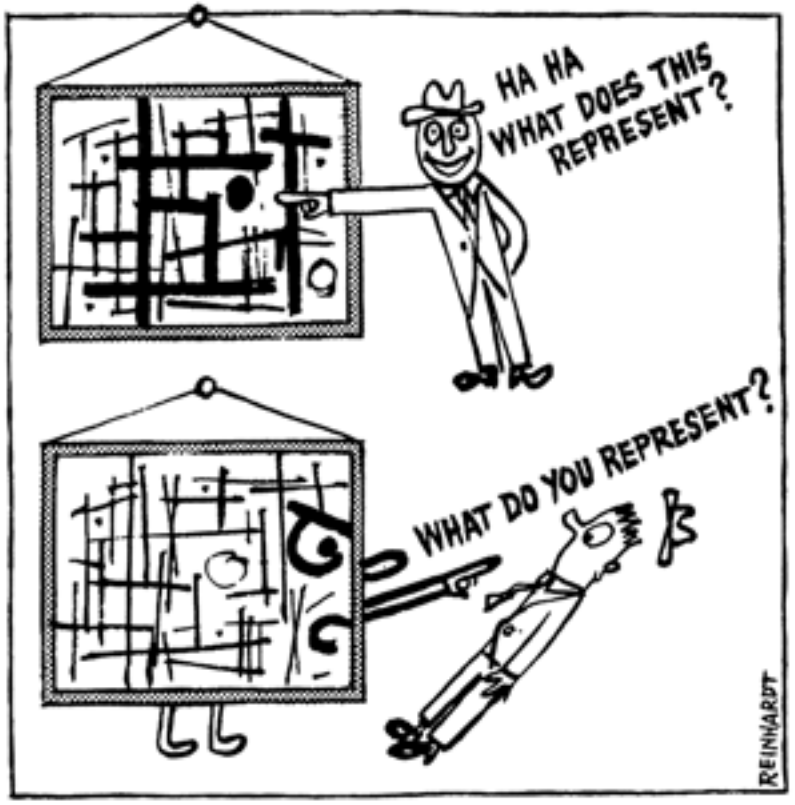
Why Art Criticism?
A Reader

Beate Söntgen and
Julia Voss, eds.

HATJE
CANTZ

Why Art Criticism?



Ad Reinhardt, detail from "How To Look at a Cubist Painting," *PM*, January 27, 1946

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Foreword

Studies on art criticism's history and definition—on its protagonists, its significance, its death or at the least its frequently diagnosed crisis—are many and manifold. But few books have gathered the actual raw materials: the critiques themselves, which, after all, are what make the concept of art criticism tangible, lending it concrete form and vitality. This reader thus gives such form to the phenomenon of art criticism via critical exercises and practices. Forty-six voices of art criticism are collected here from across four centuries. The gathered texts have appeared in both analogue and digital form: in newspapers, magazines, journals, and blogs; in popular media, catalogues, and academic publications. From the outset, we wish to avoid any misunderstanding: this reader may begin with the eighteenth century and be arranged in chronological order, but our aim is not to narrate a history or genealogy of art criticism on the basis of particular examples. We are rather seeking to provide a taxonomic account of the variety of art criticism's forms and roles.

From our perspective, the need for a reader of this sort is clear for two reasons. First, art criticism is often discussed in the singular, but it is historically and presently as varied as art itself. Only by setting out the many and manifold roles and forms, styles, modes of writing, genres, and the diversity of its criteria and domains to which it lays claim is it possible to arrive at a more precise notion and definition of art criticism. Second, and from an entirely pragmatic perspective, the reader offers material for examination and analysis in art-historical pedagogy, and as a suggestion or even possible model of contemporary and future forms of art-critical writing.

Soon after we decided to compile a reader several years ago, it became clear that it could only become reality as a collaborative project, undertaken with other experts. The present reader is thus based on an international workshop—Cultures of Critique: Forms, Media, Effects, held at Leuphana University Lüneburg in 2019, to which we invited specialists from various geographical and intellectual backgrounds to offer brief commentaries on the art critics of their choice. They explained why the chosen texts are important to them, what the texts stood for at the time of their writing, and what they stand for now. The approaches taken to the various critical positions are therefore personal ones, as the brief introductions to the source texts in this book show. To avoid resorting to texts already rendered into English and canonized, we chose to commission a number of new translations. While the publication has brought further art-critical positions into play, we do not seek to provide a systematic index or even a complete overview. Based on the contributors' suggestions, our book encourages readers to engage with points at which art critics of various provenance intersect, and also where they differ from one another. We ask readers delve into texts from eighteenth-century Paris; nineteenth-century London and Dresden; the twentieth century's New York, Buenos Aires, Delhi, Moscow, East Berlin, and Beirut; and the Kinshasa, Nairobi, and Tokyo of the twenty-first. Please also note that while all commentaries consistently use American English, in the source essays we have chosen to retain idiosyncrasies regarding translations, academic citation formats, punctuation, and regional forms of English, all of which underscore the sources' heterogeneity.

Our profuse thanks are due to all the authors collected in this volume for their contributions, both for the art critics they have selected and for the illuminating commentaries they have written. We would also like to thank our publisher, Hatje Cantz, for their keenness to include the reader in their program, and Lena Kiessler for her outstanding support in putting together the volume. Kimberly Bradley has been an inspiring and thoughtful editor. The reliable hands of Catharina Berents held together the many threads of this intricate and complex undertaking. We owe much gratitude to the translators Angela Anderson, Brian Richard Bergstrom, Ralph de Rijke, Tiziana Laudato, Stuart L. A. Moss, Francis Riddle, Matthew James Scown, Bela Shayevich, and Katherine Vanovitch, and to book designer Neil Holt, picture editor Jennifer Bressler, and production manager Vinzenz Geppert. For their support, we would like to thank the student research assistants of Leuphana University's Research Training Group—Jette Berend, Marie Lynn Jessen, David Mielecke, and Katharina Tchelidze—and the group's office manager, Stephanie Braune. Finally, particular thanks are due to the German Research Foundation for its generous financial support.

Beate Söntgen and Julia Voss
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Why Art Criticism?

An Introduction

Right now, the voices calling for criticism, value-apportioning evaluation, and intervention are urgent and loud, in both social and academic contexts. "On the life of criticism"—the title of Ruth Sonderegger's[1] study, highlights the topicality, vibrance, and power of criticism while also shifting the focus away from the definition of terms and concepts and toward critical practices. But art criticism—a critical praxis that has mostly sought for and established relations to social phenomena—has had a difficult time of late. Even if no form of criticism is ever without its own crisis, recent attacks have been particularly intense, striking at the very foundations of art criticism. This introduction explores those attacks, with the hope that the panorama of art-critical positions collected within this reader can also vividly demonstrate the value of art criticism for the present time.

A peak in these condemnations occurred in a 2002 round table hosted and printed by—of all publications—the journal *October*;[2] which, since its launch in 1976, has been one of the most important organs for critical reflection on art. *October* does not merely cultivate a politically engaged style; it also defends the use of strong criteria. And it is these which (according to depressing reports) have disappeared, having gone the same way as categories of classification. Some lament that art criticism has lost its independent voice; has become an art-industry mouthpiece and even a scribe to the royal court of the arts; mere applause for the artistic voices that the critic is promulgating. Given the dominance of the market in the artistic field, it has been said that neither discursive space nor knowledge of context are still required. There are no longer any utopian visions, and thus no social ones.[3] Criticism would therefore always participate in inescapably problematic processes of canonization that affirm social conditions and serve the market in equal measure. The skills, responsibilities, and fields of critics, historians, and curators have intermingled; art criticism has allegedly lost its ability to make judgments, reduced at best to interpretation. Many critics are blamed with having literary pretensions that compete with art and seek to seduce through language. Criticism thus either acts in sales mode, or fosters romantic notions of fusing the critical text with the object of critique.

October has made a significant contribution to focusing attention on art's potential to be critical in its own right. The *criticality* of artistic work quickly became the key marker of value in art.[4] Art criticism has perhaps dug its own grave: if art is critical, who needs art criticism? What can it add to art? What can criticism produce that art cannot produce itself? Beyond this, artists themselves also write, framing their work critically and formulating critiques of other artistic positions. The fact that criticality has become a market value in art does nothing to improve things.

This fierce attack from a Western flagship of art criticism is not the only one the latter has been forced to endure. Feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial arguments have, with good reason, cast doubt on one of criticism's core tasks—judgment—while to the same degree raising questions about the related concept of the Enlightenment notion of the subject.[5] The rational, Western, overwhelmingly male subject of criticism has apparently suppressed the physical, sensual, and affective elements of the critical act, disparaging them as purely subjective. An awareness of the ever-varying situatedness of those speaking would therefore be indispensable; this awareness, however, would make it possible to define the generally valid criteria that are required to make a judgment, at least in terms of any potential generalizability. There also remains the urgent question of who is ultimately permitted to speak for whom, and in whose name,[6] especially when it comes to socially engaged criticism.

So what is to be done with art criticism? Especially in view of the widespread diagnosis that the transformative power of (art) criticism is disappearing, Isabelle Graw and Christoph Menke assert its necessity and value; the freedom that can be found in an act of distancing that is

1 Ruth Sonderegger, *Vom Leben der Kritik: Kritische Praktiken – und die Notwendigkeit ihrer geopolitischen Situierung* (Vienna, 2019).
2 "Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism," *October* 100 (Spring 2002), pp. 200–28. The discussion featured George Baker, Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, Andrea Fraser, David Joselit, Rosalind Krauss, James Meyer, John Miller, Helen Molesworth, and Robert Storr.
3 In *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York, 2005), Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello go even further in speaking of the recuperation of all critical enterprises within the artistic field. A differing perspective can be found in Helmut Draxler, *Gefährliche Substanzen: Zum Verhältnis von Kritik und Kunst* (Berlin, 2007).
4 See Irit Rogoff, "From Criticism to Critique to Criticality," *transversal* (January 2003), https://transversal.at/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en (accessed August 18, 2021).
5 See Sonderegger 2019 (see note 1); Katy Deepwell, *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies* (Manchester and New York 1995); and Deepwell, ed., *Art Criticism and Africa* (London, 1998).
6 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Lawrence Grossberg et al., eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), pp. 271–313.

aware of its own participation and even its entanglement in what is being criticized.[7] The relational concept of criticism they have proposed and that Graw has further pursued in collaboration with Sabeth Buchmann involves reflection on one's own discriminations—both in the sense of discerning and distinguishing differences as part of the critical act, and in terms of the exclusions that each act of differentiation must entail.[8] Given that art criticism refers to a subject matter—the artwork—that is in turn the result of a sensual, reflexive act that articulates itself in specific materials and media, we feel art criticism has a unique potential to take what has often been excluded from the Western notion of criticism—the affective, the physical and sensual, the involved—and showcase it as part of the critical act.

There have been intense discussions in recent years on how to reach transculturally informed understandings of an art that is subject to globalized conditions. Only recently, however, has the significance this expanded art field has for art criticism come into consideration.[9] The journal *Contemporary And* is named here as an example, initially presenting and discussing art from African perspectives. It has since founded a second magazine focusing on Latin America.[10] Our reader is an attempt to bring diverse voices and perspectives into conversation with each other, but to do so without claiming to be comprehensive, nor to provide a systematic index or illustrate the history of art critique through model texts by its most important purveyors. We see this reader neither as an expanded canon, nor as a new anti-canon. Our aim is rather to create a renewed awareness of the historical and contemporary plurality of art critique; to demonstrate its value and diversity as a genre and highlight what is has to offer to social discourses.

Criteria

Among the authors included in this volume, Stefan Germer emphasizes the necessity of forming criteria, even if the problematic nature of generally binding critical yardsticks and normative decrees is very much at the fore. For Germer, art criticism's role and function is to make distinctions and review them—and even go so far as to evaluate them—in relation to both artistic-aesthetic questions and sociopolitical ones. This not only addresses the content-form debate—that is to say, the question of how the subject matter of an artwork is determined by the form and medium of representation or placed in a certain light;[11] it also speaks to an aporia, vital among other things to the formation of criteria, that exists within modern art or at least what is regarded as avant-garde. This aporia plays an important role in many of the contributions gathered here: namely, the question of how artistic criteria should be linked to political issues.[12]

Within the avant-gardes of around 1900, there were demands for art to intervene in life—even to merge with it—and to therefore counteract the impotence of an increasingly self-referential art. But to have any kind of potency as art, even the avant-garde must assert a right to autonomy; to an at least relative self-governance and liberation from any other purposes and vested interests. However, this results in a disentanglement from the social and a loss of potency. The question of the relationship between art and politics has vehemently returned to the stage, especially with the attention paid to global entanglements in the artistic field.[13] This is linked to the challenge of defining the criteria that can still be used to assess artistic works, given that the possibility of making normative justifications and the fiction of independent criticism have both reached their ends.

Another important criterion is in which (socio-)political issues are picked up on, made visible, problematized, or criticized in artistic work. Whether sexism (Annemarie Sauzeau-Boetti, Adwait Singh), racism, or post-Fordist labor relations (Melanie Gilligan, Aruna D'Souza); commodity fetishism (Walid Sadek), social change, and environmental destruction (Arlene Raven); territorial struggles (Helia Darabi, Lothar Lang, Marta Traba, Igor Zabel), or war and its cultural consequences (Ješa Denegri, Sadek, Luis Vidales); art criticism's task in each case involves highlighting the means and persuasion with which each of these sets of issues is articulated.

7 See Isabelle Graw and Christoph Menke, *The Value of Critique: Exploring the Interrelations of Value, Critique, and Artistic Labour* (Frankfurt am Main, 2019).
8 Sabeth Buchmann and Isabelle Graw, "Kritik der Kunstkritik," *Texte zur Kunst* 113 (March 2019), pp. 33–52.
9 See, for example, Anneka Lenssen et al., eds., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (New York, 2018).
10 The two publication platforms *Contemporary And* and *Contemporary And América Latina* launched in 2013 and 2018 respectively; they are accessible at https://contemporaryand.com/ and https://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/.

11 See Armen Avanessian et al., eds., *Form: Zwischen Ästhetik und künstlerischer Praxis* (Zurich and Berlin, 2009).
12 Likewise relevant is Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Göttingen, 1974).
13 As examples of the recent glut of studies, see Christian Kravagna, *Transmoderne: Eine Kunstgeschichte des Kontakts* (Berlin, 2017); Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham and London, 2015). On historic conceptions and the problematic nature thereof, see Susanne Leeb, *Die Kunst der Anderen: "Weltkunst" und die anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne*, (Berlin, 2015).

Art critiques that place form in the foreground of their reflections cannot dispense with commentary on what has been expressed in a particular form, even when they insist on a pitiless self-reflection on artistic materials, media, and procedures. The spectrum ranges from the communication of creative, spiritual power (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Roger Fry) or authenticity (Victor Hakim) to expressions of the body (Roland Barthes, Patrick Mudekereza, Francis Ponge) and questioning the appropriateness of a form in relation to its function (Clemens Brentano/Achim von Arnim).

A differently incisive criterion for exploring the interconnection of art and politics is the social value imparted via artistic form and artistic practice. Even where self-exploration through aesthetic experience—as it was understood from an Enlightenment perspective—is seen critically (Gilligan, Peter Gorsen), experiences of community are showcased either through artistic production itself (Coomaraswamy), via collective artistic practices (Raven, Vidales), or via shared experiences in the (self-)perception of artists (Denegri, Sauzeau-Boetti).

From his place on the left of the political spectrum, Peter Gorsen supports the provocative position that art should not be at the direct service of society. Rather than advocating for the rejection of the culture industry, he pleads for pleasure—and explicitly not in the sense of bourgeois pleasure in art. Gorsen instead demands new, (un)productive forms and experiences through art, to be generated within the framework of non-instrumental networks. He thus addresses a criterion utilized in equal measure both by art criticism and in artistic-critical practices: particularly addressing the cultural, institutional, and economic conditions in which art is produced, received, and distributed (Lawrence Alloway, Mary Josephson, Oscar Masotta, Hito Steyerl, Julia Voss).

We have covered only some of the central criteria (and these by no means represent all art-critical criteria) deployed in this volume. They hold their ground with remarkable persistence, from the beginnings of modern criticism in the mid-eighteenth century up until the present, and across cultural, political, and intellectual divides.

Tasks and Roles

Having problematized judgment as a task of art criticism, the question arises of what other or further roles it has, given that many critics remain wedded to judgment as one of criticism's core roles. Hal Foster made a number of suggestions in the aforementioned *October* round table;[14]

14 See "Round Table," *October* 100.

art criticism could, for instance, work archeologically to bring what has been buried, suppressed, and forgotten to light. Not only a memory-related role, but also a political one would therefore be evoked. By changing the focus and shifting the subject of attention, art criticism can also govern processes of canonization—and is also able to shed light on the justifications and categories behind these processes. According to Foster, art criticism can also take an explorative approach, researching figures at the margins of the art field and, in the most high-impact case, even establishing a new paradigm for evaluating art. With such a tableau of tasks, however, the already-blurred line between art criticism and art history becomes even hazier.[15] This reader, however, does not seek to mark boundaries; its aim is rather to make visible the variety of tasks and roles that art criticism could assume.

It remains a key function of each form of criticism and of art criticism in particular to intervene in artistic and social fields and to raise objections against any such restrictions. Given the increased attention being paid to the globality of the art field, many art critics feel it important to give hitherto neglected tendencies and regions their own voices (Darabi, Sadek, Zabel), to probe territories anew (Denegri, Traba, Vidales), to highlight hierarchical structures, power imbalances, and inequalities (D'Souza, Traba), and to unfold new narratives at the same time (Darabi, Allan Sekula, Zabel).[16] Two Latin American critics illustrate how these evaluations of hegemonic structures in the art field can or should be countered. Traba separates the Latin American art scene into open and closed areas; into areas open to Western influence, and ones that have insisted on their own autonomy. While she preferred "closed areas" due to the identity-creating power of art (see also Coomaraswamy), Vidales advocated a generation later for an opening to US artistic practices—an opening the critic hoped would lead to a revitalization of art in Colombia and an increased attention being paid to Colombian art, as part of an art understood as universal. This optimism about globalization is one that Vidales shares with a number of others, such as Zabel or, to a more limited extent, with Darabi. Critiques of humanism can be found from decolonial, feminist, and queer perspectives (Coomaraswamy, Sauzeau-Boetti, Singh, Lynne Tillman). This is a context in which representational

15 See *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 78.1 (2015) on "Der Ort der Kunstkritik in der Kunstgeschichte" (art criticism's location in art history).
16 See, for example, Melina Kervandjian and Héctor Olea, eds., *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?* (London and New Haven, 2012), which appeared as part of Yale University Press's Critical Documents of 20th Century Latin American and Latino Art series.

or identity-centered arguments are often accompanied with the assertion of stigmatized or neglected categories—the artisanal, material, and spiritual (Coomaraswamy, Sauzeau-Boetti), the affective or the physical (Mudekereza, Raven, Tillman).

Art criticism's mappings of the artistic field often come in the wake of wars and the formation of new political systems (Denegri, Lang, Sadek); here, art criticism is ascribed not only a documentary/archival role (Vardan Azatyan, Hakim, *New Culture* magazine, Sekula), but also a very diagnostic, politically orienting, or even world-changing one (Alexander Rodchenko, Mark Sinker, Sergei Tretyakov). This empowerment of the collective—against the grain of the humanist, Enlightenment notion of subject-creation through art—is a task frequently assigned not just to art, but also to art criticism: the latter would thus be capable of emphasizing the *assembling* power of art—its ability to bring people and concepts together—and its transcultural potential, but also its potential to create cultural, national, or political identities (Coomaraswamy, Denis Diderot, Fry, *New Culture*, Raven, Sauzeau-Boetti, Traba, Vidales) and to create networks (Alloway).

These notions and processes are often viewed critically, however. The social and economic conditions and exhibition politics under which art operates are analyzed from institutional-critical positions, as are the ways the various protagonists understand their own roles. Events behind the scenes are brought to light—how commissions are granted, for instance (Berta Zuckerkandl). Exclusions in the form of gatekeeeping, value-generating network creation (Claire Bishop, Masotta), and infrastructural constraints (Mudekereza) are addressed, as are race, gender, and class discriminations (D'Souza, Josephson, Peter Richter, Sinker, Singh) and questions of representation itself (Darabi, Rodschenko,Traba). Institutional issues are often spoken to in art criticism written by artists; these critiques provide a theoretical background to the artistic works of their authors, while at the same time explaining it, expanding upon it, defending it, or even undermining it (Masotta, Gilligan, Steyerl).

The translation of artistic issues and the strengthening of their impacts was already present as a concern in early art criticism (Diderot, Brentano/von Arnim) and is taken up anew and in different ways in the twentieth century (Barthes, Fry, Julius Meier-Graefe). Others set a different emphasis by observing where artists and critics share common strategies and alliances—whether shared concepts, values, and ideas (Sauzeau-Boetti, Sadek), comparable economic situations (Ponge), or the blurring of lines between roles with the aim of disrupting hierarchies. Some critics focus resolutely on addressing a broader public audience

(D'Souza, Hakim, Lang, Tillman, Traba), something which depends not least on the publication media and also impacts their styles of writing. This also demonstrates how valuable art criticism is in discussions of social structure and urgent societal and political questions.

Styles and Modes of Writing

The question here is which manners, forms, genres, styles, and modes of writing art criticism can use to bring its interventions and its value to bear. All criticism is bound to the forms and media in which its descriptions appear,[17] but criticism does not merely reconstruct its subject matter; it is rather the modes of representation, the styles, and the media that highlight particular aspects of the subject matter and the conditions surrounding it, placing it in a new light. Criticism always spotlights, frames, and illuminates its subject in a specific way; in doing so, it also creates visibility for the process of critiquing and the situation in which it takes place. Criticism thus implicitly or explicitly also addresses the techniques and processes of critical description; these are in turn participants in the constitution of the subject matter as it appears within critique. This means that when the mode of description changes, criticism's subject matter changes, too.

By way of its subject matter alone, art criticism knows the power of representation, as one of its tasks is evidently to describe and examine that very power. One of this reader's aims is to highlight the diversity of art-critical modes of description and/or representation and their effects; we thus asked the authors of the commentaries to speak to the peculiarities of the various styles and modes of writing they selected. According to Roland Barthes, these differ in the following ways:[18] style is a "self-sufficient language"[19] which, based on linguistic conventions and grammatical norms, unfurls from within the writer. Regarding the mode of writing—Barthes's translators called this *literary form*—we speak rather of the relation between the written and the social; Barthes speaks of "literary language transformed by its social finality,"[20] the "morality of form."[21] Art criticism refers to an artwork, to a materialized approach to the world that has taken form; and it addresses an audience. This means that art criticism is writing that refers to an outside in two ways, yet can be shaped by an author's will to write in a particular style.

17 See Sami Khatib et al., eds., *Critique: The Stakes of Form* (Berlin and Zurich, 2020).
18 See Roland Barthes, "What Is Writing?," in *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston, 1985), pp. 9–18.
19 Ibid., p. 10.
20 Ibid., p. 14.
21 Ibid., p. 15.

The relationship between self-sufficient modes of expression and reference to the subject matter, world, or society always varies in how it plays out. In the early days of art criticism around 1800, it was often understood as a space in which the artwork resonated (Diderot, Brentano/von Arnim); a notion that one hundred years later is taken up again in the specific literary form of *Kunstschriftstellerei* (Meier-Graefe), whose German appellation can only loosely be translated as "literary art writing"; but it is also deployed in critiques that understand form as a medium of communication (Coomaraswarmy, Fry). Here, the authors are concerned with amplifying the message hidden within the work of art, doing so via expression that is both linguistically adequate and conscious of form. This is proof at the same time of the author's will to pursue style; of the author's descriptive skill. Last but not least, a form of criticism that linguistically reinforces the qualities of an artistic work in this way also serves as a testament to the validity of the author's own understanding of art; discussed in emphatic terms, the work demonstrates the impact art can have, with the impact corresponding to the critic's own criteria (Diderot, Meier-Graefe). Another form of resonance is the recording of bodily, affective reactions to an artistic work; reactions that are then showcased as a factor within the critique (Barthes, Mudekereza, Raven, Richter, Tillman). Ponge, for his part, anthropomorphizes painting to highlight parallels in the material, social, and economic contingencies of criticism and its subject matter.

During the twentieth century, there emerged a demand to find (or invent) new modes of writing that would be adequate to developments in contemporary art, thus enabling art criticism to play a greater role in debates beyond art (Bataille, Raven, Sekula). This can come in the form of modes of writing not previously regarded as criticism, such as autofiction or fictional criticism (Sinker, Tillman); text/image constellations (Bataille, *New Culture*, Sekula); or unusual print type, via which the changes in criteria, argument, and modes of writing are also shown visually. Another tried and tested method is for the critic to write in voices other than their own. With his alter ego Mary Josephson, Brian O'Doherty exposes the patriarchal power structures of the art field. With Berta Zuckerkandl's leak, it is not the critic herself who provides information; rather, it is letters sent by figures whose cultural policies are being denounced by their own writing.

Differing modes of writing are also conditioned by varied political contexts. In times of revolution and upheaval, art criticism can become a form of agitation, bringing art itself along with it in pursuit of shared political goals (Tretyakov). In political systems that make offensive

interventions into the artistic field, smart language games can evade the censor, without abandoning the mission of criticism. Ultimately, and as previously outlined, the mode of writing in each form of art criticism is ultimately produced by its media and genres.

Genre and Media

Art critiques can diverge massively in style. They can be written dispassionately or vehemently, descriptively or as judgments, exuberantly or minimally, academically or lyrically. There are whole worlds between—for example—the passionate literary style of Denis Diderot in the eighteenth century, the consciously adopted first-person perspective of Lothar Lang in twentieth-century East Germany, and the matter-of-fact analyses of Patrick Mudekereza in the twenty-first century. Some authors are keen to distance themselves from the artists they write about, whereas others, like Viktor Hakim in Beirut, speak about them in more informal terms and call them by their first names.

New approaches to writing have continually been introduced and tested throughout the history of art criticism, with the differences of form being at times so pronounced that it pays to divide the texts into genres. Examples of this are numerous in this reader: the Yugoslavian critic Ješa Denegri chose the interview as a way to do formal justice to the diversity of art currents in Yugoslavia in 1989, both in one-on-one dialogue and in conversation with larger groups. In 1808, German poets Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim invented a fictitious dialogue in order to approximate a painting by Caspar David Friedrich. Around a hundred years later, Zuckerkandl in Vienna got involved in a dispute about paintings Gustav Klimt had been commissioned to create by the city's university; for this she chose the form of the leak, publishing excerpts from letters addressed from the ministry to Klimt and not intended for public consumption. Yet another hundred years later, Australian art critic Jennifer Higgie deployed the serial format to give visibility to women artists: on Instagram, she posts an image of a female artist every day, to an audience of 60,000 followers. Even the recommendations website Yelp has been used as a platform for art criticism.[22]

By looking at genre, it becomes possible to avoid the trench warfare in which different approaches to art criticism have been pitted against each other. One example of this being how value-apportioning art criticism was elevated to the status of art criticism's definitive genre, with less

22 In 2014, Brian Droitcour briefly used Yelp, a platform typically used for rating restaurants and shops, as a home for pithy critiques of museum exhibitions in New York. Droitcour is now an editor at *Art in America*.

normative approaches being interpreted as signs of decline.[23] There is no doubt that the review is an important genre; it is represented here by a Julia Voss article on an exhibition by the painter Markus Lüpertz. Other genres still have value, however; in a catalogue text for the artist Bernard Réquichot, for example, Roland Barthes gave up on any form of distancing and instead sought forms of intense empathy in the work, body, and life of the artist. In this instance, we feel it makes sense to also designate catalogue texts as a possible form of art criticism. Often, these are bound too closely to requirements set by those commissioning them—galleries or museums—for them to count as art criticism; Barthes's catalogue texts, however, went well beyond friendly, scholarly contemplation; in doing so, he created the genre of immersive, literary, bodily resonance. This is quite different to the genre of the chronicle as represented by the critic Hakim and his gesture of plain description, largely absent of empathy and value judgment.

The various genres and formats—interview, fictional dialogue, leaks, serial chronicles, catalogue texts, reviews—are closely interlinked with the platforms they appear on. The form is made possible by developments in the media landscape, from the emergence of magazines and daily newspapers to the mass media and social media. Each new medium opens possibilities that were not present before, thus also begetting new genres. To name another example from this reader: in the Netherlands, "Anonymous" (an unnamed female blogger) nestled herself exclusively in the comments section of articles published online, where she trolled against the poor representation of women. These interventions took place within the literary field, but could easily be transferred into the art field and have thus been included here. The expanded prospects of a "hypermediatized" cultural journalism are set out by Kenyan author Enos Nyamor.

A look further into the past shows that the media history of art criticism began unfolding long ago. The changing alliances that emerged in the wake of the varying forms of publication are also reflected in this reader. We begin with one of the founding figures of art criticism, Denis Diderot, who wrote his critiques on behalf of Friedrich Melchior Grimm and for a select, mostly courtly audience across Europe. He was guided in this by the notion that exhibitions, like theater, served to educate the people and nurture good citizens.[24] It was no longer members of art academies and rather laypersons, like Diderot himself, who selected the

23 See James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism* (Chicago, 2003).
24 Eva Kernbauer, *Der Platz des Publikums: Modelle für Kunstöffentlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert*, (Göttingen, 2011)

criteria of discernment and judgment. The example of art would thus be used as a means of training critical thinking and public debate. This is an idea that also appears in the bourgeois salon culture that emerged around 1800, modeled on the courtly culture.[25] Their mouthpieces were journals and newspapers such as the *Berliner Abendblätter* that Bretano and von Arnim wrote for, and later the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, in which texts by Zuckerkandl appeared. Fin-de-siècle art critics had other organs of publication at their disposal, from art trade catalogues to specialist art journals.[26]

The so-called *Kunstschriftsteller*innen*—art writers of a more literary bent—are a consequence of this publishing boom, which also included art books issued in large editions. The excerpt from *The Indian Craftsman* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy means that academic publishing as a possible medium of art criticism is also represented in the reader.

Further stages come into play over the course of the twentieth century. The fact that artworks can now be easily and affordably reproduced in high quality has spawned an international glut of new, specialist art magazines with various aims, from entertainment to scholarly debate. The latter has long been typified by *Artforum*, founded in 1962 and the journal in which Claire Bishop's essay originally appeared.

Art critics' careers can also be boosted by visual media like television, as with Argentine critic Marta Traba. The explosion of media in which art is critiqued or at the very least reported on was recounted a few years ago on the basis of the Documenta exhibition series, founded in 1955 in Kassel. By the time Okwui Enwezor curated the eleventh edition of Documenta in 2002, 15,000 journalists from Germany and around the world were accredited to cover the event.[27] Those keen to take the trouble to index these journalists' pieces by media and genre would have had much material to discover.

The transitions between old and new media are fluid at times; almost all publications that began in analogue form now also have digital versions. Still, there are a number of differences that must be sketched

25 Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford, 1993); overviews of the history of art criticism can be found in Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices* (Boston, 2013); Lionello Venturi, *History of Art Criticism*, (New York, 1936); and Gérard-Georges Lémaire, *Histoire de la critique d'art* (Paris, 2018).
26 On the significance of art criticism in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Cynthia A. White and Harrison C. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York, 1965).
27 See Jasmin Schülke and Jürgen Wilke, "Multiple Medialisierung: Eine Fallstudie zur Kasseler documenta (1955–2007)," *M&K Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* 59 (2011), https://doi.org/10.5771/1615-634x-2011-2-235 (accessed August 23, 2021).

out, at least in brief. With digitization and social media, voices previously unable to get past the editorial departments of printed publications are now able to have their say. This has led to debates previously pushed to the margins of art criticism being returned back to the center. Founded in 2009, the online art magazine *Hyperallergic* offers a daily-updated and explicitly politically engaged art criticism that tackles issues of race, gender, and classism as a matter of course. Generally, it can be said that digitization has brought with it a widespread politicization of art criticism. Activism and art criticism are also moving closer together.[28] Given these developments, it seems to us all the more necessary to examine to what extent and for which reasons the various genres can be regarded as art criticism.

The Art Market and Networks

At an art criticism conference, Jörg Heiser spoke of the "sink-or-swim" strategy that accompanies gentrification. People who work in the "worst-paid artistic fields," he claimed, "are compelled to keep the greatest possible number of fields of activity open and to slip into changing roles."[29] This pressure clearly also weighs on art criticism. Cities with particularly high densities of art institutions are often particularly expensive; rents in many instances have risen astronomically in recent years, while the fees paid to art critics have continued to fall. With the exception of the small number of editors on long-term contracts, very few people can make a living by writing about art. Art historians have often sprung into this gap, teaching at universities in the daytime and moonlighting as writers for art magazines. This necessarily leads to academization of art criticism, both in its style and in its content.[30]

There are also many freelancers who curate in galleries, museums, or at biennials, while writing art criticism at the same time. According to one widespread view, these many subordinations and precarious relations have made art criticism less polemic, less up for the fight. The texts in our reader shed a different light on the situation. Critics like Lawrence Alloway have taken networks as the subject matter of their writing, addressing at the same time their own entanglements within them. Other critics like Marta Traba, Annemarie Sauzeau-Boetti, and Arlene Raven call for nothing less than the formation of new networks or collectives, allowing them to become more assertive, more vocal, or more just. Finally, there are also tactics in which the author's own identity is discarded; this can be read as a creative means of escaping the constraints of subjugation. Within our reader, the alter ego Mary Josephson and Anonymous could be cited as examples of this.

Just a few years ago, a foreword to an art criticism essay would have been obliged to include a statement on how collectors' strong financial capital had long since replaced the power of critics' opinions. A new generation of collectors had been described as mega-collectors, their emergence coming hand-in-hand with an increasing number of private museums. The intensive economization of the art field and the rise of art as an asset class have been described many times.[31] Nevertheless, the situation has developed in an unexpected manner: on the one hand, because the relation between art and money has been anything but a niche topic, having been set out and analyzed in many ways by Bishop and other writers. The need for business models and art production to be examined in tandem is shown with great humor, via the example of the Japanese scholar Yuriko Furuhata.

On the other hand, we have witnessed how trustees at large museums have been compelled to resign and how institutions have refused to accept donations due to overwhelming criticism. Without the internet and activists' digital platforms, these phenomena would be inconceivable. These activisms are accompanied by an art criticism that, taking its cure from institutional critique, examines economic relations and connections in far greater detail than in previous decades. In this reader, Gilligan elaborates on what the cultural logic of financialization means for art production, while D'Souza examines economic inequalities and the degree to which institutions practice what they preach.

As comprehensive as it has become, this reader is still pieced together from fragments of a multifaceted phenomenon. In constellation, however, we hope that they still shed some light on the value of art criticism, both within and beyond the artistic field.

28 Julia Voss and Norman L. Kleeblatt, "Art, Criticism, and Institution," in Danièle Perrier, ed., *Art Criticism in Times of Populism and Nationalism: Proceedings of the 52nd International AICA Congress, Cologne/Berlin 1–7 October 2019*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2021, pp. 187–202.

29 Jörg Heiser, "Strategischer Multi-Optionalismus: Untiefen eines postkritischen Konzepts," in Ines Kleesattel and Pablo Müller, eds., *The Future Is Unwritten: Position und Politik kunstkritischer Praxis* (Zurich, 2018).

30 On the relationship between art criticism and university art history departments, see the spirited early plea made by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, "Wie werde ich ein Kunstkritiker," in Ruperto Carola: *Zeitschrift der Vereinigung der Freunde der Studentenschaft der Universität Heidelberg* 13 (1961), no. 29, pp. 107–111.

31 There is an enormous range of literature on this. See, for example, Heike Munder and Ulf Wuggenig, eds., *Das Kunstfeld: Eine Studie über Akteure und Institutionen der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, (Zurich, 2011); Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton, NJ and Woodstock, Oxfordshire, 2011); and Georgina Adam, *Dark Side of the Boom: The Excesses of the Art Market in the 21st Century* (London, 2017).

Passion, Performance, and Soberness: Denis Diderot

Beate Söntgen

The *Salons* written by Denis Diderot (1713–84) are considered to be founding texts of modern art criticism. He wrote them on behalf of Friedrich Melchior Grimm for his publication *Corréspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, a handwritten magazine that was distributed to a select circle throughout Europe by diplomatic post in order to evade censorship. His writings were detailed commentaries on the Salons, the yearly exhibitions of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture) from 1665 onward, which were held in the Louvre's Grande Galérie starting in 1699. Diderot's art criticism represented only a small part of his work; he also wrote novels and stories, as well as dramatic theory and stage works. With Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, he organized and authored the *Encyclopédie*. His conviction that empirical and rational observation should be accompanied by a sensual approach to the world that includes perception can be found in all of his writing, which distinguishes itself through its brilliantly rhetorical approach.

Between 1759 and 1781, Diderot wrote a total of nine articles under the title "Salons"; the densest are those from the seventeen-sixties. The fact that Diderot did not have the works in front of him while writing led to some imprecision. The form was not that of today's art criticism, which is written for a large and anonymous newspaper audience. His readership was Europe's political and intellectual elite, who were collectors as well, like Catherine II and Friedrich the Great. Diderot did not hesitate to recommend his most beloved artists to potential collectors.

Diderot himself was on a threshold. While coming from a culture of the emphatic contemplation of paintings, he was committed to the Enlightenment agenda of critical, distanced reflection. In his Salons, forms of passionate involvement with the subject are interwoven with cool observation, self-reflexively illuminating both the artists' and his own practice. Diderot advocated for a kind of painting that would, like theater, portray everyday bourgeois life as an example, because the representation of what is familiar to the viewer touches them more profoundly and thus can better instruct them.

One of Diderot's distinctive characteristics is the relationship of his writing style to the representations of the images he critiques. His writing adapts to what is being portrayed. His linguistic expressions evoke the themes, structures, and effects of the images in question, accentuating their particularities. The images thus become the expressive proof of Diderot's theories of representation. It was in this way that Diderot's impassioned descriptions of Jean-Baptiste Greuze brought out the emotionality of the viewer that he demanded, while showing how this was used for "moral education." In the Salons on Chardin, however, a different, dispassionate speech oriented toward techniques of painting prevails, in which sociological aspects of art such as studio know-how and the conditions of production and exhibition become relevant. The focus here is on paint instead of subject matter, and new optical discoveries amalgamate with topoi from classical art literature, such as proximity to nature and vitality.

For Diderot, art criticism is not only the passionate and considered writing about an object. In his texts, which are arranged like theatrical scenes, the emotional entanglements in the image are presented just as convincingly as the reflexive refractions when passing judgment. Diderot articulates contradictions in imaginary dialogues, and in monologues he observes his own emotional reactions. The salons are a form of performative critique that shows itself and makes its methods transparent. To this effect, they conform to an ideal of self-reflexivity as a characteristic of modern culture, but without excluding sensual and even physical implementations of aesthetic experience and the writing on them.

There are three particular qualities in these texts that for me constitute an inspiring model for contemporary writing on art: First, the polyphony with which Diderot multiplies the perspectives on a particular work; second, his regard for the corporal in his reflection and writing; and third, his knowledge that the form of critique plays a role in the constitution of its object.

Essays on Painting

Denis Diderot

from the Salon of 1763: Jean-Baptiste Greuze

This Greuze here is really my kind of person....

Most of all, I like the genre. It is moral painting. What, has not the paintbrush been devoted long enough to debauchery and vice? Should we not be content to finally see it compete with verse drama to touch us, to teach us, to correct us, to invite us to be virtuous? Have courage, my friend Greuze! Moralize in painting, and do so always. When you are about to leave this life, there will not be a single one of your compositions that you will not be able to recall with pleasure. For were you not at the side of this young girl who, gazing at the head of your *Paralytic*, cried out with a delightful vivacity *Oh, my Lord, how he touches me; but if I look upon him again, I believe I will cry*; if only this young girl were mine! I would have recognized her by this wave of emotion. When I saw this eloquent and pitiful old man, I felt, like her, my soul becoming tender and tears ready to fall from my eyes....

Everything is related to the main figure and what is being done in the present moment, and what was done in the previous moment....

From the top to the bottom, there is nothing that does not evoke the pity felt for the old man.

There is a large sheet hanging on a rope, drying. This sheet has been very well conceived, for the subject of the painting and for the effect of the art. One suspects that the painter was quite deliberate in painting it with such broad dimensions.

Everyone present has precisely the degree of purpose that corresponds to their age and character. The number of figures gathered in a relatively small space is very large; however, they are present without confusion, because this master excels above all in ordering his scene. The color of the flesh is true. The fabrics are well cared for. There is no unease of movement. Each person is focused on what they are doing. The youngest of the children are cheery, because they have not yet reached the age when one feels. The shared feeling of sadness among the older ones is expressed very powerfully. The son-in-law seems to be the most affected, as it is to him that the patient addresses his speech and his gaze. The married girl seems to listen with pleasure rather than pain.

If not extinguished, the attention of the old mother is at least desensitized; and that is entirely natural. *Jam proximus ardet Ucalegon* ("Close by, Ucalegon's house is already burning"—Virgil, *Aeneid*). She can no longer promise herself any consolation other than the same tenderness from her children, for a time not far away. And then comes the age that hardens the fibers, dries out the soul.

Some say that the paralytic is leaned too far back, that it is impossible to eat in this position.

He does not eat, he speaks, and one would be ready to raise up his head.

They say it was his daughter's duty to present him with food, and his son-in-law's to raise his head and pillow, because skill is asked of one and strength of the other. This observation is not so well founded as it seems at first. The painter wanted his paralytic to receive aid marked by the one he was least entitled to expect it from. This justifies the good choice he made in favor of the girl; it is the real cause of the tenderness on her face, her gaze, and of the speech he addresses to her. Displacing this figure would have meant changing the subject of the painting. To put the girl in the son-in-law's place would have been to overthrow the whole composition: there would have been four women's heads in a row,



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Paralytic (Filial Piety)*, 1763

and the succession of all these heads would have been unbearable....

It is said that this artist lacks fertility; and that all the heads of this scene are the same as those of his painting *The Village Bride*, and those of his *The Village Bride* the same as those of his *Peasant Reading to His Children*....

If (the artist) encounters a head that strikes him, he will get down on bended knees before the owner of this head to lure them into his studio. He observes constantly, in the streets, in the churches, in the markets, in shows, on walks, in public meetings. When he meditates on a subject, he obsesses over it, follows it everywhere. His very character suffers as a result. He takes his character from his painting; he becomes brusque, sweet, subtle, caustic, gallant, sad, cheerful, cold, hot, serious or crazy, depending on the thing he projects....

Ah, Monsieur Greuze, that you are different from yourself, when it is tenderness or purpose that guides your brush. Paint your wife, your mistress, your father, your mother, your children, your friends; the others, however, I advise you to send back to Roslin or Michel Van Loo.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Girl with Dead Canary*, 1765

What a pretty elegy! What a pretty poem! What a fine idyll Gessner[1] would make of it! It could be a vignette drawn from this poet's work.

A delicious painting, the most attractive and perhaps the most interesting in the Salon. She faces us, her head rests on her left hand. The dead bird lied on top of the cage, its head hanging down, its wings limp, its feet in the air. How natural her pose! How beautiful her head! How elegantly her hair is arranged! How expressive her face! Her pain is profound, she feels the full brunt of misfortune, she's consumed by it. What a pretty catafalque the cage makes. How graceful is the garland of greenery that winds around it!

Oh, what a beautiful hand! What a beautiful hand! What a beautiful arm! Note the truthful detailing of these fingers, and these dimples, and this softness, and the reddish cast resulting from the pressure of the head against these delicate fingers, and the charm of it all. One would approach the hand to kiss it, if one didn't respect this child and her suffering. Everything about her enchants, including the fall of her clothing, how beautiful the shawl is draped! How light and supple it is! When one first perceives this painting, one says: Delicious! If one pauses before it or comes back to it, one cries out: Delicious! Delicious! Soon one is surprised to find oneself conversing with this child and consoling her. This is so true, that I'll recount some of the remarks I've made to her on different occasions.

Poor little one, how intense, how thoughtful is your pain! Why this dreamy, melancholy air? What, for a bird? You don't cry, you suffer, and your thoughts are consistent with your pain. Come, little one, open up your heart to me, tell me truly, is it really the death of this bird that's caused you to withdraw so sadly, so completely into yourself? ... You lower your eyes, you don't answer. Your tears are about to flow. I'm not your father. I'm neither indiscreet nor severe. Well, well, I've figured it out, he loved you, and for such a long time, he swore to it! He suffered so much! How difficult to see an object of our love suffer! ... Let me go on; why do you put your hand over my mouth? On this morning, unfortunately, your mother was absent; he came, you were alone; he was so handsome, his expressions so truthful! He said things that went right to your soul! And while saying them he was at your knees; that too can easily be surmised; he took one of your hands, from time to time you felt the warmth of the tears falling from his eyes running the length of your arm. Still your mother

1 Johann Matthias Gessner (1691–1761). German humanist and translator/adaptor of Latin literature.

didn't return; it's not your fault, it's your mother's fault ... My goodness, how you're crying! But what I say to you isn't intended to make you cry. And why cry? He promised you, he'll keep all his promises to you.

When one has been fortunate enough to meet a charming child like yourself, become attached to her, give her pleasure, it's for life ... And my bird? ... My friend, she smiled ... Ah, how beautiful she was! If only you'd seen her smile and weep! I continued: Your bird? When one forgets oneself, does one remember one's bird? When the hour of your mother's return drew near, the one you love went away. How difficult it was for him to tear himself away from you! ... How you look at me! Yes, I know all that. How he got up and sat down again countless times! How he said goodbye to you over and over without leaving! How he left and returned repeatedly! I've just seen him at his father's, he's in charmingly good spirits, with that gaiety from which none of them are safe ... And my mother? ... Your mother, she returned almost immediately after his departure, she found you in the dreamy state you were in a moment ago; one is always like that. Your mother spoke to you and you didn't hear what she said; she told you to do one thing and you did another. A few tears threatened to appear beneath your eyelids, you either held them back as best you could or turned away your head to dry them in secret. Your continued distraction made your mother lose her patience, she scolded you, and this provided an occasion for you to cry without restraint and so lighten your heart. Should I go on? I fear what I'm going to say might rekindle your pain. You want me to? Well then, your good mother regretted having upset you, she approached you, she took your hands, she kissed your forehead and cheeks, and this made you cry even harder. You put your head on her breast, and you buried your face there, which was beginning to turn red, like everything else. How many sweet things this good mother said to you, and how these sweet things caused you pain! Your canary warbled, warned you, called to you, flapped its wings, complained of your having forgotten it, but to no avail; you didn't see it, you didn't hear it, your thoughts were elsewhere; it got neither its water nor its seeds, and this morning the bird was no more ... You're still looking at me; is it because I forgot something? Ah, I understand, little one, this bird, it was he who gave it to you. Well, he'll find another just as beautiful ... That's still not all; your eyes stare at me: and fill up with tears again. What more is there? Speak, I'll never figure it out myself ... And if the bird's death were an omen . . . what would I do? What would become of me? What if he's dishonorable? ... What an idea! Have no fear, it's not like that, it couldn't be like that ... —Why my friend, you're laughing at me; you're making fun of a serious person who amuses himself by consoling a painted child for having lost her bird, for having lost what you will? But also observe how beautiful she is! How interesting!

I don't like to trouble anyone; despite that, I wouldn't be too displeased to have been the cause of her pain. The subject of this little poem is so cunning that many people haven't understood it; they think this young girl is crying only for her canary. Greuze has already painted this subject once. He placed in front of a broken mirror a tall girl in white satin, overcome by deep melancholy. Don't you think it would be just as stupid to attribute the tears of the young girl in this Salon to the loss of her bird, as the melancholy of the other girl to her broken mirror? This child is crying about something else, I tell you. And you've heard for yourself, she agrees, and her distress says the rest. Such pain! At her age! And for a bird! But how old is she, then? How shall I answer you, and what a question you've posed. Her head is fifteen or sixteen, and her arm and hand eighteen or nineteen. This is a flaw in the composition that becomes all the more apparent because her head is supported by her hand, and the one part is inconsistent with the other. Place the hand somewhere else and no one would notice it's a bit too robust, too developed. This happened, my friend, because the head was done from one model and the hand from another. Otherwise this hand is quite truthful, very beautiful perfectly colored and drawn. If you can overlook the small patch that's a bit too purplish in color, it's a very beautiful thing. The head is nicely lit, as agreeably colored as a blonde's could be; perhaps she could have a bit more relief. The striped handkerchief is loose, light, beautifully transparent, everything's handled with vigor, without compromising the details. This painter may have done as well, but he's never done anything better.

This work is oval, it's two feet high, and it belongs to Monsieur de La Live de La Briche.

After the Salon was hung, Monsieur de Marigny did the initial honors. The Fish Maecenas[2] arrived with a cortege of artists in his favor and admitted to his table; the others were already there. He moved about, he looked, he registered approval, disapproval; Greuze's *Girl With Dead Canary* caught his attention and surprised him. That is beautiful, he said to the artist, who answered him: Monsieur I know it; I am much praised, but I lack work. —That, Vernet interjected, is because you have a host of enemies, and among these enemies there is someone who seems to love you to distraction but who will bring about your downfall. —And who is this enemy? Greuze asked him. —You yourself, Vernet answered.

2 *Poisson Mécene*: Marigny's family name was Poisson, which means "fish" in French.

Here is the real painter; here is the true colorist. There are several small paintings by Chardin in the Salon. Almost all of them depict various fruits surrounded by the accessories of a meal. They are nature itself; the objects all stand out from the canvas in such a way that the eye is ready to take them for reality itself. The one you see as you walk up the stairs is worth particular attention. On top of a table, the artist has placed an old Chinese porcelain vase, two biscuits, a jar of olives, a basket of fruit, two glasses half-filled with wine, a Seville orange, and a meat pie. I feel I need to make myself another pair of eyes when I look at other artists' paintings; to see Chardin's I need only keep those that nature gave me and use them well.

If I wanted my child to be a painter, this is the painting I should buy. "Copy this," I should say to the child. "Copy it again." But perhaps nature itself is not more difficult to copy. The fact is, that porcelain vase is made of porcelain; those olives really are separated from the eye by the water they are immersed in; you have only to put out your hand and you can pick up those biscuits and eat them, that orange and cut it and squeeze it, that glass of wine and drink it, those fruits and peel them, that meat pie and slice it.



Jean-Baptiste Simeon Chardin, *Still-Life with Olive Glass*, 1760



Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *The Ray*, 1728

Here is the man who truly understands the harmony of colors and their reflections. Oh, Chardin! It is not white or red or black you mix on your palette, it is the very substance of things themselves, it is air and light that you take on the point of your brush and apply to your canvas.

After my child had copied and recopied this piece of work, I should set him to work on the same master's *The Ray*. The object itself is disgusting, but that is the fish's very flesh, its skin, its blood: the real thing would not affect you otherwise. Monsieur Pierre, (you are a famous painter), but when next you go to the Academy, look carefully at this canvas and learn, if you can, the secret of using your talent to redeem the distastefulness that is present in certain natural objects.

This magic is beyond our understanding. There are thick layers of paint in some places, laid one on top of the other, that make their effect by glowing through, from the bottom upward.

In other places, it is as though a vapor had been breathed onto the canvas; in others still, a light foam has been thrown across it. Rubens, Berchem, Greuze, Loutherbourg could all explain this technique to you better than I, for all of them can also make your eyes experience its effects. If you move close, everything becomes confused, flattens out, and vanishes. Then as you move back, everything takes shape and re-creates itself again. I have been told that Greuze, upon coming into the Salon and noticing the Chardin painting I have just described, looked at it, then heaved a profound sigh as he walked on: a eulogy both briefer and more valuable than mine.

In Conversation: Clemens Brentano, Achim von Arnim

Johannes Grave

On October 13, 1810, the newspaper *Berliner Abendblätter* published a review which later aroused lasting interest, particularly in more recent art historical and literary studies. The subject of the short text was Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Monk by the Sea*, which at the time was being shown at the annual exhibition of the Berlin Academy. While Kleist's review is quite famous, the first draft of this text, written by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim, has remained to this day in the shadow of the more pointed, finally published version. Their text exemplarily stands for an art criticism that does not focus on explaining the characteristics, qualities, and shortcomings of a work of art; neither does it concentrate on describing the viewer's experience in front of the painting as precisely as possible. Rather, the two authors have chosen the strategy of finding verbal and literary equivalents for essential moments of this aesthetic experience—and these equivalents gain their profile and quality precisely through being conscious of the fundamental difference between linguistic text and vivid picture.

In a few words, "that which I should have found within the picture I found instead between the picture and myself, namely a claim that my heart made on the picture, and a rejection that the picture did to me by not fulfilling it," Brentano and Arnim plainly state that Caspar David Friedrich's painting was not conceived to aim at illusion or even immersion, but unambiguously revealed itself as a picture—a flat, confined, painted, man-made artifact. It is only in this context that Kleist's monstrous metaphor, which was added later—"the viewer feels as though his eyelids had been cut off"—wins its explosive force. In the combination of Brentano's, Arnim's, and Kleist's observations, a fundamentally new concept of the power of pictures emerges. The picture no longer wins power over its viewers through deceptively similar depiction, production of effects of presence, or seductive fidelity to reality, but rather gains this effect as an artifact that ostentatiously reveals its status as a painting, instead of veiling it in favor of the depicted subject's appearance. While Kleist's text only affirms this fundamental insight, Brentano's and Arnim's dialogues attempt to make this partial loss of control accessible and tangible to readers. Using linguistic and literary devices, they recreate and regenerate what the observer can experience in the sensory perception of the picture itself, with three important verbal and literary strategies: 1) phonetic and semantic shifts, 2) figures of supplementation, and 3) moments of shifting from external references to self-reference; or from the depicted objects to the means of depiction.

1) Especially in the first dialogues, Brentano and Arnim deliberately, almost obtrusively, work with equivocations, ambiguous references, and confusion between phonetically similar but connotatively different words. In the first dialogue, a gentleman characterizes the painting as "infinitely deep and sublime." His companion, however, transfers the attributes from the medium of representation and the painter's supposedly expressed "sensibility" to the depicted subject, in this case the sea—a shift of reference that also implies a shift in meaning of the attribute "deep." Such shifts are conspicuously frequent in the dialogues. They are not mere gimmicks. Rather they draw attention to the fact that the relations between sign and signified become uncertain, and demonstrate how the material of language itself, the sounds and letters, begins to become independent. Through genuinely linguistic devices, the *glissements* reproduce what the viewer can also experience in front of the picture. The viewer's perception is prompted to shift between the experience of a space of indeterminate depth, and the view of the picture plane structured by strips of color. Phonetic and semantic shifts in the dialogues indicate that what is said and meant is diverted to the material of language and its own inherent dynamics.

2) Friedrich's picture is empty in a disturbing or provocative way. Brentano's and Arnim's dialogues address this emptiness by imagining the ways in which viewers try to remedy this deficiency by supplementing it—one beholder thinks of amber fishers in the foreground. Then the scenery is temporalized, so that noise and gusts of wind can be heard and felt, the sun can flash at least briefly, and a sail appears. Thus, the dialogues act out how, almost painfully, gaping blanks are filled. At the same time the conversations show that these fillings are entirely contingent, even arbitrary. Again, a dialectic of claim or appeal, and rejection or refusal, is at work.

3) External references turn into self-reference, in which attention is directed from the depicted to the depiction itself. The dialogues' efforts to come to an apt interpretation

or establish a reliable connection between what is portrayed and its deeper meaning, do not guide the reader from the picture to an external context, but to seemingly circular self-references and figures of mise en abyme. The text accentuates that Friedrich's painting requires the observer to consciously perceive and reflect on its status as an image.

These strategies demonstrate the new power of images in emphasizing that the perception of the picture has to be regarded as a temporally extended, often self-contradictory process with incalculable performative effects, in which the oscillation between the represented and the mode of representation is of particular importance. The task of evaluating the work of art is subordinated to the aim to recreate, through literary means, the specific form of aesthetic experience in front of Friedrich's painting.

For today's reflection on art criticism, the text is of interest because it aims to activate, in correspondence with Walter Benjamin's concept of Romantic art criticism, the temporal and performative effects of literary representation in order to find an equivalent to comparable effects in painting.

In Front of a Friedrich Seascape with Capuchin Monk

Clemens Brentano, Achim von Arnim

It is a magnificent thing to gaze off into a boundless watery in infinite solitude by the sea, under a sullen sky; and this has to do with having travelled there, having to return, yearning to cross over, finding one cannot, and while missing all signs of life, nevertheless hearing its voice in the roar of the surf, the rush of the wind, the drift of the clouds, the lonely crying of birds: it has to do with an appeal from the heart, which nature herself rejects. All this however is not possible in front of the picture, and that which I should have found within the picture I found instead between the picture and myself, namely a claim that my heart made on the picture, and a rejection that the picture did to me by not fulfilling it, and so I myself became the Capuchin monk, the picture became the dune, but that across which I should have looked with longing, the sea, was absent completely. To come to terms with this strange feeling I listened carefully to the remarks of the various observers around me, and pass them on as appropriate to this picture, a backdrop in front of which there must always be activity, in that it allows of no response.
[A lady and gentleman approach, he apparently highly intelligent. The lady looks in her program.]
LADY: Number two. Landscape. Oils. How do you like it?
GENT: Infinitely deep and sublime.
LADY: You mean the sea. Yes, it must be very deep, and the monk is indeed very sublime.
GENT: No, Frau War Minister. I mean the sensibility of our incomparably great Friedrich.
LADY: Is it so old that he too could have seen it?
GENT: Ah, you misunderstand. I mean Friedrich the painter. **Ossian's harp is audible in this picture*.[1] [They pass.]
[Two young Ladies]
FIRST: Did you hear that, Louise? That is Ossian.
SECOND: No no! You misunderstand. That is the *ocean*.
FIRST: But he said it was playing a harp.
SECOND: I see no harp. It is really quite grisly to look at. [They pass.]
[Two Connoisseurs]
FIRST: Grisly indeed. It's all completely gray, as this man paints only the driest subjects.

1 Asterisk and italics signify phrases used by Kleist.

SECOND: You mean, this man paints wet things very drily.
FIRST: I'm sure he paints them just as well as he can. [They pass.]
[A Tutoress with two *demoiselles*]
T: That is the sea at Rügen.
FIRST D: Where **Kosegarten* lives.
SECOND D: Where the groceries come from.
T: Why must he paint such a sad air? How beautiful if he had painted an amber fisher in the foreground.
SECOND D: I'd like to fish up a beautiful amber necklace of my own somewhere. [They pass.]
[A young mother with two blond children and two gentlemen]
FIRST GENT: Magnificent! Only this man can express a soul in his landscape. What great individuality in this picture: the high truth, the solitude, the gloom of the melancholy sky. He certainly knows what he paints.
SECOND GENT: And paints what he knows, feeling and thinking and then painting.
FIRST CHILD: What is it?
FIRST GENT: It is the sea, my child, and a monk walking beside it and feeling very sad not to have a clever little boy like you.
SECOND CHILD: Why isn't he dancing around in front of it? Why doesn't he wag his head like the ones in the lantern shows? That would be even more beautiful.
FIRST CHILD: Is he like the monk that tells the weather outside our window?
SECOND GENT: Not exactly, my child, but he too tells the weather in a way. He is Oneness amid the All-encompassing, **the lonely center in the lonely circle*.
FIRST GENT: Yes, he is the heart and soul and consciousness of the whole picture in itself and of itself.
SECOND GENT: How divinely inspired the choice of that figure is, nor merely a relative measure for the vastness of the scene, he himself is the subject, he is the picture, and as he appears to be dreamily lost in the view as in a sorrowful reflection of his own isolation, the enclosing sea, void of ships, which binds him like an oath, and the barren dune, as joyless as his own life, seem to be symbolically drawing him out again, like some desolate, self-prophetic plant of seashore.
FIRST GENT: Magnificent! To be sure. You are quite right. (*To the Lady*) But, my dear, you have said nothing at all.
LADY: Oh, I was feeling so at home with this picture, it is so touching, so genuine in its effect, but while you spoke it became just as obscure as

when I went for a walk by the sea with our philosophical friends, hoping for nothing more than a fresh breeze and a sail, and for a glimpse of the sun and the thunder of the surf; but now it's all like one of my nightmares and longing for my homeland in my dreams. Let us go on. It is too sad. [They pass.]
[A Lady and her Escort]
LADY: Great, inconceivably great! **It is as though the sea were thinking Young's* Night Thoughts.
ESCORT: You mean, as though the monk were immersed in them?
LADY: If only you weren't always making jokes and disrupting everyone else's feelings. Secretly you feel exactly the same way, but you like to ridicule in others what you revere in yourself. I said it is as though the sea were thinking Young's *Night Thoughts*.
ESCORT: And Mercier's *Bonnet de Nuit* and Schubert's *Glimpses of Nature's Night-side*, as well.
LADY: I can only answer with a parallel anecdote. When our immortal Klopstock wrote for the first time in his poems that "the rosy dawn was smiling," Madame Gottsched said, when she read it, "What sort of a mouth does she have?"
ESCORT: Certainly none as beautiful as yours when you tell it.
LADY: What a bore you are!
ESCORT: Then Gottsched placed his mouth on hers in return for the bon mot.
LADY: And I'll give you a night-cap for yours, you tiresome man.
ESCORT: I'd prefer a view of *your* nature from its "night-site."
LADY: How vile!
ESCORT: Oh, if only we two were standing there like that monk.
LADY: I'd leave you and go to him.
ESCORT: And beg him to unite us in marriage?
LADY: No, to throw you into the sea.
ESCORT: And you would remain with the monk and seduce him and disrupt the whole picture, as well as all his "night-thoughts." Women! In the end, it is you yourselves who destroy what you feel. By telling so many lies you eventually utter the truth. If only I were that monk, gazing so eternally alone at that dark, forbidding sea, which **lies before him like the Apocalypse*! Then, dearest Julie, I would eternally long for you and eternally miss you, for this longing is the only fine emotion in affairs of love.
LADY: No, my dearest! In art as well! If you say such things, I'll leap into the water after you and leave the monk all alone! [They pass.] All this while a tall, mild-mannered gentleman had been listening with signs of impatience. I stepped accidentally on his toe, and as though I had thereby

solicited his opinion, he answered: “How fortunate it is that the pictures have no ears. They would have drawn their veils long ago. The public seem to suspect a lurking immorality, as though the pictures were pilloried here for some crime or other, which the viewers must guess at.” “But what do you think of the picture?”

“It pleases me to see that there are still landscape painters who attend to the wonderful conjunctions of season and sky, which produce such gripping effects even in the most barren of regions. But of course I would much prefer for the painter to have not only the right feeling but the talent and training as well to reproduce it faithfully; and in this respect he stands as far behind certain Dutch painters of similar scenes as he surpasses them in the mood of his conception. It would not be difficult to mention a dozen pictures where sea and shore and monk are better painted. The monk from any distance looks like a brown smudge, and if I had wanted to paint one at all, I would have stretched him out in sleep, or placed him kneeling in all the humility of prayer or contemplation, so as not to obstruct the view of the spectators, on whom the sea obviously makes a stronger impression than that tiny figure. If someone then decided to look about for inhabitants of the shore, he could still have expressed such opinions as some people here, with presumptuous familiarity, so loudly imposed on everyone else.”

These words so pleased me that I tagged along home with the gentleman and shall remain there indefinitely.

Feelings Before Friedrich’s Seascape

Heinrich von Kleist

from *Berliner Abendblätter*, October 13, 1810

A magnificent thing it is, in infinite solitude by the sea, under a sullen sky, to gaze off into a boundless watery waste. But this has to do with having travelled there, having to return, yearning to cross over, finding one cannot, and, though missing all signs of life, yet the very voice of life, in the roar of the surf, the rush of the wind, the drift of the clouds, the lonely crying of birds: this one does hear. It has to do with an appeal from the heart and a rejection, so to speak, from nature herself. This however is not possible in front of the picture, and that which I should have found within the picture I found instead between the picture and myself, namely an appeal from my heart to the picture and a rejection by the picture; and so I myself became the Capuchin monk, the picture became the dune, but that across which I should have looked with longing, the sea, was absent completely. Nothing could be sadder or more discomfited than just this position in the world: the single spark of life in the vast realms of death, the lonely center in the lonely circle. The picture with its two or three mysterious objects lies before one like the Apocalypse, as though it were thinking Young’s *Night Thoughts*, and since in its uniformity and boundlessness it has no foreground but the frame, the viewer feels as though his eyelids had been cut off. Yet the painter has doubtless opened a new path in the field of his art; and I am convinced that, through his powers, a square mile of Prussian sand, with a barberry bush and a crow beruffled forlornly in it, would have the effect of an Ossian or a Kosegarten. Yes, were such a painting made with its own chalk and water, the foxes and wolves, I believe, would be set howling by it, which is doubtless the strongest praise one could lavish on this kind of landscape. But my own feelings about this wonderful picture are too confused; and therefore, before daring to speak them out more fully, I have tried to learn something by listening to the comments of those who, in pairs, pass before it continually from morning to night.



Caspar David Friedrich, *The Monk by the Sea*, 1808–1810

Emotional Collectivities: Julius Meier-Graefe

Stephanie Marchal

In many ways, Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935) was a transgressor of borders. His life and works oscillated between Germany and France, between various arts, media, and materials, and between tradition and avant-garde. The terrain on which his activity was most sustained was art and cultural critique. During the days of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic, he categorized and canonized the increasingly diverse range of artistic streams, using art to seismograph the condition of society and seeking to offer a way of orienting worldviews and aesthetics in times of national rivalries. Friendships with artists like Edvard Munch, Henry van de Velde, and Max Beckmann, fruitful collaborations with collectors, art dealers, and museum directors, and his indefatigable commitment to Art Nouveau, Impressionism, and Neo-impressionism made him an influential agent of modernism.

In the following passage, the critic describes with his typical literary verve his encounter with Édouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (The Luncheon on the Grass) (1863). This passage is to be found in his powerful *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Modernen Kunst* (1904) *(Modern Art: being a contribution to a new system of aesthetics*, 1908); with this, his magnum opus, he attempted in the early twentieth century to raise German readers' awareness of French modernism. The dense passage gives an impression of his art-critical style.

Before our internal reader's eye, Meier-Graefe unfolds a scene and in doing so trenchantly highlights the case-by-case nature of the act of criticism. He performs his contemplation of the artwork, showing himself in the process of viewing as a perceiving and reflecting subject. He attempts to comprehend what is capturing his attention and why, entering into a conversation with himself about what he faces. The monologue conducted is not one that digresses from the artifact, with the painting merely providing an occasion for solipsistic digression. The artifact instead challenges a specific experience that it decisively shapes: in order to sensitize to this specificity, Meier-Graefe lets the painting speak—quite literally—in its own voice.

For Meier-Graefe, what the painting expresses is the experience of alienation. But rather than explicitly stating this and describing it in terms of concepts and metalinguistics, Meier-Graefe demonstrates that same mode of sensation and perception in his scenic presentation. He is himself the flaneur who discovers this "outdoor scene" from which he, despite his sympathetic participation, keeps his distance: a distance he requires to be able to reflect on what has been experienced, to appraise it, and ultimately to carry it into a personal, communicable form, into a scene like the one unfurled here.

By showing the work in its effect, description results in value judgments. What Meier-Graefe demonstrates is the painting's capacity to communicate even the most personal, subjective experiences. Key to this is the ability of the artist (and ultimately also that of the critic mediating the artwork) to mediate participation and distance to each other, to objectify feeling into form.

In this oscillation between distanced reflection and emotional participation, the open-end or "spiral" structure of critique (Michel Foucault) becomes visible—underlined by Meier-Graefe's remark that Manet's painting always remains enigmatic to him, though he feels himself to know it "like an intimate friend." He thus opens a space of negotiation for points of view. More than a means of producing and communicating knowledge, criticism is a medium of persuasion and assumption of perspectives: its "how," its modes of mediation, are crucial. By narrativizing an object that is before everyone's eyes, a shared reference point common to all, Meier-Graefe exhibits points of view as points of view. Subjectivity and objectivity thus become discussable as positings and concepts. As a symbolic space, "art" functions as a test tube for mediating the diversity of modern perspectives and, by aiming at tentative agreement, for creating (temporary) emotional communities.

Kunstschriftstellerei—a specific critical practice that in the German-speaking world began around 1900 to build on the French art criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which remained tremendously impactful in the Anglophone world until Clement Greenberg—has played a significant role in shaping the Western canon of modern art. It can be described as a resonance phenomenon in which the negotiation of ego and alterity is central. To conduct this negotiation process, *Kunstschriftstellerei* has developed a repertoire of persuasive strategies, helping to shape an emotional culture of which it was an indispensable part.

Fellows in Reality

Julius Meier-Graefe

from *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Modernen Kunst: vergleichende Betrachtungen der bildenden Künste, als Beitrag zu einer neuen Aesthetik,* (*Modern Art: being a contribution to a new system of aesthetics*), 1904

I. *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (The Luncheon on the Grass)

Each of us has often sat resting in the forest, and this memory ensures our trust in Manet.

... Outside, under trees, two friends and a girl sit together, chatting with each other. One speaks; the others dream. Nothing in particular occurs, but the girl happens to be nude. No one notices, as the conversation and the musings of the listeners drift elsewhere. The situation appears so natural that it would not even require a second girl, who is seen in the background emerging from a swim. The scene is serious, simple, and perfectly appropriate. The very thing that we expect least in this motif is present in overflowing abundance—dignity. A severe, masculine, and very rational dignity that gains its beauty precisely from those elements that seemingly strive against it. Again and again, we perceive anew the mystery, the contradiction of this effect, even if we believe we know the painting as well as an intimate friend. Improvised like all our leisure, a picnic somewhere in the woods becomes a poignant symbol. Two men from a nearby town, a nude girl, nothing more; everything else in the painting is too much. And this absence of legend inspires awe. We tread lightly, keeping a pious distance, not speaking. As if this idyll were a legend of saints....

The functions of the idyll were love, dance, song, enchantment. This severe, entirely masculine, wholly rational dignity does not belong to prior notions of an idyll, being entirely removed from ecstasy. Manet's idyll is ours. None of its forms would be conceivable at any other time; certainly not the idea of painting them. This idyll, beside the others, is sober and cold and born of an incomparably more heated devotion. Here, the arousal that renders the old idyll into charming forms seems to be held together in the heart of the painting and hardly cracks a smile. Being, as it is, at the highest point of arousal, it is very cold. Be silent, be silent! it says; see, see! And it is odd how one is silent and descends into sight, and how the quietude becomes greater than all earlier



Edouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (The Luncheon on the Grass), 1863

idylls. Momentum, in the painting having been brought to standstill, only ignites exuberance within us, and it is as if joyful spirits who once dwelled in the woods, river gods and satyrs, were performing jubilant dances while we gaze as motionless and indifferent as the three in the painting....

It is the idyll to which improvisation belongs as a necessary gesture because it cannot bear a pose: our idyll. We can only ever arrive at celebration with improvisations, gaining tranquil moments from so many forms of turmoil. Our idyll's possibilities lie in the conversational lulls of our addiction, in trembling glances that grasp at serendipitous peace, in flowing trivialities that only a sensation familiar to chance, transcending the ephemeral, is able to hold fast; that is, to preserve them in chance form. They seldom become real: our world is devilishly un-idyllic. But should it succeed, no price is too high. The plainest serenity then becomes a monumental gesture, and a *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* becomes classic on an entirely different magnitude to a Raphaelist engraving of Marc Antony with the river gods....

The Leak: Berta Zuckerkandl

Julia Voss

When Berta Zuckerkandl published her article "The Klimt Affair" on April 12, 1905, she brought a journalistic approach into art criticism for which an appropriate label would only arise much later—the leak. Some parts of the correspondence, which she spread over an entire page of the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* without having received prior authorization, originated from Austria's Education Ministry. The letter's addressee—whom Zuckerkandl quoted publicly—was Gustav Klimt, the painter, cofounder of the Vienna Secession, and a friend of the journalist. The conflict raging between Klimt and the Ministry concerned a commission the artist had received more than ten years prior. His task was to create several ceiling paintings for the university's festival hall, depicting allegories of philosophy, medicine, and jurisprudence. Once completed, however, each of these paintings met with substantial resistance, both among the public and in the university. When the Education Ministry ultimately demanded changes, Klimt resolved to withdraw the paintings and refund all monies that had already been paid to him. The Ministry refused even this offer—until Zuckerkandl made the affair public.

The debate on the "Faculty Paintings" has been well researched, studied, and reappraised. Its lesson for art criticism is the innovative form that Zuckerkandl gave to it: Rather than defending Klimt with incandescent praise, she resorted to a strategy which had up until that point been a part of political journalism's repertoire. By making public what was meant to remain behind the scenes, she pushed Klimt's opponents to expose themselves. Klimt bore witness to the readership on the arguments with which the Ministry sought to justify the withdrawal of his paintings. Simultaneously, the public was able to read up on how his return request had been refused. Zuckerkandl presented the original, stilted tone of the language in which Klimt was three times addressed as "Your Honor" (*Euer Hochwohlgeboren*, literally "your high-born"), with artistic considerations not playing any role. "One forgot," commented Zuckerkandl dryly, "that it was in fact ultimately about artworks, not something like deliveries of bathing trousers for the municipal baths…."

It is unsurprising that Zuckerkandl was shrewd in terms of political journalism. When she was three years old, her father Moritz Szeps bought a pro-government newspaper in Vienna and lent it a new, liberal-left direction. At seventeen, Zuckerkandl was running political errands, delivering messages her father exchanged with the progressive Crown Prince Rudolf. Upon Rudolf's death by suicide in 1889, hopes for a better future for the Austrian monarchy had been dashed. From her childhood onward, Zuckerkandl was present in a political system that was hostile to her beliefs. As an art critic, she consequently placed herself alongside those who advocated for change—including Gustav Klimt, Otto Wagner, and Josef Hoffmann. She maintained close contacts with France and held a renowned salon, supported by her husband, anatomist Emil Zuckerkandl. Plans for the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätten ("Viennese Workshops") are said to have been forged at the Zuckerkandls' villa.

Zuckerkandl's articles were shadowed by the sneering comments of Karl Kraus, editor of the newspaper *Die Fackel*, who opposed almost all the artists she promoted in her writing. Fortunately for us, her judgment prevailed. As a Jew, she was forced to flee in 1938 when the Nazis marched into Vienna. Two years later, she was also forced to leave Paris, once again to incoming German troops. She moved to Algiers to live with her son, who had emigrated there at an early age. She died in October 1945 in Paris.

The Klimt Affair

Berta Zuckerkandl

from *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 12, 1905

"The principal reasons that led me to take back the ceiling paintings ordered by the Education Ministry"—explained Gustav Klimt to me—"are not to be sought in any displeasure that may have been elicited in me by the attacks from various parties. These impacted very little upon me at the time and I did not lose my joy at the commission. I am very much impervious to any kinds of attacks. But I am rather more susceptible in those moments where I feel my commissioner is not satisfied with my work. And this is precisely the case with the ceiling paintings. The Minister has in all his attacks only ever maintained legal advocacy of his point of view, with the artistic moments, despite being of prime importance here, being touched upon only in the most cautious manner; rather than any kind of defence one could in fact observe a rejection of the artistic qualities. Via countless hints, the Ministry led me to understand that I may have become an embarrassment for that party. There are then no circumstances more embarrassing for an artist—I stretch this term to its limits, of course—than to create works for a commissioner who is not fully on side with the artist in both heart and mind, and to accept money from him in return. This is something to which I can in no way resolve myself and I had already sought for all possible means to free myself from these circumstances, which I feel to be entirely humiliating in respect to any true artistry. As long as eight years ago, the same feeling drove me to act in this way. This was already so when my sketches of the ceiling paintings were presented to the Art Commission. The following was requested of me at the time: Philosophy should be set to a darker tone; Jurisprudence should be restricted to 'calmer lines'; and for Medicine, the unclothed female figure must be either painted over with a man, or the lady should be given clothing. I wished at that moment to withdraw immediately and it was only via the arbitration of Baron Weckbecker in the Education Ministry, who drafted a very reasonable contract permitting me full liberty as an artist, that I permitted myself to set about my work.

Since the unfortunate 'state commission,' it has become custom in Vienna to hold Minister v. Hartel responsible for each one of my other works. Bit by bit, the Minister of Education seems to have genuinely


Wiener
Allgemeine Zeitung.
6 Abr-Blatt.
Nr. 8120. Wien, Mittwoch, 12. April. 1905
Uebernahms-Anzeige.
Grand Café Magnet, II. Praterstrasse 49
Restaurant „Bellaria" Mathias Kraft,
KLEIDERHAUS
M. Neumann
Wien, I. Kärntnerstrasse 10.
Zum Süssen Mädel
MINNA ROTT
Folies Caprice
Grinzinger Wintergarten
Original-D'Grinzinger.
CAFÉ MAGNET
Casino de Paris
„München in Wien"
Heute: Vergnügungs-Abend.
FRANZ JANSKY.
Carlton.
Frühjahrs- u. Sommer-Neuheiten
Schostal & Härtlein
Wien, I. Kärntnerstrasse Nr. 14.

"The Klimt Affair," *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 12, 1905

formed the impression that he bears such responsibility. I am thus subject to unprecedented levels of interrogation at many exhibitions. At my large oeuvre exhibition, for example, I was dissuaded from exhibiting a painting that aroused 'fear.' I did so as I wished to avoid any inconvenience for the association. I would have vouched for my work, however. In Düsseldorf, where our Austrian exhibition was an official one, the Education Ministry urged the removal of *Goldfisch* prior to the opening, as the German Crown Prince, who was set to perform the opening, may have been shocked. This did not happen in the end, but you see what is possible. From the same fearful feeling sprang the hard rejection of the exhibition project the Secession had designed for St. Louis. No, I have always and everywhere been a terrible embarrassment to the Minister and, by the step I am now taking, I am now once and for all relieving him of the bizarre protectorship that has grown to watch over me. I will likewise never, and certainly not under this Ministry, be in an official exhibition unless my friends compel me to do so. Enough of censorship. I will take the matter into my own hands. I wish to extricate myself. I wish to get back to freedom, away from all these unedifying absurdities that hinder my work. I reject any kind of state support. I renounce it all.

I declare that I have a right to paintings. I have been told all too often that the paintings would not be put in their proper place as ceiling paintings. Via the fact of the ten pendentive paintings that had been ordered from me the previous year having been transferred by mutual agreement to Matsch for the same festival hall and the Education Ministry taking back the advance sum I had been given for them, the coherence of the commission granted to me was ripped apart. The paintings would be exhibited under quite different conditions to those for which I created them. Even in the face of the Ministry's bizarre declarations, they are not yet to be regarded as finished, as they are absolutely not in harmony with one another and it is only possible for an artist to complete ceiling paintings once they have been installed in place. I am also protected by a passage in the contract which explicitly states: "Should it for any reason be not possible for one of the artists to deliver the work, another must take over part of the commission." Just such a case has now occurred. I am not in a position to deliver works that do not meet with the commissioner's expectations, will return the money, and retain the images. I cannot be dependent on somebody against whom I must fight.

But all that I have here said to you is of lesser importance. The principal issue is that I wish to make a stand against the manner in which, in the state of Austria, in the Education Ministry, matters of art are handled and settled. With each and every matter, it assaults real art and real artists. It is only the weak and the wrong that are protected. Many things have come to pass against serious artists; I wish not to list them here but will do so one day. I want to take up arms for them, create clarity for once. There must be a clear divorce. The state should not play the patron of the arts where it at best doles out charity. The state should not baselessly assume the role of dictator of the exhibition system and artist debates where its only duty should only be to act as mediator and a commercial party, leaving the artistic initiative entirely to the artists. Civil servants should not force their ways into the art schools and usurp the artists, as is happening now in the most arrogant manner, unless they at least take the strongest possible stand against such an art policy. If, as occurred at the most recent Budget Committee meeting, a speaker attacks the Secession in the most humiliating, libelous way and the Minister feels unmoved to say a single word in reply, the least that should be done is to find an artist who, by way of a single act, demonstrates that true art no longer wants to have anything to do with such authorities, with such parties. It was not the spirit of togetherness that brought this about, as the planned demonstration by the artist associations did not take place. So let the individual do it instead. It is not because I want nothing more to do with commissioners so far removed from real art and real artists that I am not handing over my paintings.

I note in passing that you can here see the response I just received from the Education Ministry. The tone of the letters is of such a nature that I am only now seeing how correct I was in tearing away each and every bond between myself and these parties. All that I have said here has been said only to inform the public and my friends about the reasons for my actions—on no account whatsoever to give account to the Ministry. I will hand over the paintings only upon use of brute force."

Klimt's letter to the Education Ministry

To the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Culture and Education:

Ten years ago, when I received the university auditorium commission, I went to work with great enthusiasm on the grand task that had been granted to me. As it is well known, my many years of earnest labors have earned me wealth of abuse that, on account of their sources, were unable to dull my zeal. This, however, has changed over the course of time. Via a series of communication, His Excellency Minister Dr. Hartel made it clear to me that my works had begun to cause discomfort for the commissioners. If my years-long work is to reach a stage of completion at all, I must first find joy in it again; and this joy will be completely absent for me so long as I must regard it as a state commission under the present circumstances. I am thus confronted with the impossibility of completing a commission that has already come so far. I have already given up on one part of this, the pendentive paintings, as the Ministry has noted and approved of. In consequence I will now resign the entire commission and will commence by gratefully returning the entire advances that I have received over the years. I request information as to the account into which I should pay this money.

Respectfully, Klimt.

In the response of the Ministry to the artist it is stated that the Ministry is absolutely unwilling to give up its claims to the paintings, claiming that the sums accepted by Klimt over the years are to be seen not as advances but as payments in and of themselves. Klimt would thus be legally obliged to deliver the paintings to the state. These paintings, which are currently again located in the artist's studio, were in fact only loaned to him by the Ministry for the purpose of their exhibition.

The Ministry's letter culminated with this sentence:

"... As, however, Your Honor likewise declares in the aforementioned letter that you presently are unable to complete the paintings, I allow myself the honor to address to Your Honor the urgent and earnest entreaty that each of the three ceiling paintings in question be immediately sent to this Ministry, under observation of all the required precautionary measures, in the same form in which they were delivered to Your Honor."

At a time when it is being made so difficult for the artist to document pride in their own person, Klimt's words here take on a far-reaching significance. In this full-blooded espousal of the ideals and rights of artistic pursuits lies a prophetic power. Klimt's act, just as every free, bold, and selfless act of the public, will bring about an elevation and invigoration of culture. We believe the days of civil-service art are numbered.

Crafts and the Spiritual: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

Monica Juneja

The book *The Indian Craftsman* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, from which the following extract has been chosen, addresses a seminal question about processes of artistic creativity. In doing so, the author chooses not to privilege European humanist concepts and the values they transport—canons that have long enjoyed the claim to universal validity within art history. Coomaraswamy's approach is rather anti-modernist and anti-industrialist. Like all his writings, it makes a strong case for grasping the dynamics of Indian art not through the lens of form alone, but rather based on prior knowledge of iconography, philology, theology, and metaphysics. *The Indian Craftsman* is framed along a binary axis that posits materialism against spiritualism, while the text's critique of industrial modernity valorizes collective labor and social cohesion as vital aspects underpinning art production. At the same time, the work relies on an ethnographic method of direct observation that contrasts to the philological approach and philosophical abstraction that mark the author's later work. Although the anti-colonial framing of Coomaraswamy's writings has meant that they are frequently couched in a language of a nativist nationalism, the possibilities inherent in an approach that conceives of art as a holistic, ethical praxis, which lives from a connection between the hand and mind, merit investigation.

The choice of this text stems from an interest in making its content productive for an art history informed by a notion of critical globality—in other words, a perspective that aspires to make insights from regions beyond the Western European–North Atlantic axis globally intelligible and capable of being critically worked back into the mainstream discipline. Can an approach that counters the idea of art as representation and urges us instead to look at art as making, as contingent on skilled ways of knowing that conjoin materiality with knowledge and experimentation, help in rethinking art history in a global context? Coomaraswamy's critique of modernity shows the way to questioning existing distinctions, such as art versus artifact, that downgrade or exclude many historically and aesthetically significant kinds of objects and practices from consideration. Further, making materiality central to the experience of art, to its production and reception, helps pluralize our understanding of concepts such as vision, by making art history more capacious for notions of sight that go beyond the purely ocular and prevail in different world cultures. Drawing our attention to skills of art making is an important reminder that processes of knowledge production are as much material as they are textual. In the context of South Asia—though probably applicable to other traditions in the world—it is important not to fall into the trap of considering canonical texts, for example in Sanskrit, as manuals for artists. These instead were composed as a set of abstract norms, were often transmitted orally, and most importantly, learned as skills translated into practice.

Coomaraswamy's insights serve as a basis to argue that a society's conceptual knowledge about art was not produced exclusively within lexical repositories; it was equally reconfigured through practice and experiment, and percolated through and within workshops. The art-critical potential of Coomaraswamy's text that views the significance of a work of art beyond the intentionality of its maker lies in a kind of artisanal epistemology. It describes art making as an ensemble of manual skills, technical procedures, material practices—often indirectly transmitted—together with other sources. Artisanal epistemology sensitizes us to look for a distributed agency that takes us beyond the individual artist, whom art history, conditioned during its formation by an evolutionist logic, tends to canonize as the pinnacle of creativity.

Pursuing these insights today could lead us towards a non-totalizing, transcultural approach to art history that must also consider migration as a logical condition of art making. For materials and technologies, and—not least—the craftsmen themselves were important links in a network of connectivities among things, peoples, and ideas from all time periods and geographical locations. Studying these beyond national units will allow us to negotiate existing gaps and discontinuities within art-historical understanding that we continue to grapple with.

The Indian Craftsman

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

excerpted, first published by Probsthain & Co., London 1909

CHAPTER VI. EDUCATION.

I have spoken more than once of the "hereditary craftsman," a phrase justified by the hereditary fixity of social function under the caste system. But it is worthwhile to consider the point in greater detail. It is often assumed that the skill of the "hereditary craftsman" depends upon the direct inheritance of his father's individual skill. But this skill is an acquired character, and it is almost universally agreed by scientists that there is no such thing as the inheritance of an acquired character; a man who loses one leg does not have one-legged children; a man who learns to play well on the piano does not transmit that skill; nor can the craftsman transmit his acquired capacity for carving wood or chasing metal. On the other hand, of course, if it be supposed that large groups of craftsmen are descended from a common ancestor who originally possessed innate artistic genius (a different thing from actual skill in handicraft), it may be argued that this capacity is inherited, and this would be the case. Personally, I should be inclined to attach little value to the likelihood of the actual existence of such authentically superior race of craftsmen; one would think, indeed, that the absence of selection and elimination in an hereditary caste might lead rather to degeneration than to a preservation of standard. As a matter of fact, all these considerations are of small weight beside the question of education and environment, conditions of supreme importance, and implicit in the expression "hereditary craftsman" as ordinarily used. The important facts are these: *the young craftsman is brought up and educated in the actual workshop, and is the disciple of his father*. No technical education in the world can ever hope to compensate the craftsman for the loss of these conditions. In the workshop, technique is learnt from the beginning, and in relation to real things and real problems, and primarily by service, personal attendance on the master. And it is not only technique that is learnt; in the workshop there is life itself, that gives to the pupil both culture and metaphysics, more essential to art than technique itself; for what use is it to speak well if you have nothing worth saying? I have been struck, in contrast, by the inefficiency of the great Technical Schools in London, the pride of the County Council. Their watchword, like that of the British in the East, is indeed efficiency; but this means that the Professor is hauled up before a committee if he is late in attendance, not that his personality is a first consideration.[1] It means, too, that he is expected to be intensely practical, and to go through some curriculum leading to certificates and prizes; woe betide him if he should waste time in giving to his pupils a metaphysic or teaching them medieval romance. Small wonder that the pupils of these schools have so little to say; they cannot, indeed, put more into their work than there is in themselves. But in speaking of the Eastern system of craft education, I used the term *disciple* advisedly; for in the East there is traditionally peculiar relation of devotion between master and pupil, and it is thought that the master's secret, his real inward method, so to say, is best learnt by the pupil in devoted personal service; and so we get a beautiful and affectionate relation between the apprentice and the master, which is impossible in the case of the busy professor who attends a class at a Technical School for a few hours a week and at other times, when engaged on real work, and dealing with real problems, has no connection with the pupils at all.

The master need not be the boy's father; he may be an elder brother, or even unrelated; but in any case, once chosen, he is the ideal of the pupil, from which he never wavers. There are often trade secrets, simple enough it may be, but valuable as much in the idea as in the fact; these the master reveals to the faithful pupil only after many days, and when he has proved himself worthy. Devotion and respect for the teacher remain throughout life; I have seen a man of thirty receive wages in the presence of an elder brother, his teacher, and hand them to him as the master with the gentlest possible respect and grace; and as gently and delicately they were received, and handed back, waiving the right to retain; and this same elder brother had an aged father, a great craftsman in his day, and he never returned home with wages without offering them to him in the same way. I have seen few things in East or West more suggestive of entire gentleness than these expressions of reverence for the teacher.

1 In this exaltation of administrative ability over creative gifts, which are much rarer and more precious, our institutions share the weakness which pervades our industrial establishments, where the manager or superintendent usually gets larger pay and is regarded as more important than the most expert craftsman. In both we see the same striving for a certain sort of efficiency and economy of operation, and for the attainment of a completely standarised product. This tends in both cases to the elimination of individuality and to sterility.... I would that there might be displayed in the administrative offices of every institution of higher education this testy remark, once made by an eminent scholar: "You cannot run a university as you would a saw-mill!" Address by Prof. F. L. Nicholls to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1908. *Nature*, January 14th, 1909.

I need not point out what a perfected instrument for the transmission of a living tradition such an education forms. And if, to return to the Technical School of to-day, one may make a suggestion, it would be this: that supposing the aim be to train up a generation of skilled and capable craftsmen, it were better to appoint living master craftsmen as the permanent servants of the community, endowed with an inalienable salary, or better, a house, and demand of them that they should carry out the public works undertaken by the community, and that they themselves should keep apprentices, choosing out of them one to be their successor in the position of Public Craftsman. Such a system would do more to produce skilled craftsmen, and to produce good work, than would twice the money spent on Technical Schools and on competitive design for great undertakings.[2]

There are few, if any, places in India where the traditional methods of instruction are maintained in every detail. But a brief account of the system as surviving in Ceylon, almost to the present day, may be useful here. We may suppose that a young boy, son of a caste craftsman, has been apprenticed to or is the son of a younger brother of the master or the teacher. His attitude is one of discipleship and deep respect. If not a relation, he has been brought to the craftsman's home, with presents of betel leaves and perhaps an offering of money or cloth, and given into the master's charge. During his years of instruction he will live with and be fed and clothed by his master and teacher, and when at last his education is complete, be given the last secrets of the art and perhaps some heirloom or gift of a design drawn by a famous painter generations back.

The boy is given first a wooden panel, primed with a preparation of iron slag, quart sand, coconut-shell charcoal, tamarind seed, and the leaves of *Eclipta erecta*. Upon this panel he learns to draw, using as pencil a sea urchin spine or a piece of pointed wood.

It is of interest to note that this method of instruction is so far practically identical with the method of drawing on a primed panel, prescribed for beginners by Cennini.[3] The forms drawn upon the panel are certain peculiar curves, gradually elaborated into very complex studies in applied ornament.

Drawing from nature is never taught. After the hand and eye and memory have been trained in the use of the fundamental curves in this fashion, traditional ornament, repeating patterns, and the like are

2 See A. J. Penty, "Restoration of the Guild System"; and C. R. Ahsbee, "Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry," Campden, 1908.
3 See translation by Mrs. Merrifield, London, 1894.

taught, then mythical animals and designs with men and beasts in them. The pupil is also taught to use the brush, and assists his master in practical work in temples, at first by grinding the colors and general personal service, then by priming the surfaces, applying a ground colour, and by preparing and taking care of brushes and pigments, and lastly, by filling in outlines sketched by the master for completion by the pupil. Experience is thus gamed in practical work. There is nothing *dilettante* about the young craftsman's education. It begins early and is exceedingly thorough.

While it is in progress he has, in addition to his ordinary education, to learn by heart various Sanskrit works on art, with their meaning. These technical works, composing what is called the *Silpa Sastra* or "science of the arts," describe various kinds of images, the characters of mythical animals, the measurements of images and buildings, the kinds of jewellery proper for kings, the proportions of various tools and utensils.

A point of interest is the extreme simplicity of the craftsman's tools and methods. The painter's brushes, for example, are made of the awns of various grasses, of squirrels' hair, of roots, or fibre, and he is always able to replace them or modify them at need. The repousser's tools he makes himself to suit the work in hand, and he does not hesitate to make a new tool out of an old one for a special purpose. The value of this simplicity lies in the fact that the craftsman relies upon himself rather than upon his tools, and at the same time is completely master of them, adapting them exactly to the requirements of the moment. So with the pigments and mediums. There is no mystery, and success depends on thoroughness and patience rather than on any secrets of the trade. It would be easy to give further details of technique and methods here, but the purpose of the present work being rather to portray the craftsman than to describe his work, the reader is referred for such details to such works as "Mediaeval Sinhalese Art," by the present author, "Industrial Arts of India," by Sir George Birdwood, "Indian Art at Delhi," by Sir George Watt, and the pages of the "Journal of Indian Art and Industry." It may also be remarked that Mr. Percy Brown, Director of the School of Art in Lahore, has there collected a valuable series of exhibits illustrating the traditional methods of instruction in the various crafts still, or until recently, practised in the district. It is of the utmost importance that further work of this kind should be undertaken before it is too late. While anthropologists and sociologists are busy studying savage tribes, there is much of the organized life of the ancient civilizations slipping away for ever, which it is of far more importance to study and record.

To conclude with the craftsman himself: perhaps there is nothing more striking about his position in society, whether as a villager, a

guildsman, or a feudal servant than this—the assurance of his position, and the assurance of his purpose and value. It is only in the absence of anxiety as to the immediate future, that that quality of leisure so characteristic of true works of art and craft can appear in them. The serenity and dignity of his life are things which we cannot overlook, as Sir George Birdwood says, if we are rightly to understand the Indian craftsman.

"He knows nothing of the desperate struggle for existence which oppresses the life and crushes the very soul out of the English working man. He has his assured place, inherited from father to son for a hundred generations, in the national church and state organization, while Nature provides him with everything to his hand, but the little food and less clothing he needs, and the simple tools of trade.... This at once relieves him from an incalculable dead weight of cares, and enables him to give to his work, which is also a religious function, that contentment of mind, and leisure, and pride and pleasure in it for its own sake, which are essential to all artistic excellence."[4]

The craftsman had this leisure for thought, and even for dreaming, and his economic position made him secure against oppression or want. He had no need to accumulate wealth, and we do not find that the wage asked by the traditional craftsman in unspoilt districts to-day represents more than a bare living for self and family.

Too often we forget that industry, *per se*, is of little or no value to humanity, if the results are valueless. But the true craftsman will often work overtime if he is interested. I have had Sinhalese craftsmen who insisted on working by lamplight far into the night. But the same craftsmen demand the right on other occasions to come and go at their will, and it would be quite vain to expect any particular piece of work done within a fixed time. The artistic and the commercial methods are thus radically different; and the artistic result cannot be attained on commercial lines, nor *vice versa*.

The current rate of wages for all depended much more on the general cost of living than on the degree of skill required for this special craft or the other. The craft was much more a "calling" than a trade, and to this day Sinhalese craftsmen care more for congenial work, and personal appreciation, than for money payments. And as we have seen, in the most typical cases, the craftsman received no money wage at all, but was repaid in other ways. Many a British workman would be glad to exchange his money wage for such security and appreciation as belonged to the Sinhalese craftsman of a hundred years ago. Presents, indeed, were

4 Sir George Birdwood, "Industrial Arts of India."

expected, even grants of land, but these were for faithfulness and excellence; not a payment at so much a yard or so much an hour for such and such kinds of work. For the work was art, not commerce, and it would have been as idle to demand that a carpet like the Ardebil carpet should be designed and made at so much per square foot, as to expect, academy pictures to be done in the same way; indeed, I think it would be more reasonable to sell these by the square yard, than to suppose that the works of the Mediaeval Eastern craftsman could be valued in such a way.

If now, in conclusion, we endeavour to sum up the results to which we are led by this study of the Indian craftsman, and by a correlation of his position in society with that of the craftsman in periods of good production in the Western world, and in other parts of Asia, we find that no really great traditional art has ever been produced, except under the following conditions: Freedom of the craftsman from anxiety as to his daily bread; legal protection of the standard of work; his art not exploited for profit. These are the material conditions; even more important is that spiritual conception of the serious purpose of art, which we find expressed in the work of true craftsmen of whatever age or place, but perhaps more in India than anywhere else. In other words, it has only been when the craftsman has had the right to work, the right to work faithfully, a right to the due reward of his labour, and at the same time a conscious or subconscious faith in the social and spiritual significance of his work, that his art has possessed the elements of real greatness. And so we can hardly avoid the conclusion that these will always be conditions necessary for the production of fine art and craft.

Practical Formalist: Roger Fry

Beate Söntgen

The critic, curator, painter, and interior design workshop founder Roger Fry is considered a formalist in art history. This title is not meant as an embellishment, considering that the term denotes a focus on questions entirely immanent to art, to the exclusion of social issues. Only recently has the perspective on this tireless writer and orator shifted, with emphasis now being placed on the communicative potential and societal functions of Fry's notion of form. According to Fry, the process of production, the characteristics and manipulation of the material, as well as the joy of creation itself are retained in form and conveyed to the viewer. This transmittance of creative momentum led to the spiritualization of daily life, which, in Fry's perspective, had been rendered desolate by commercialization and consumerism, as well as to the healing of individual and societal wounds caused by the war.

Post-Impressionism, the term Fry used to describe French painting around 1900, with its emphasis on the autonomy of form, order, rhythm, and sensually induced joy, served as his leitmotif. In England, it was primarily the paintings of Vanessa Bell that materialized this kind of understanding of art. Beauty in painting is not an end in itself, but rather an effect of the sincere, unconscious expression of feelings that resonate with their viewers and inspire their own creativity. The tacky Lawrence Alma Tadema appears here as a negative counterpoint, whose glossy paintings constituted part of the materialistic, commercial culture against which artists were expected to compete. The Futurists shared Fry's notion that art should manifest one's approach to life, as a figurative echo of mental visions. But their methods of countering their own, and in any case dubious, claims to originality were conventional, tending toward painted theory rather than genuine expression.
Fry, who came from a wealthy London Quaker family, began as a curator specialized in early Italian painting, which shaped his understanding of modern painting. After working at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, he returned to London in 1910 and organized an exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings. With the founding of the egalitarian and collectively organized artisanal craft workshop Omega in 1913, Fry wanted to incorporate the representational styles of the Post-Impressionists into everyday design, an undertaking which in itself invalidated all accusations of formalism.

Other members of Omega included Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, who were also part of the Bloomsbury group, with whom Fry maintained intense working, friendship, and love relationships. In the collective design and use of houses, such as the Charleston Farmhouse, as well as in the collective artisanal production of furniture and everyday utilitarian objects, alternative forms of life that restructured community relations materialized. Chosen family, artistic, intellectual and erotic bonds, as well as shared projects were at their foundation. Fry developed the criteria for his art criticism from these diverse artistic, artisanal, curatorial, teaching, and entrepreneurial practices. He discloses these criteria non-polemically, with a rhetorical elegance that employs wordplay, incisive anecdotes, and irony. Fry reveals where he stands in his texts, thus defending himself against the accusation of conflating aesthetics and ethics through a nuanced account of his notion of artistic morality. Taking the review of the Futurists as an example, it becomes clear how artistic processes can become social models; by communicating interior life as it is conveyed through form, and through the reciprocal relationships of parts of the whole.

The Futurists

Roger Fry

excerpted, from *The Nation*, March 9, 1912

At the Sackville Gallery is to be seen a small collection of work by this group of Italian painters. The catalogue contains a manifesto of their aims and beliefs. This, at least in the English translation, is by no means closely reasoned or clearly expressed; it might have been better to allow us the assistance of the original Italian.

It is interesting to find painters who regard their art as a necessary expression of a complete attitude to life. Whatever one thinks about the content of their strangely Nihilistic creed, one must admit that they hold it with a kind of religious fervor, and that they endeavor to find an expression for it in their art. Fortunately, too, their dogmas appear to allow of great variety of treatment or method, so that, as yet, no stereotyped formula has been evolved, and each of those artists pursues his researches along individual lines. None the less, admitting as one may the sincerity and courage of these artists and their serious endeavor to make of art a genuine expression of spiritual experience, I cannot accept without qualification their rash boast of complete and absolute originality, even supposing that such a thing were in itself desirable. Rather what strikes one is the prevalence in their work of a somewhat tired convention, one that never had much value and which lost with the freshness of novelty almost all its charm, the convention of Chéret, Besnard, and Boldini. It is quite true that the Futurist arranges his forms upon peculiar and original principles, breaking them up into fragments as though they were seen through the refracting prisms of a lighthouse, but the forms retain, even in this fragmentary condition, their well-worn familiarity.

Apparently what is common to the group is the belief in psychological painting. The idea of this is to paint not any particular external scene, but, turning the observation within, to paint the images which float across the camera obscura of the brain. And these images are to be made prominent in proportion to their significance, while their relations one to another have the spacelessness, the mere contiguity of mental visions. Thus, in rendering the state of mind of a journey, the artist jumbles together a number of more or less complete images of the home and friends he is leaving, of the country seen from the carriage window, and of anticipations of his journey's end.

These pictures are certainly more entertaining and interesting than one would expect to result from such an idea, and one or two of the painters, notably Boccioni (in his later works) and Severini, do manage to give a vivid pictorial echo of the vague complex of mental visions. If once they give up preconceived ideas of what sort of totality a picture ought to represent, most people would, I think, admit the verisimilitude of several of these pictures—would own that they do correspond in a curiously exact way to certain conditions of consciousness. Unfortunately, the result is much more of a psychological or scientific curiosity than a work of art, and for this reason that the states of mind which these artists investigate are not really at all interesting states of mind, but just those states of quite ordinary practical life when the images that beset us have no particular value or significance for the imagination.

The idea of painting from the mental image is no new one, though it is one that artists might well practise more than they do. Blake roundly declared that to draw from anything but a mental image was vain folly; but he drew from mental images only when, stimulated by some emotional exaltation, they attained to coherence and continuity of texture. Probably a great many of Rembrandt's sketches are the result of distinct mental imagery, but it was a mental imagery stimulated by reading the poetical prose of the Bible. The fact is that mental visions, though they tend always to be more distinctly colored by the visionaries' own personality than external visions, are almost as various in their quality, and are, as often as not, merely accidental and meaningless. Doubtless the Futurists aim at giving them meaning by their relations to one another, and in this they aim at a direct symbolism of form and color. Here, I think, they have got hold of a good idea, but one which it will be very hard to carry out; as yet their work seems for the most part too merely ingenious, too scientific and theoretic, too little inspired by concrete emotion. It is the work of bold and ingenious theorists expressing themselves in painted images rather than of men to whom paint is the natural, inevitable mode of self-revelation. One artist of the group, Severini, stands out, however, as an exception. He has a genuine and personal feeling for colors and pattern, and the quality of his paint is that of an unmistakable artist. His *Pan Pan* is a brilliant piece of design, and really does, to some extent, justify the curious methods adopted, in that it conveys at once a general idea of the scene and of the mental exasperation which it provokes. For all its apparently chaotic confusion, it is not without the order of a genuine feeling for design. Here, as elsewhere, the worst fault is a tendency to lapse into an old and commonplace convention in individual forms.

His *Yellow Dancers* is another charming design. The statement in the catalogue that it exemplifies the destruction of form and color by brilliant light, shows the curious scientific obsession of these people. Such a fact is aesthetically quite irrelevant, and the picture is good enough to appeal on its own merits. The same is true of his *Black Cats*, a novel and curious color harmony, which gains nothing from the purely autobiographical note in the catalogue. Whether Signor Severini arrived at his design by reading Edgar Allan Poe or not is immaterial; the spectator is only concerned with the result which, in this case, is certainly justified.

No amount of successful exposition of theory will make bad painting of any value, and, on the other hand, a good picture is none the worse because the artist thinks he painted it to prove a theory, only in that case the theory has served its turn before the picture was painted, and no one need be troubled with it again.

Apart from individual failures and successes, one result of these efforts stands out as having some possibilities for the future of pictorial design, namely, the effort to prove that it is not necessary that the images of a picture should have any fixed spatial relation to one another except that dictated by the needs of pure design. That, in fact, their relation to one another may be directly expressive of their imaginative importance....

What the Futurists have yet to learn, if their dogmas still retain the power of growth, is that great design depends upon emotion, and that, too, of a positive kind, which is nearer to love than hate. As yet the positive elements in their creed, their love of speed and of mechanism, have failed to produce that lyrical intensity of mood which alone might enable the spectator to share their feelings.

The Case of the Late Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema, O. M.

Roger Fry

excerpted, from *The Nation*, January 18, 1913

It is a curious case. If it were not for the familiarity of its general outline, one would call it incredible, but its oddity was brought home to me by an incident. I was talking to a leading politician who has taken up the question of the nation's relation to art with characteristic energy and public spirit, and an allusion was made by him to the late Sir Alma Tadema.

The word "late" struck oddly upon me, and without thinking of what a ridiculous position I put myself in, I said: Is he dead? So little had he been alive to me that though I had undoubtedly seen his death in the papers, I had completely forgotten it. And this was the artist whom of all others the nation delighted to honor, and I was a man of average intelligence, whose chief business in life was the pursuit and study of art.

The historian of this time will have to take note of the fact, then, that there exist, side by side, two absolutely separate cultures, so separate that those who possess one culture scarcely ever take any notice of the products of the other. The converse of my lapse of memory occurred the other day. In the "Times" review of the year, under the rubric Art, the writer stated that there had been no noteworthy exhibition held during the year, that the public had "done" the galleries with a weary sense of duty. Apparently he was quite oblivious of the fact that the Post-Impressionist Exhibition had drawn a far larger public than any recent exhibition of modern art.

And so the two cultures go on side by side, every now and then expressing their mutual incompatibility, but for the most part ignoring each other. The culture of which the late Sir Alma Tadema was so fine and exuberant a flower may perhaps be defined as the culture of the Sixpenny Magazine. It caters with the amazing industry and ingenuity which we note in all Sir Alma Tadema's work for an extreme of mental and imaginative laziness, which it is hard for those outside it to conceive.

This culture finds its chief support among the half-educated members of the lower middle-class. Its appeal to them is irresistible, because it gives them in another "line" precisely the kind of article which they are accustomed to buy and sell.



Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Roses of Heliogabalus*, 1888

Sir Lawrence's products are typical of the purely commercial ideals of the age in which he grew up. He noticed that, in any proprietary article, it was of the first importance that the customer should be saved all trouble. He wisely adopted the plan, since exploited by the Kodak Company, "You press the button, and we do the rest." His art, therefore, demands nothing from the spectator beyond the almost unavoidable knowledge that there was such a thing as the Roman Empire, whose people were very rich, very luxurious, and, in retrospect at least, agreeably wicked. That being agreed upon, Sir Lawrence proceeded to satisfy all the futile inquiries that indolent curiosity might make about the domestic belongings and daily trifles of those people. Not that he ever makes them real people; to do that would demand an effort of imagination on the part of his spectators altogether destructive of the desirability of the article. He does, however, add the information that all the people of that interesting and remote period, all their furniture, clothes, even their splendid marble divans, were made of highly-scented soap. He arrived at this conclusion, not as a result of his profound archaeological researches, but again by reference to commercial customs.

He noticed that, however ill-constructed a saleable article might be, it had one peculiar and saving grace—that of "shop-finish." The essence of this lies in the careful obliteration of all those marks which are left on an object by the processes of manufacture. This grace is often a difficult one to obtain. It requires great ingenuity and inventive skill, for instance, to remove completely the marks made upon a vessel by the potter's hands. But I believe that no piece of pottery is worthy to be presented to the general public until this has been done, and the surface reduced to dead mechanical evenness.

Sir Lawrence set his active brain and practised hand to the problem, and learnt to lick and polish his paint, so that all trace of expression, all remnants of vital or sensitive handling that there may have been—the drawings make it seem unlikely that there ever were—were completely obliterated. He gave his pictures the expensive quality of shop-finish....

His work is like very good, pure, wholesome margarine, and for all we know, Sir Lawrence put it forward as such, and never had an opportunity of correcting the little misunderstanding on the part of the public which insisted on calling it butter....

As I say, this would be astonishing if we could get enough outside of contemporary habits of thought to make some sort of true valuation of spiritual things; as things are, the case of Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema is only an extreme instance of the commercial materialism of our civilisation. Against that, the artist is and must always be in revolt, and while it lasts, he must be an Ishmaelite. He must expect a quite instinctive but none the less reasonably grounded suspicion and dislike from the social organism which is governed by a desire to prolong its life.

Another explanation of the case, of course, occurs to one, and would rise naturally to the lips of the successful trader in art, namely, that the artist is a duffer, and his indifference to the glorious career of an Alma Tadema but the expression of his affected belief in the sourness of the grapes. Doubtless most real artists covet honestly enough a tithe of Sir Lawrence's money. That does not smell. But his honors! Surely by now, that is another thing. How long will it take to disinfect the Order of Merit of Tadema's scented soap?

Independent Gallery: Vanessa Bell and Othon Friesz

Roger Fry

excerpted, from *The New Statesman*, June 3, 1922

The first quality of Vanessa Bell's painting is its extreme honesty. I have been taken to task by "the adversary" for calling a painter's work honest on the ground that I am confusing esthetics and ethics. But I cannot see how one is to deny certain moral qualities which are advantageous to the production of the best esthetic work. They are not necessarily the same moral qualities as bring a man respect in common life, though it is not impossible that they may be combined. There is, for instance, a certain artist who is a thief and a lair in ordinary life. He will even pick his friend's pocket, which certainly is a breach of moral standards, but he is none the less qua artist moral in that his work is free from insincerity and humbug. On the other hand, there are many respected and honoured members of society whose word no one would doubt, whose debts are scrupulously paid, who are good husbands and fathers, and yet are immoral artists in that they take money for pictures which are not what they pretend to be. In their work they are not honest about their sentiments, making out that they are more interesting, impressive, noble or what not, than they really are.

Honesty in this sense, as in the other, is a relative term; every artist must at one time or another be tempted to cover up some gap in his design by a plausible camouflage, and even if he is in the main honest, he has probably more than once fallen. Now, it seems to me that

Vanessa Bell comes very high in the scale of honesty, and in her case the virtue shines with a special brightness because she has no trace of what would ordinarily be called cleverness in a painter. I take cleverness to mean the power to give an illusion of appearance by a brilliant shorthand turn of the brush. Hals, for instance, is a very clever painter; Sargent was at one time, and how many more who have succeeded him in popular favour. This is the quality which of all others is the most rapturously acclaimed by the public, while artists themselves are not insensible to its charm. Now, Vanessa Bell is not only not clever but she never makes the slightest attempt to appear such. She follows her own vision unhesitatingly and confidingly, without troubling at all whither it may lead her. If the result is not very legible, so much the worse; she never tries to make it out any more definite or more vividly descriptive than it is.

It is the same with the quality of her painting. She has worked much with Duncan Grant, who is distinguished for the charm and elegance of his "handwriting." Her "handwriting," though it is always distinguished, is not elegant. It is slower, more deliberate, less exhilarating. But she seems to have made no effort to acquire a more pleasing manner; she realises that it is only the unconscious charm of gesture which counts in the end. She has, in fact, entirely avoided a mistake which almost always besets English artists at some period of their career, namely, the research for beautiful quality as an end in itself. She knows that "handling" and quality of paint are only really beautiful when they come unconsciously in the process of trying to express an idea.

Although the unfortunate obsession of quality as an end in itself is, as I think, peculiarly common in England, it is by no means unknown in France, and two pictures by Couture at the Burlington Fine Arts Club supply examples of the falsity and unreality which results from thus putting the cart before the horse. Anyhow, Vanessa Bell is singularly free from this artistic insincerity. One feels before her works that every touch is the outcome of her complete absorption in the general theme. So complete is this devotion to the idea that she seems to forget her canvas and her métier. In fact, she is a very pure artist, uncontaminated with the pride of the craftsman. How much harm, by the by, the honest craftsman has done to art since William Morris invented the fiction of his supposed humility!

To say that Vanessa Bell is not clever may perhaps give a wrong impression, for she is a very accomplished artist; there is nothing amateurish or haphazard about her work. The very absence of any anxiety about the effectiveness of what she does produces a refreshing sense of security and repose. She is never emphatic; she is genuinely classic

in the sense that she allows the motive to unfold itself gradually to the apprehension. And the attention is held at once by the peculiar charm and purity of her colour and by the harmony of her designs. In these she always shows an admirable sense of proportion. I do not think she makes any great or new discoveries in design, but it is always rightly adjusted and almost austerely simple and direct. She shows, indeed, a keen sense of the underlying architectural framework. But adequate as the design is, it seems to me that in this direction her development is not yet complete: that in this she has not yet quite discovered her personal attitude. Among her early works I remember one or two that suggested a peculiarly personal feeling for the architectural opposition of large rectangular masses and bare spaces. There was a gravity and impressiveness in these which I miss in her present work. What she has gained in the meantime is immense. It lies in the command of a far richer, more varied and more coherent, texture of tone and colour. It may well be that what I take to be her instinctive bias in design will again reassert itself now that she has gained the control of her means of expression. I suspect it is in this question of design rather than elsewhere that the influence of Duncan Grant's more playful and flexible spirit shows itself.

But, after all, it is as a colourist that Vanessa Bell stands out so markedly among contemporary artists. Indeed, I cannot think of any living English artist that is her equal in this respect. Her colour is extraordinarily distinguished. It has even more than her drawing and design measure and proportion. Look at the *Still Life (No. 8)* of aubergines and onions lying on a table before a grey wall.... Vanessa Bell has indeed found that the secret of colour lies not in vehemence but in maintaining the pitch throughout. She never puts in a touch of merely non-committal or nondescript colour. However apparently neutral or unimportant a tone of grey shadow may appear, its pitch is as exactly found as if it were a piece of brilliant local colour. Every note has indeed its full resonance and effect in the total harmony.

It is curious how little the human figure makes its appearance in Vanessa Bell's work; her rooms are empty and her landscapes lonely. This suits, I expect, her habitual mood of grave but joyous contemplation....

This exhibition ought, I think, to prove how high a place Vanessa Bell is entitled to in contemporary English art. I come back to the fact that the feeling of grave, untroubled serenity and happiness, which is the dominant mood of the exhibition, comes from the singular honesty and purity with which she accepts and expresses her vision....

Agitation: Sergei Tretyakov

Valerija Kuzema

Sergei Tretyakov (1892–1937) has a reputation as one of the most active and versatile members of the avant-garde of the nineteen-twenties and thirties in the Soviet Union. He has frequently been characterized as a poet, author, photojournalist, and travel writer, and he also worked on several cinematic productions. Yet little attention has hitherto been paid to his activity as an art critic. His art criticism is particularly interesting, however, because these writings were formulated under new political conditions and in the expectation that every field would break with tradition. At the same time, Tretyakov's art criticism reflects his conceptual and political thinking and his participation in various artistic movements, and these influenced the character of his style and terminology.

In the post-revolutionary climate of the Soviet Union, art criticism acquired a new function. Alexander Bogdanov, the theoretician behind the *Proletkult* implemented by the Bolshevik Party, ascribed it a steering, regulating role in *Iskusstvo i rabochiy klass* (art and the working class), a volume published in 1919. He also argued there that art criticism should see its primary task as defining the boundaries of proletarian art to prevent its contamination by the art of the "old world." In keeping with this aim, Soviet art criticism began to acquire the character of art theory in the early twenties. In a similar vein, the two selected texts by Tretyakov exemplify how early Soviet art criticism turned away from bourgeois society and the art market as traditional addressees. They affirm the goals of the socialist revolution and pursue a politically driven program. They instruct, agitate, and with the aid of rhetorical devices such as metaphor and short questions convey the dynamism and determination of the twenties in the Soviet Union.

The magnitude of the project to which the proponents of the artistic avant-garde had subscribed is illustrated by a book published with writer Nikolai Aseyev in the Siberian city of Chita in 1922, which devotes 26 pages to the Cubo-Futurist painter Viktor Palmov. Tretyakov does not confine his thoughts here to the work of Palmov, or to urban centers such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but extends them to the development of painting up to and including the transformation of the entire realm of art and the role of the artist. At the end of his text, Tretyakov draws on the widespread vocabulary of war to portray the current situation in art: here art is a "front line" where forces advance, attack, and engage in battle, just like a military avant-garde. Since 1913, Tretyakov had been an active member of Futurist groups and doubtless saw himself as part of this "artistic combat."

In 1923 in Moscow, he joined with Vladimir Mayakovsky, photographer Alexander Rodchenko, and others to found the Left Front of the Arts (LEF). Its print media—the journal *Lef* (1923–25) and later *Novyi Lef* (1927–29)—offered the group an opportunity for experiments and the conception of what became known as "factography," an artistic strategy for using words and photography to document reality. Factography was intended to ensure maximum authenticity and to agitate through the montage of diverse "facts." Tretyakov's "Photo Notes" of 1928 can be read within the context of *Novyi Lef* objectives. As a basis, he draws on his own facts—travel jottings, diary, reportage, or anything directly recorded—and on his own person as a photographer. He integrates dialogues with amateur photographers, describes moments in factories, and "assembles" these to endorse his line of argument. In reflecting on the methods of photography, therefore, he was testing a concept he championed: the "literature of fact." The text demonstrates how art criticism can itself become a field for literary experiment.

The Work of Viktor Palmov

Sergei Tretyakov

from *Artist V. Palmov*, Chita 1922

A battle between two ideologies is raging in the left wing of contemporary Russian visual art (painting, sculpture), between the nonobjective and the productionist tendencies. The crux of their conflict concerns value, the so-called "aesthetic state"—i.e. a very specialized concern related to how a work of art is experienced. Here, the work is conceptualized as its own special world, imbued with its own value. The finished work is a world comprised of the traces of the artists' conquest over his materials (paint, solid matter).

The lifelike little world contained within a painting, which reflects reality or the nearly real imaginings of the artist, has long ago been blasted to smithereens by the continual attacks of art workers beginning with the Impressionists, who were the first to reprioritize the "how" of painting over the "what." Their incursions were primarily focused on material elements: color, surface (*faktura*), the relationship between these, and the approaches to working with them for the purpose of making the most expressive visual impression possible.

Cézanne first established the principle of "visual contemplation," the use of color that creates material form by means of color and color juxtaposition. Cézanne's discovery, a method for conveying the muscular and tactile sense of the mass, weight, and resistance of objects, inspired artists to demonstrate power relationships between masses in their work with forms. This led to the emergence of Cubism, in which the entire world is nothing more than the interweaving of hulks in the simplest forms. The artist admires and becomes intoxicated on the literally just-discovered sense of weight, flexibility, and hardness, which he conveys through color.

Material relationships inspire interest in power relationships. The sense of material moving through breakage rather than adhesion represents a shift; the interest in conveying all power sensations inspired by an object gives rise to Futurism in the narrow, painting context with its founder, Picasso. Artists turn their focus to objects in motion; the principle of indivisibility is shattered along with the principle of the single, unified viewpoint.

The object is depicted from multiple angles at once, a method that had already existed in icon painting, Chinese art, and the work of children. The greatest plenitude of sensation created by the object inspires the most interesting interventions in the play of the paint and other developments on painting surfaces. It is no longer compulsory to paint the object in a motionless pose or a split-second view. Instead, the artist fixes snapshots of an object in motion onto the motionless canvas and even creates these movements, whether they be general or partial. The artist introduces the fourth dimension, time, capable of making even the most solid objects penetrable and interpenetrable, like crystals growing out of crystals. The painting becomes an integrated mechanism, a kind of machine that moves through the interaction of the objects and forces within it, conveyed to the viewer via the tactile effects of color and *faktura*.

Little by little, the old purpose of painting—to be a window into a world reflected by the artist for viewers to admire while frozen before it in terrified or ecstatic contemplation—gives way to the new: to comprehend the painting, following the path of the combination of colors, lines, and surfaces constructed by the artist, appreciating the organization of materials and arrangement of elements to achieve material or energetic tension.

Paint on the surface is no longer enough. The artist now employs everyday materials (tin, wood, metals, paper), arranging them on various planes in relation to the primary one. This gives rise to counter-reliefism, which completely departs from the painting's main plane and works over the materials, intertwining, bending and cutting them. The color of the auxiliary materials that the Futurists introduced into painting completely supersedes the color of the paint. The artist begins to chisel, drill, solder, screw. In Russia, it was Tatlin who pursued this most dimensionally and logically, whose counter-reliefs are reminiscent of the models of objects such as cars, machinery, and industrial tools.

The artist regains his sensitivity and love for the materials that practical, necessary things are made of—sensations endemic to the craftsman, technician, and builder.

One more step in this direction and the artist will be known as one who, loving and knowing materials and expert at working with them, organizes and "shapes" these materials, using all of his inventiveness in order to create forms that aren't exclusively for contemplation, but have practical applications. Thus, the artist becomes one with the craftsman and the technician. The painting as a window into another world, the world of "art," is no longer needed because the "world of art" will have become our everyday, practical world. These are indeed the claims of the productionists, summarizing the achievements of the leftist movement

in art: Futurism, which brilliantly destroyed the painting from within, annulling it as an object of aesthetic pleasure and developing the sensibilities of the "arrangers of materials" to the maximum extent.

Pure art is dead because no more leisure time needs to be filled up by it. Leading the mind out of the world of "art," they say, "Long live production art, in which the old principle of 'the beautiful' now coincides with the hated principle of the 'useful' into a new concept: 'constructive.' This movement is closely tied to the reorganization of the human psyche on the basis of the reorganization of economic and productive life—i.e. the task of social revolution. Within this movement, there is a developing dream of creating a new kind of man—an organizer, constructor, and inventor, a man rejoicing in the active conquest of matter and the elements through joint, concerted efforts: a man who forms matter (form) to answer the demands (content) of humanity.

I thought it was important to include this introduction in order to illuminate the web of interconnected realms in art, so that, with this in mind, we can answer the question of the art of Palmov (or, to put it more precisely, in order to avoid the flavor of sacrimony that comes with the word 'art'—Palmov's work or constructions).

Palmov is a Futurist, or rather, a Cubo-Futurist. His paint constructions solve problems related to the interaction of masses and forces using particularly emphatic and inventive color and texture.

Is he a productionist? For the moment, no, but he will doubtlessly also pass through this phase, considering his rapid path from influence to influence, from Cézanne, to Picasso, Gleizes, Metzinger, Le Fauconnier, and then from construction to construction. Is this bad?

It is only natural if we take into account the power Palmov wields over the medium of paint, the power color itself has over him, and the incredible diversity of his output, in which it's surpassingly rare to find even two or three repetitions of the same approaches and materials.

If we roughly divide Palmov's work into periods spanning his life in the Far East until today, we can speak of the Vladivostok, Pacific, and Chita periods.

In Vladivostok, his palette was still relatively muted. He was working out the problem of movement through shifts, finding an interesting, linearly-shifted picture. Movement was created by means of shifted perspective (a house, a barbershop), shifted masses and planes (Burliuk's family portrait). The associative method (especially applicable to Burliuk) for depicting ideas about complicated processes and extracting only the most characteristic phenomena from the given process onto the canvas, phenomena, objects, and motions (*Shven, Tanets, Perevorot*).

The attempts to introduce colorful material marks to the canvas through the incorporation of pieces of fabric, boxes, and paper. The latter method in the black-violet palette led to the exemplary *Skorb*, perfect and icon-like, in which the angles of the face create a psychological effect that hits the mark directly on the head.

Japan and the Pacific Ocean: the viewer's contemplation is refined, the artist masters a bright and expressive palette, focusing on blue-green, the oceanic mass of water. The sense of materiality is sharpened. Human bodies seem to be made of sheet metal or soldered iron pipes. His water is hard, stony crystal. His air is blue, fantastically forged steel. For him, the world takes on a special material hardness in which he, like a sculptor, carves out routs, sharp-ribbed and taut, with the strikes of his brush. We see this kind of metallic world in his *Rybake, Kapitan parokhoda, Yapontsy s rakovinoi*, and *Progulka po ulitse*. The artist develops a particular economy and precision toward every part of the painting. At the same time, the shifting of dozens of perspectival planes in each painting don't make them look like frozen crystal fields, but moving swells of a solid sea, splashing with sharp waves.

With this particular kind of rendering, the flatness of the painting shatters, transforming from a "window" into a kind of arranged "pile," that needs to be investigated from all angles at the risk of cutting the clamoring eye on the sharp edges of objects and materials.

The tropical Pacific islands also intensify the powerful colors of Palmov's paintings. His metal, sharp and complex as ever with its teeth and ledges, becomes molten, red-hot. Wild tropical greenery and crimson volcanic earth go head-to-head in a furious battle of color on color. The clusters of trees and feathered palms, provide an excuse to create green and blue glass bubbles and spheres that shine through each other, establishing equivalences between the artist's beloved glass-metal and the eternal shaggy-haired wood (recall Levitan's green water on tree trunks).

In Chita, the paintings' tone grows harsher. Our harsh era makes itself felt. The molten, crystallized metal gives way to renderings of heavy broadcloth, sackcloth, felt, soldered metal and sawtooth. Snow white patches appear. The *faktura* is developed. Sparkling glass and metal are introduced—silver paper. This creates matter-object organisms on a plane dressed in sharp, shiny skin. That which is usually referred to as background undergoes a special, intense working over. Decorative ornamentation is applied, and among the ornamental "embroidery" dancing across the canvas, in front of the background, filled with constructions, the tensed ribcage of the subject (in the literary sense) chirrs, most often

in a symbolist and revolutionary manner. The metallic background and color and the textured edges attracted to it create something analogous to icon painting. The artist paints completely subjectless—that is, un-titleable paintings—colorful assemblages and mountings with bright and linear centers of gravity, whose subject lies in the battle or, on the contrary, within the solid cooperation between areas of color and *faktura*.

The impulse of the inventor and constructor and the ability to lovingly admire material and conquer it through shaping drives the artist forward, keeping him from staying in any one place, as I have described above, among his already accomplished combinations. Each painting is but an intensification of the artist's methods for working with his materials which paves the way for the next one. Beyond this demand, the individual painting has no other value.

"So is any of this necessary?" one may ask. It is. The work of the Futurist artist on a framed surface has not yet been perfected, and meanwhile, the call of the productionists has been sounded. The longing for paintings that are windows one wants to fall through onto soft meadows of "different worlds" "created" by the artist has not yet been wrested from human hearts. The charm of "recreating reality" has not yet been lost. People have not yet completely trained themselves to approach paintings the way they approach blueprints in order to repeatedly overcome all of the efforts undertaken by artists who create colorful, plane-studded organisms.

It's understandable why everyone seeking the subject in Palmov's paintings is so overwhelmed by the materialization of such things as air and water, that metallic outfitting of space with brushstrokes. They are swept off their feet and out of their reason by the need to climb over all of the swirls and cracks in the painting's structure with their eyes. After all, for Palmov, the subject is not the purpose, but the means—his excuse to call out a handful of habitual perceptions and then, with his shifted planes, by leading the eye and attention away into the very thick of his "working over of the material," he forces the viewer to seek out the system of forces and approaches invented and employed for this illumination rather than the "illuminated object" itself. Of course, after having held the viewer under this psychological checkmate of constructions and conquests, he leaves him lost and bewildered. All that is left for the viewer is to weep from the depths of his sentiment, feeling insulted on behalf of tradition and his natural right to "calm contemplation," uttering the sacramental phrases, "it didn't move me," and "I don't get it!"

Palmov is one of the great battering rams smashing apart the idea of the self-sufficient, aesthetically hermeneutic painting from within while



Viktor Palmov, *Horse Taming*, 1927

also attacking the passive, layman's psychology of "perceiving" but not desiring to "conquer."

And if the productionists make up the frontlines, attacking head on with their demands that artistic practice and aesthetics submit to the needs of building a new life in solidarity, in the name of the new man, the constructor, then Palmov the Futurist is a partisan in the enemy camp. He is entirely in the picture plane. However, at the same time, these are no longer paintings at all, but construction sketches. He constructs bridges of mutual understanding between the painting and the viewer, whose only choice is to either retreat to the vaults of what had once been considered "great" art or push through the breach down the path of solving the constructive problems expressed in painting.

This work by this Futurist artist is particularly valuable and necessary. It is no less necessary than the work of the productionists, for it is through their joint efforts that the principle of the relative assessment of revolutionary tension leads to the development of coherent methods for conquering stagnation, both material and psychological, brought into the consciousness of the masses awash in revolution.

Everything that can be brought into the realm of human conquest must be. Critical thought, intense inventiveness, tactical flexibility, the

joy of solidarity in shaping musty or elemental material—these are the paths that the revolution takes into people's psyches and how it becomes entrenched in them.

Palmov's work is a battlefield within a giant front fighting to neutralize the war between a millions-strong army of passive viewers against a small group of specialists, the artistic innovators, and unite these factions into a single mass of humanity, in solidarity with one another in labor, imbued with a common and universal joy at seeing the world in a new way, in a unified, inventive onslaught of the expressive construction of everything that humanity needs.

Photo-Notes

Sergei Tretyakov

from *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings* (1989), 1913–40; first published as "Fotozametki," in *Novyi Lef*, no. 9, 1928

When I was in Kislovodsk, a photographist came up to me (I won't say "photographer" because that usually suggests a professional practitioner) who wanted to work in the *Lef* style.

He told me that a local photographer had begun to take portraits "from way below" and that, consequently, this fellow now thought he was making leftist art.

So I explained that this kind of "ersatz *Lef*" does not make us especially happy (we immediately punned on the theme of "*pod Lef*" [ersatz *Lef*] and "opodlev" [having become mean]). It's the application of our constructive principles to aesthetic ends.

There is no such thing as *Lef* photography. What matters most is how you go about setting it up, the aim (purpose) of the photograph and why you have to take it, and then finding the most rational means for the actual photographing and the points of view—that's the *Lef* approach.

We started to talk about portraiture. The photographist said:

"*Lef* once wrote that a man's portrait should be composed of an entire range of snapshots taken of him in his normal environment."

We came to the conclusion that there are portraits and portraits, i.e., there are different goals. If we want to form an impression of a fellow in his everyday reality, well, there's no better approach. People generally conceal their real, ordinary selves and have themselves photographed looking unusual, very special, heroic. Naturally, heroes need Rembrandt shadows, a clean-shaven face, a youthful air, a special twinkle in the eye, and smart clothes. So all warts, pimples, and wrinkles are carefully removed. But there's also the kind of portrait where it's important to record these very same details, I mean the I.D. No Rembrandt shadows, no snapshots of the ordinary environment, either—just an exact description of the face. Those are the kind of portraits used by the Department of Criminal Investigation.

The ability to pinpoint a necessary feature of detail assumes particular importance when the portrait is a scientific commission. Medicine has no interest in likeness, but on the other hand will demand the exact rendering of an eczematous texture; anthropology will demand the close-up of a cranial construction; eugenics needs to see the elements that resemble ancestral portraits; while a reporter will reproduce a face against the background of the sensational event which he is describing in his telegram.

In struggling against the professional photographer we are fighting against the habit people have of lying about themselves. We are struggling against the widespread opinion that individualistic and false self-promotion is the synthetic (aggregate) truth about this or that person.

The Kislovodsk fellow is photographing geological sections in precipices. But he forgets to put a human being or tree next to the precipice. So the result is a precipice devoid of scale—it could be either a piece of geology or a slice of layer cake.

As we analyze these geological photographs, let us take into account the possible mistakes. We might enthuse over the play of light and shadow and enjoy an effect like that of a nice landscape photograph; but the shadows traversing the strata or cast next to them confuse the viewer, creating the impression of varieties of rock strata which actually are not there.

Could there ever be a reason to set up a landscape and photograph it so that it looks nice?

Yes, there could, if the purpose was to attract the kind of idle tourists who exclaim "Marvelous!" at a particular sight. But *Lef* is for the re-education of the tourist, and feels that this kind of purely picturesque delight is characteristic of the bourgeois—not the Soviet—tourist.

Delight in nature "untouched by the blasphemous hand of man," in "virgin" forest, in "chaos," in the great masses of tree trunks rotting irresponsibly and unmethodically, is just a belch of reactionary Romanticism. Would it not be more correct to express interest in nature

organized to human advantage? In the fields plowed and sown, in the forests cleared and cultivated, in the rivers locked in the casemates of dams turning the hydroelectric turbines?

The poster. The book cover. The postcard. The atlas. The guidebook. The textbook. All these are different kinds of useful objects that dictate to the photographer different methods of photographing. The photographer's worth lies not in his inventing his own particular "style" of working, but in the fact that he executes every commission with maximum expedience and ingeniousness, making it accessible to the consumer.

I took a lot of photographs in an agricultural commune, and I had to conduct one of the photography sessions in the repair workshop. This involved a good deal of self-control; the workers were forced to pose against their will. They crowded around a disassembled tractor engine, and one of them grabbed a ruler in one hand and calipers in the other so as to measure the thickness of the shaft. But the calipers appeared at the very edge of the foreshortening focus and would have looked in the photograph like a piece of cotton thread. So I asked the worker to point the calipers at another shaft, so it would appear bigger.

The reply was exhaustive:

"You want to make a fool of me? That shaft can never be measured with a pair of calipers."

For this man it's the opinion of his fellow technicians that is important. He wants to be photographed as an engineer, not as a hero.

When I was photographing a work scene at a brick factory, I pointed the camera at a woman who was turning some bricks. When she saw this she immediately took off her kerchief, and to my question why she had done that, she replied:

"Why should I come out looking like an old woman?"

This reluctance to be photographed during working hours is characteristic (especially of women): "This is an old dress." "My hands are dirty." "I have to look at what I'm doing, you won't see my face."

The method I used in order to bring people out of their stiff posing was to turn their attention to some defect in their work, and while they were straightening it out, to photograph them—before they had a chance to adopt a pose. They were usually full of regrets:

"What? You've already taken me? And I had my hand on my hip."

On Sunday one of the commune men dropped by to have himself and his family photographed. His wife was in her Sunday best and held a kerchief in her hand. The youngest son was holding a toy horse. They explained that this was precisely how a photographer from the town had photographed them before.

I let them make themselves comfortable as they thought fit. Basically it was the typical pose: one sitting, another standing alongside with a hand on the other's shoulder and looking straight ahead. The children were arranged around them.

The mother instructed the little boy with the toy horse to look straight into the lens and insisted that he not screw up his eyes from the sun. Another boy wearing a jacket and long trousers held a puppy (people don't like being photographed empty-handed, they just have to be holding something—an apple, a pigeon, a chicken, any old object, an instrument, a branch, and if worse comes to worst, even a handkerchief). When the family members had already grouped, the mother suddenly shouted to the boy with the dog:

"Take off your shirt and roll up your trousers!"

All the family helped him to roll up his trousers and then pronounced with great satisfaction:

"Now you're wearing shorts. You'll look like an athlete. In any case, the dog will come out better against the white body."

Snapshot: Alexander Rodchenko

Margarete Vöhringer

Alexander Rodchenko's 1928 essay "Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot" was intended to offer a theoretical classification of his work while also repositioning it politically. In just four years as a photographer, Rodchenko had developed a visual language still considered genuinely avant-garde today: close-ups, surprising perspectives, extreme cropping, and abstracting montages appeared in exhibitions and magazines, on posters, and as book illustrations. In expanding into everyday space, Rodchenko's photographs were already characterized by the aesthetics of the new, revolutionized society of the nineteen-twenties. At the same time, they stood for his radical concept of art, in which artists in the aftermath of the October Revolution were regarded as role models for the entire Russian population: freed from decorative art, artists were obliged to depart from their traditional view of reality and instead learn to see in a new way. The goal was not something like a mere critique of obsolete art, but rather biopolitics—through aesthetic change, people themselves would be able to change.

At the height of these developments and at a time when Rodchenko's aesthetic had been broadly established in Russia, his essay was published, offering a rejection of his own success. It began with an analysis of present conditions: given the abundance of newspapers and articles constantly updating knowledge and the abundance of technologies and sciences whose achievements changed on a daily basis, it would be impossible to formulate any aesthetic that could claim supratemporal validity. Of all things, Rodchenko cited as his example a portrait of Vladimir Lenin that had been the subject of dispute for several years. Documentary forms were opposed to idealized, pseudo-realistic forms, multiperspectivity against iconic veneration, avant-gardists against realists. To resolve these conflicts, Rodchenko made a proposal: establishing an archive containing all representations of Lenin. To make clear "that … it cannot be a matter of any one single everlasting portrait," there was a need for "a portfolio of photographs, showing him at work and at leisure, an archive of his books, writing pads, notebooks, shorthand reports, film recordings, gramophone recordings."

Rodchenko's text appeared in the magazine *Novyi Lef* (New Left Front of the Arts), for which he was also image editor. With his photomontages, he sought to develop a method for representing a reality based on facts rather than fictions. Key to this factographic representation was the observer not being separated from the object, with the singular perspective of the author remaining visible.

Rodchenko was advocating for this involved and enlightened approach to reality at a precarious moment: Stalin's consolidation of power was largely complete, the first five-year plan had been adopted with industrialization as the key state doctrine, and what Stalin later called the year of the "great change" began, focusing on a planned economy after a phase of experimentation. In addition, criticism of Rodchenko's aesthetics was growing ever louder. His works were vilified as plagiarisms of foreign photographs that caused confusion rather than enlightenment. And even if Rodchenko took part in the disputes, they seemed like shadow battles given the critiques of representation he published around the same time. Ultimately, he was seeking not to position his own aesthetics and rather to use an opposites-subverting archival concept that would allow him to remain active as a photojournalist, even in the face of the unrest around him. He succeeded in this.

With his essay and its genuine political commitment, Rodchenko sought to resolve conflicts over the representation of power. It is thus instructive for the present: first, given the conjuncture of multiperspectivity in both postcolonial studies and exhibition practices; second, with respect to archiving the material world through globally networked databases; and third, on the question of representing facts in the post-truth age.

Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot

Alexander Rodchenko

From *Novyi Lef* No. 4, April 1928

I was once obliged to dispute with an artist the fact that photography cannot replace painting in a portrait. He spoke very soundly about the fact that a photograph is a chance moment, whereas a painted portrait is the sum total of moments observed, which, moreover, are the most characteristic of the man being portrayed. The artist has never added an objective synthesis of a given man to the factual world, but has always individualized and idealized him, and has presented what he himself imagined about him—as it were, a personal summary. But I am not going to dispute this; let us assume that he presented a sum total, while the photograph does not.

The photograph presents a precise moment documentarily.
It is essential to clarify the question of the synthetic portrait; otherwise the present confusion will continue. Some say that a portrait should only be painted; others, in searching for the possibility of rendering this synthesis by photography, follow a very false path: they imitate painting and make faces hazy by generalizing and slurring over details, which results in a portrait having no outward resemblance to any particular person—as in pictures of Rembrandt and Carrière.

Any intelligent man will tell you about the photograph's shortcomings in comparison to the painted portrait; everyone will tell you about the character of the Mona Lisa, and everyone forgets that portraits were painted when there was no photography and that they were painted not of all the intelligent people but of the rich and powerful. Even men of science were not painted.

You need not wait around, intelligentsia; even now AKhRR[1] artists will not paint you. True—they can't even depict the sum total, let alone .001 of a moment.

Now compare eternity in science and technology. In olden times a savant would discover a truth, and this truth would remain law for about twenty years. And this was learned and learned as something indisputable and immutable.

Encyclopedias were compiled that supplied whole generations with their eternal truths.

1 The Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia.

Does anything of the kind exist now? … No.
Now people do not live by encyclopedias but by newspapers, magazines, card catalogues, prospectuses, and directories.

Modern science and technology are not searching for truths, but are opening up new areas of work and with every day change what has been attained.

Now they do not reveal common truths—"the earth revolves"—but are working on the problem of this revolution.

Let's take:
aviation
radio
rejuvenation,[2] etc.

These are not mere platitudes, but constitute areas that thousands of workers are expanding in depth and breadth, thanks to their experiments.

And it is not just one scientist, but thousands of scientists and tens of thousands of collaborators.

And hence there will never be eternal airplanes, wireless sets, and a single system of rejuvenation.

There will be thousands of airplanes, motorcars, and thousands of methods for rejuvenation.

The same goes for the snapshot.

Here is an example of the first big collision between art and photography, between eternity and the moment. Moreover, in this instance photographs were taken casually, but painting attacked photography with all its heavy and light artillery—and failed miserably….
I mean Lenin.[3]

Chance photographers took his picture. Often when it was necessary, often when it was not. He had no time; there was a revolution on, and he was its leader—so he did not like people getting in his way.

2 The term refers to the Soviet emphasis on mass gymnastics and health exercises, which were particularly stressed during the 1920s and 1930s. Rodchenko himself was an avid sportsman and photographed many scenes of sports activity, including calisthenics, diving, and parachuting.
3 Lenin was a favorite subject for Soviet photographers. The file that Rodchenko refers to is probably the *Albom Lenona. Sto fotograficheskikh snimkow* (Lenin Album: A Hundred Snapshots), compiled by Viktor Goltsev and published by the State Press in 1927. Rodchenko himself also photographed Lenin; one of his portraits served as the cover of *Novyi Lef*, no. 8/9 (1927).

Nevertheless, we possess a large file of photographs of Lenin.

Now for the last ten years artists of all types and talents, inspired and rewarded in all sorts of ways and virtually throughout the world and not just in the USSR, have made up artistic depictions of him; in quantity they have paid for the file of photographs a thousand times, and have often used it to the utmost.

And show me where and when and of which artistically synthetic work one could say: this is the real V. I. Lenin.

There is not one. And there will not be.

Why not? Not because, as many think, "We have not yet been able to, we haven't had a genius yet, but certain people have at least done something."

No, there will not be—because there is a file of photographs, and this file of snapshots allows no one to idealize or falsify Lenin. Everyone has seen this file of photographs, and as a matter of course, no one would allow artistic nonsense to be taken for the eternal Lenin.

True, many say that there is no single snapshot that bears an absolute resemblance, but each one in its own way resembles him a bit.

I maintain that there is no synthesis of Lenin, and there cannot be one and the same synthesis of Lenin for each and everyone.... But there is a synthesis of him. This is a representation based on photographs, books, and notes.

It should be stated firmly that with the appearance of photographs, there can be no question of a single, immutable portrait. Moreover, a man is not just one sum total; he is many, and sometimes they are quite opposed.

By means of a photograph or other documents, we can debunk any artistic synthesis produced by one man of another.

So we refuse to let Lenin be falsified by art.

Art has failed miserably in its struggle against photography for Lenin. There is nothing left for it but to enlarge photographs and make them worse.

The less authentic the facts about a man, the more romantic and interesting he becomes.

So that is why modern artists are often so fond of depicting events long past and not of today. That is why artists have enjoyed less popularity when they have depicted contemporaneity—they are criticized, it is difficult to lie to their faces ... and they are acknowledged afterward when their contemporaries have died off.

Tell me frankly, what ought to remain of Lenin:

- an art bronze,
- oil portraits,
- etchings,
- water colors,
- his secretary's diary, his friends' memoirs—
- or a file of photographs taken of him at work and rest,
- archives of his books, writing pads, notebooks,
- shorthand reports, films, phonograph records?

I don't think there's any choice.

Art has no place in modern life. It will continue to exist as long as there is a mania for the romantic and as long as there are people who love beautiful lies and deception.

Every modern cultured man must wage war against art, as against opium.

Photograph and be photographed!

Crystallize man not by a single "synthetic" portrait, but by a whole lot of snapshots taken at different times and in different conditions.

Paint the truth.

Value all that is real and contemporary.

And we will be real people, not actors.



Alexander Rodchenko,
Cover of *Novyi Lef* magazine,
No. 8–9

Decomposition: Georges Bataille

Malte Rauch

In Georges Bataille's (1897–1962) multifaceted work, which cuts across disciplinary boundaries and resists attempts at stable classification, the idea of criticism occupies a singular place. Throughout his career, Bataille used the role of the critic to position himself in contemporary debates, radically reconfiguring the received understanding of a critical *écriture* in the course of these interventions. The programmatic significance of criticism for Bataille is particularly evident in his founding of the French journal *Critique* in 1946. Mostly dedicated to book reviews, yet strictly opposed to any disciplinary compartmentalization, the journal quickly established itself as an important voice in French intellectual life and continues to be published today.

For Bataille, the idea of criticism is not, however, limited to a critique of the written word, as evinced by the articles published here. In his early work, Bataille's criticism traversed a variety of fields, especially in the texts he wrote for the short-lived journal *Documents*. Although much remains uncertain about its genesis, it is clear that Bataille had a central role in founding and editing the journal, which was published in fifteen issues between 1929 and 1930. A hub for dissident Surrealists, *Documents* was characterized by its use of unexpected text-image constellations and its heterogeneous contents, which spanned, according to the magazine's cover, "Doctrines, Archeology, Fine Art, and Ethnography" ("Variety" was later exchanged for "Doctrines").

Under the appearance of a high-gloss journal, *Documents* became what Michel Leiris—a close friend of Bataille's and one of the journal's contributors—described as a "war machine against established ideas." In this vein, Bataille's essays demarcate a domain of what is "wholly other" to contemporary culture: its negative underside, constituted by all that has been excluded and repressed. Two of the texts included here—the essay on *Les pieds Nickelés* and the review of Joan Miró—are from the fourth and seventh issues, respectively, of the 1930 volume of *Documents*. Eschewing a literal understanding of negation, these interventions suggest that the dismemberment of the human figure, the scattering of random marks, and the obscuring of vision in Miró's painting is more prone to invoke and materialize this otherness than the anti-artistic strategies of Dada. Although Bataille was never formally a member of the group, his writings can be understood as an attempt to shift and radicalize the Surrealist aesthetic, which he depreciated for its persistent idealism. The third text published here—a review of works by André Breton, Paul Éluard, and Tristan Tzara from 1932—reveals how Bataille's criticism continued to grapple with Surrealism as an intimate enemy and crucial interlocutor.

While the art-theoretical reception of Bataille's early work by Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Georges Didi-Huberman has established the importance of his notion of the "formless," the essay on Miró employs an equally important concept in his critical lexicon: the notion of "decomposition," understood in the dual sense of declassification and decay, the latter referring to the rotting corpse as a marker for what culture must repress in order to constitute itself. The transformation that the idea of criticism undergoes in Bataille's work could be seen in accordance with this twofold operation. Criticism as practiced by Bataille is not a form of judgment according to established criteria. On the contrary, it is an undoing of established criteria, a form of writing that vindicates decomposition and destruction as constitutive elements of contemporary art, and also seeks to perform such a decomposition of meaning in the text.

What Bataille's writing shares with the Enlightenment tradition of French art criticism is the privilege granted to the sensuous experience of art. Yet, for Bataille, the experience of art should not be distanced and pleasant; it should be shocking, violent, and transgressive. In contradistinction to the Enlightenment subject of critique, which affirms its autonomy through acts of judgment, Bataille's criticism is keyed to an experience of desublimation and alterity that unsettles the viewer's sensibility. Aside from the historical importance of Bataille's work, the enduring relevance of his criticism consists in its attempt to problematize and transform dominant forms, rather than to stabilize and implement them. In so doing, Bataille's writing poses the exigent question about the criticality of art criticism: can critique operate on the side of the wholly other?

Critiques

Georges Bataille

from *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris 1970, first published in 1932

André Breton, *Le revolver à cheveux blancs* (The White-Haired Revolver);[1] Tristan Tzara, *Où boivent les loups* (Where the Wolves Drink); Paul Éluard, *La vie immédiate* (The Immediate Life), Paris, Cahiers libres, vol. I, 1932.

These three collections of poems are just about this year's only testimony to the diminished activity of Surrealism, and it is certainly in keeping with the will of their authors to study them not from a vague and more or less bluntly literary point of view and rather from a point of view that they themselves have sought to define.

It was not exactly into literary existence, considered as a specialized domain, but rather into existence as such that Surrealism sought to introduce a mode of activity that exceeds limits—those fixing law and those fixing custom—that atrophy to the same extent as thought and its expression; acts and attitudes. Critiques formulated on all sides have only avoided insignificance to the degree that they have documented the various outcomes in pursuit of this declared goal.

In the latter case, they happily deride those literati who have only barely managed to escape the degradation of an intellectual life that, for the very reason of its broad development, has debased itself ever closer to the point of inanity.

But it must be recognized that it is not enough to ironically note the discrepancy between effort and outcome. It is certain that all activity worthy of interest requires a radical rupture from the world of impoverished vanity, of rarefied thought, in which the current excitement of the literary bourgeoisie is to be found. It remains possible to assign vital importance to the representation of humanity before its own eyes and to refuse entirely those conditions of expression which, as a matter of obligation, make of this representation a senile farce, a little pretense here, a little perversity there. For this determination to reach a region perfectly estranged from this world of petty hypocrisies has been now expressed by the Surrealists with a certain force, and it is thus that their

1 This and the subsequent two collections have never appeared in English translation.

maneuvers, their impoverished precocities, their conventional provocations that have responded to this resolution without perceptible reward, cause little mirth given that they now warrant a pessimism more or less without reserve.

André Breton publishes under the title *Le revolver à cheveux blancs* a collection of poems that, written between 1915 and the present year, at least has the merit of not insisting on promises too loosely kept. On the contrary, its entire poetic activity is situated in keeping with a French literary tradition typified best by Stéphane Mallarmé and to which even Paul Valéry reattaches himself. Surrealism's own contributions to technique, tasked with subverting expression and via expression life itself, appear reduced to their proper scale: a method just as impoverished as those others in a series of efforts characterized by a search for method having replaced the vulgarity of poetic inspiration.

Within this series, however, it is possible to consider the Surrealist method as a denouement after which all novelty of the same kind would be untenable from the very start. It would thus have the merit of a perfect demonstration: the systematic search for modes of expression has the outcome of coming closer to an increasingly *estranged* image of poetry, but to a degree this image has emptied itself of its human significance in that it has rid itself of certain elements that are in immediate contact with elements essential to life. *Revolver à cheveux blancs* is situated entirely within this impasse.

The collection is preceded by a sort of preface in which André Breton himself comes to speak of puerility and which is certainly the most degenerate product of Surrealist literature: having reached this extremity of dullness, it is difficult to observe any difference from the nauseating horticultures of Jean Cocteau.

Tristan Tzara's poems are tinged with an incontestable grandeur. And if they appear estranged and situated outside of life, this character of isolation, far from introducing impotence, is undoubtedly the only thing that exists in the most blinding of worlds. Within the limits of poetry, expression reaches a point of extremity. But at the same time, it reveals itself to be incapable of changing the course of any kind of existence or of responding to the base need expressed by Surrealism. As seductive as it may be, rupturing from life in its entirety remains nothing more than the culmination of the impoverished tendencies of Mallarméan poetry. It emerges with particular clarity in Tzara's work—precisely because of a real force of expression—that Surrealism cannot have any meaning other than to carry to their extremes the exhaustion, emptiness, and despair that give modern societies' mental existence its deepest meaning. In no

case would he be able to keep the promise made to effect an exit from that existence, being incapable of creating a connection between poetry and life.

Paul Éluard's poetry is keenly appreciated by a class of enlightened amateur enthusiasts of modern literature, but it has nothing to do with poetry. The author himself, who must suffer on account of this, does not hesitate to treat those who enjoy his writing as "men smaller than nature."

Joan Miró: Recent Paintings

The set of Joan Miró's paintings that we publish here represents the most recent development of this painter, with this present evolution being of particular interest. Miró commenced with a representation of objects so minute that to some degree, it turned reality to dust; a kind of sunlit dust. Subsequently these very objects, infinitesimal as they are, liberate themselves individually from any kind of reality, appearing like a throng of elements decomposed and all the more agitated. Ultimately, Miró having himself confessed his desire to "kill painting," the decomposition was forced to a point at which nothing other than a few formless stains remained on the lid (or tombstone, if one prefers) of its box of tricks. The small, enraged, and alienated elements then once more force violent entry, before again disappearing here in these paintings, leaving behind nothing more than traces of who knows what disaster.

Les Pieds Nickelés

A Mexican god such as Quetzalcoatl, amusing itself by sneaking down from atop the mountains in small, illustrated form, seems to me more than any other thing explicable with the miserable repertoire of common words to have always been a *Pied Nickelé*:[2] In its evident sadness and gratuitousness, any observation of this kind is nothing other than another small effort to denounce the pathetic stubbornness with which an insect colony of intellectuals, set in motion by an overwhelming imperative, repairs small holes in a hive wall that threatens to allow a pernicious light to pass through. It is in fact vital to the strength of the edifice upon which our intellectual existence depends that a certain part of human activity, falling, if we like, within the purview of *moral freedom*, cannot be defined by any term. It is already many years since the coughing and spluttering Dada (also rather courteous in the final analysis, making itself available rather quickly as an object of laughter) was ditched by its

2 The comic *Les Pieds Nickelés* took its name from a French pejorative, "nickel-plated feet," used to designate people perceived as evading or unable to work.

own makers. On the other hand, and in spite of a number of equivocations, it remains out of the question to speak of Surrealism, especially at that very moment where it seeks to culminate in nothing other than a morose obscurity.

It would be vain to seek direct remedy to such a state of affairs: it is evidently impossible at present, in any intellectual form at all, to permit sufficient freedom to the figures of the Mexican Valhalla, at once bloodied and dying with laughter. Today, it is easier to find their hilarious puerility and their scorn for grandiosity in the mocking faces of the *Pieds Nickelés*. The *Pieds Nickelés*, all in all, do nothing more than what small boys do to entertain themselves and, likely not knowing how to spit in the wind, no one would have the effrontery to clearly and loudly declare that the suffering we endure, the work performed the world over, the banks, the ministries, the hospitals, and the prisons have any goal other than to be the object of three especially ugly rascals' delirious laughter.

The adventures—or misadventures—of the *Pieds Nickelés* gang, composed wholly of the characters Croquignol, Ribouldingue, and Filochard, have appeared since 1908 and without pause in one of the main illustrated children's weeklies, *L'Épatant*. On sale before the war for just a few pennies, this weekly magazine was aimed at children from the classes referred to, with a singular cynicism, as underprivileged. Its enduring success and, we might say, the extraordinary fame of the *Pieds Nickelés* are of an essentially *populaire* (working-class) character. The exploits of the *Pieds Nickelés*, however, are very much familiar across the whole social ladder.

It is curious to once again note that to find the lowest of the likable bandits, it suffices to lose one's *seriousness* (whereby a person old before their time cannot fail to rival the most terrible child). The social order may originate with a burst of laughter; children can be entertained by representations of this order being scorned by beings of perfect grotesqueness: they are never going to be anything other than people of the utmost honesty. Teachers and mothers effectively tell astonished children—not without the most comic gravity—that "life is not a burst of laughter." With a soft hand, they give the children *Pieds Nickelés* for immediate enjoyment—before taking them back away from them with another.

But I imagine that in a sad mind clouded by that mysterious conditioning, a still-shimmering paradise can emerge from the formidable noise of breaking crockery: somewhere, in those extravagant stores where a jacketed specter armed with the notorious *Do not touch* sign moves around only to collapse with a cry like that of a duck whose throat

has been cut in a hideous trap. Idiocy and wrongheadedness receiving outrageous reward, ugliness, the New Prometheus turned to a grimace, ripping from the sky not fire, but rather a burst of laughter; and finally, overflowing with joy, grinning angels of marvelous beauty reduced to decorating canned peas or camembert: unrestrained entertainment makes use of all the products of the world, and all discarded objects must be broken like playthings.

I cannot help but be crudely delighted at the thought that when they find no such paradise in reach, people—somewhat wild—generously permit one to puppets elevated to the status of gods, reducing themselves to the role of a plaything, looking curiously, but with the help of a large knife, at what is contained within the belly of that screeching plaything.

It is perhaps possible to push this timid pleasure a little further via a seemingly naïve assumption: when an individual is not a plaything, they are a player, unless they are both at the same time.

And if we lend to entertainment a sufficiently "Mexican" meaning, that is to say an intervention which is more or less always out of place in the most serious of domains, entertainment still runs the risk of appearing to be idealism's sole reduction. A simple dream analysis can indicate, ultimately, that *entertainment* is the most desperate of needs and, of course, the most terrifying one in human nature.

Decolonizing Art History: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

Parul Dave Mukherji

What is the urgency today of revisiting art criticism by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), one of the great art historians of the twentieth century, when the world seems to be hurtling toward an uncertain future? Coomaraswamy has had an enduring presence across time. In him, we see not only a strident critic of cultural imperialism but even a proto-globalist for whom terms currently in use, Global North and Global South, were prescient. With his proficiency in Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, and Chinese, he had access to different knowledge systems in the world. His art criticism may be situated in the first half of the twentieth century when art, art history, and metaphysics became a means for asserting the intellectual autonomy of the Global South.

Born of a Ceylonese-Tamil father and English mother, he was educated in England. Early in his life, he abandoned a career in geology to devote full attention to the study of "Eastern" culture. During his field trips to Sri Lanka to study its rocks and minerals, his attention shifted to its people and culture. This turn from physical sciences to culture brought his biracial identity to the fore and made him acutely aware of cultural differences. His first book *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908) became a plank from which to delve deeper into aesthetics, literature, mythology, folklore, religion, and metaphysics of South and Southeast Asia and also develop an abiding investment in comparativist projects. His acute awareness of the pitfalls of modernization—premised on rapacious capitalism and its attendant inequalities—made him extremely