit in his concluding remarks proscribes against art functioning ideologically. Kuspit's desire for transformation is reformatory. Such a position is frequently advocated by those who believe in the priority of the individual governed in their actions by legislation. Legislation then is the recognition of the specific only as it is generalised which creates and reproduces its own conditions of description and prescription. This utilitarian policy provides for the greatest number of people being kept happy.<sup>43</sup>

So then, is this the fuel to the fire of a periphery such as Irish art criticism reproduced in the catalogues and reviews by Irish art critics? Is the desire for credibility a utilitarianism which in its function as a fantasy of understanding allows the desire for credibility to overrun the responsibility of maintaining what is radical about critical theory.

It is the danger that the conceptual jargon developed in a philosophical art critical practice is easily reduced to the key (buzz) words of peripheral academia, to an extent largely populist in local sites of criticism.

41. op. cit. no. 37.
42. Re'dynamic' is associated with Julia Kristeva's management of paradox, allowing for superficially contradictory statements to produce a bridge of meaning over the troubled waters of an otherwise self-negating claim.
43. Irish Marion Young, Impartiality and the Civic Public, Feminism as Critique, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Drucilla Cornell. Cambridge : Polity : 1987.



The problems of legitimation ring loud around the auditoriums of today's critical and theoretical institutions. The judicial function of 'advocacy in a court of law' is maintained by academic debate. Indeed, the (mis)recognitions of the problem are a necessary faculty of any contemporary institution of culture. The product of a combination of academic and political motivations, their articulation of value in the visual arts, presses upon its own conventions to establish a discourse bound to a definite criterion of scientific reliability and the poetics of creativity.

That the critical authoring and authenticity of a legitimating commentary has shifted from its original class bias is largely true. However, the hierarchy of who is in-the-know and who is not has been maintained. Critical virtue is not beyond virtuoso hype. Publishing companies and acclaimed universities are the weight behind the relevant academics.

Taste too is burgeoning and masquerading as criticality. The prerogative of the accultured bourgeoisie, it is depressingly displayed in the aims and management of The Museum of Women in the Arts. 'Around the corner from the White House in Washington D.C., U.S.A., the Museum is staffed by voluntary women workers'(not an authentic use of the term). These women are the same women who patronise the Museum, attend its openings, etc. Wealthy women of independent means and the wives of business men, diplomats and cultural attaches to Washington are the consumer capitalist cultural 'selves' equivalent to the women of the Enlightenment. 'In Renaissance courts, Queens and Duchesses served as patrons and ambassadors of culture. Women of the Salons served as active arbiters of public taste in the arts and sciences'. (My emphasis).

Briefly, rather than be misunderstood, I am not offering this comparison to be a model or example of any decadence or decadent art criticism or notion of a feminisation of culture, I certainly do not ... humbug ... I do grieve over the appropriation of space opened by the feminist movement in the U.S. to build a monument to the de-radicalisation of the absence of women in art and in history writing and the edification of liberal America's art market forces. The contemporary worth of the latter analogy is its reference to the dependency of professionalised criticism and art production upon the capitalist 'drive' of



modern economics. I suggest, then, that the professional cultural 'class' as shown in the Modernist practices of the '60's is re-emphasised again in the late '80's. As centralisation is the order of the day, so is the privatisation of the artist, and the critic - the mechanism is the same as I have described of psychoanalysis. Notions of value in the mainstream are point-blank, first and foremost fiscal, with worthiness orbiting as nostalgia or detoxed left alternativeness. The oppositionality of radical critical theory is alternative because it is peripheral not because it is viable - thus it is portrayed by the official right wing ideologies of western liberal humanist democratic 'dynamic'. The speaking subject is centred in language of the mainstream while the peripheries are maintained as tangential in their dumb 'otherness'.

The analogy of the psycho-analyst to the critic, I am thinking of one critic in particular, is consolidated in the 'privatisation' of both professions which produce social and critical theory. The superiority in a transference situation lends itself rather complacently to the repositioning of the mythical fixed private individual as the priority of social activity and productive worthiness.

The involvement of psychoanalytic theory (in the light of Lacan) with culture has primarily been with literary criticism, structuralism and the propriety of the Modernist paradigm. Such is the crisis in naming a new department in professions which provoked David Carrier to coin the phrase 'Artwriting'.



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