NONSITE • ORG

1

AUTHOR-ARTIST-AUDIENCE

nonsite.org is an online, open access, peer-reviewed quarterly journal of scholarship in the arts and humanities affiliated with Emory College of Arts and Sciences. ISSN 2164-1668

EDITORIAL BOARD

SUBMISSIONS

ARTICLES: SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Please direct all Letters to the Editors, Comments on Articles and Posts, Questions about Submissions to nonsite.org@emory.edu.

Potential contributors should send submissions electronically via nonsite.submishmash.com/Submit. Applicants for the B-Side Modernism/Danowski Library Fellowship should consult the full proposal guidelines before submitting their applications directly to the nonsite.org submission manager.

Please include a title page with the author's name, title and current affiliation, plus an up-to-date e-mail address to which edited text and correspondence will be sent. Please also provide an abstract of 100-150 words and up to five keywords or tags for searching online (preferably not words already used in the title). Please do not submit a manuscript that is under consideration elsewhere.

ARTICLES: MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Accepted essays should be submitted as Microsoft Word documents (either .doc or .rtf), although .pdf documents are acceptable for initial submissions.. Double-space manuscripts throughout; include page numbers and one-inch margins. All notes should be formatted as endnotes.

Style and format should be consistent with *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. or above. Second and later references to a previously cited work should be made in the text, giving the author's last name and the title of the work. Do not use op. cit.

POETRY: SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

We accept unsolicited poetry via nonsite.submishmash.com/Submit. Please submit your work in .doc or .pdf formats. Your submission should be a single file consisting of no more than ten pages, and may include, if you wish, a cover letter listing a few of your recent publications. We consider only previously unpublished work, and while we encourage simultaneous submissions, we request that you notify us (poetry@nonsite.org) immediately if your work is accepted elsewhere.

MEDIA AND PERMISSIONS

Authors must obtain permissions for illustrations that require permissions. A 300 dpi file (JPEG, GIF, PIC, or TIFF) of each illustration will be needed, though a legible scan is acceptable for initial submission. Hyperlinks will need correct URL addresses; video clips should be in MPEG, MOV or Quicktime formats; sound files should be high-quality MP3s.

Nonsite is subject to the same copyright restrictions and intellectual property laws as all publications. It is the contributor's responsibility to obtain necessary permissions to reproduce images, video clips, and sound files in the article text. Permission is not required for the inclusion of hyperlinks; the use of links may offer a more efficient way of including video, music, and image files. Image captions should include appropriate credits and permissions.

ABOUT NONSITE

nonsite.org is an online, open access, peer-reviewed quarterly journal of scholarship in the arts and humanities affiliated with Emory College of Arts and Sciences. ISSN 2164-1668.

ISSUE #1:AUTHOR-ARTIST-AUDIENCE SPRING 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Sonnenuntergang: **On Philippe Parreno's June 8, 1968** **8**
Michael Fried

Neoliberal Aesthetics: Fried, Rancière and the Form of the Photograph . . **20**
Walter Benn Michaels

Paul Valéry's Blood Meridian, Or How the Reader became a Writer **48**
Todd Cronan

History and the Work of Art in Sebald's *After Nature* **72**
Dorothea von Mücke

Matisse and Picasso: The Redemption and The Fall **102**
Eric Michaud

False Gods: Authority and Picasso's Early Work **124**
Charles Palermo

REVIEWS

Mysterious Exchange: On Susan Sidlauskas's *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense* **154**
Todd Cronan

ARTICLES

SONNENUNTERGANG:
ON PHILIPPE PARRENO'S JUNE 8, 1968

MICHAEL FRIED

Shortly after midnight in Los Angeles on June 5, 1968, after having delivered a victory speech celebrating the results of the Democratic primary in California in which he had defeated Eugene McCarthy, Robert Kennedy was shot three times, once in the head, by Sirhan Sirhan in a service area of the Ambassador Hotel. He was rushed to a hospital, where he underwent surgery; all night and throughout the next day and much of the next night his life hung in the balance; my wife and I remember staring numbly and futilely at the small black-and-white TV in our student apartment in Cambridge, Massachusetts as the endless hours dragged by. Eventually a spokesman appeared and announced that Kennedy was dead. Barely two months earlier Martin Luther King, Jr. had been murdered in Memphis, and a short time after that Andy Warhol, of all people, had been shot and gravely wounded as well. And of course Robert Kennedy's brother, JFK, had been assassinated in Dallas in 1963. In Vietnam the war showed not the least sign of abating. Anyone in my generation who wanted to believe that there was hope for an American future worth having would have a hard time finding the terms in which to express that hope after the events of 1968.

Kennedy's body was flown to New York, where the casket was on view at St. Patrick's Cathedral for two nights and a day; thousands of people waited hours on line to pay their last respects. After the funeral on June 8, the coffin was transported by train to Washington,

D.C., where Kennedy was subsequently buried at Arlington National Cemetery. The train ride normally took four hours; in this case it took eight. In Evan Thomas's words: "As they had for Lincoln [when his body was taken by train from Washington back to Springfield, Illinois], many thousands – perhaps, for RFK, a million people – lined the tracks. The coffin, on a bier close to the floor of the observation car, could not be seen by bystanders. So Kennedy's pallbearers lifted it up and placed it, a bit precariously, on chairs. Along the route of the train, Boy Scouts and firemen braced at attention; nuns, some wearing dark glasses, stood witness; housewives wept. Thousands and thousands of black people waited quietly in the heat, perhaps because they lived close to the tracks, but also because they had felt for Kennedy, and knew they would miss him. 'Marvelous crowds,' said Arthur Schlesinger, staring out the window as the train slowly rocked south. 'Yes,' said Kenny O'Donnell. 'But what are they good for now?'" [1]

On the train were scores of Kennedy's friends, supporters, and members of his family, as well as a photographer, Paul Fusco, who had been given the assignment by LOOK Magazine of recording the day's events. This turned out to involve photographing the memorial services at St. Patrick's, and then, throughout the train ride, taking almost two thousand color photographs of the mourners informally gathered by the side of the tracks as the train slowly rolled south. He also took a number of photos at the ceremony in Arlington. Surprisingly, no book-length selection of those photographs was published for more than thirty years; starting in 1998 the situation changed, and now we have the fullest selection to date, an Aperture volume entitled *Paul Fusco: RFK*, which provides a historical visual context for Philippe Parreno's *June 8, 1968*. A movie cameraman from CBS was also on the train; color footage from the same train ride is now available through the WPA Film Library, and looking at it leaves no doubt that this too was an important source of inspiration for Parreno, as he himself has said. [2]

Parreno's movie lasts almost exactly seven minutes from beginning to end. It was filmed in color in April 2009 in several different locations: the train shots in the Niles Canyon in the San Francisco Bay area on a heritage railway with a train of the same type as the original one; the city shots in Oakland, California; and what Parreno calls the "nature shot" on a ranch, also in California, about two hours from Los Angeles. The filming took place over five days. The shooting itself lasted two hours and then another two hours; some material needed to be reshot; the filming was in 70 mm and the plan was (and ideally has remained) to screen the film in 70 mm as well, with no digital processing at any point. The sound was recorded during the shooting and then designed and edited in relation to the film's final cut. The casting of the "mourners" was done on the basis of photos. The team that took part in this was the same outstanding trio involved in the making of Parreno's and Douglas Gordon's *Zidane: A*

Twenty-First Century Portrait: Darius Khondji, cinematography; Nicolas Baker, sound recording and editing; and Herve Shneid, film editing.

I first saw *June 8, 1968* this past summer at Bard College, where it was shown in a large-screen digital projection rather than in 70 mm, as it had earlier been presented at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition space was a large room, carpeted but without seats of any kind; viewers had to decide for themselves where to stand, or if they chose to sit or lie on the carpet, where to settle down. The absence of proper seating made one conscious of one's presence before the projection – for all the latter's great size and relative proximity, there was no question of simply absorbing or immersing oneself in the image, as is traditionally the case in ordinary movies. The sound too reinforced one's sense of separation from the projection by virtue of its loudness, hyper-clarity, and effect of envelopment coupled with intervals of silence. Another distancing factor was the way in which the illumination in the room – reflected light from the screen – varied according to the brilliance of the image. (Regardless of format, Parreno insists that every iteration maintain a similarity of size "between the characters on screen looking at the audience and the [members of the] audience looking at them"[personal communication]. Thus the ratio of image height to image width is always 1:2.4 – a Cinemascope ratio – and the base of screen, depending on the exhibition space, runs between nine and twelve meters in width.) [3]

A number of points seem both obvious and important.First, there is the matter of the relation of June 8, 1968 both to the events to which it ostensibly pertains and to the scenes recorded by Fusco and the CBS cameraman. Not only is the landscape that we glimpse in the film not at all like that lying between New York City and Washington, D.C. (more on this shortly); the seemingly basic motif of grief, of heartfelt response to a national tragedy, has been mostly purged from Parreno's film – a strange decision on the face of it. Specifically, none of those

filmed by the side of the tracks salutes or holds a hand over his or her heart; there are no flags, no hastily gathered honor guards, no hand-made signs saying "So-Long, Bobby" or "God bless the Kennedys" or anything of the sort – although all are features of Fusco's photos. There are black people, but not in numbers. No one seems particularly sad, though almost everyone appears serious, thoughtful. By the same token, the film also lacks the young people excitedly waving, sometimes with out-of-place smiles on their faces, who appear in several of the photos in the book. Also absent are the packed crowds that occupy various station platforms and the like in Fusco's photos and the CBS footage – in general, Parreno's film is much more sparsely populated than either. Not that various shots in the film do not find their inspiration in the earlier images; they plainly do. But the differences are striking, and are meant to be so.

Second, the fact of the film's brevity invites reflection. That is, it works against the possibility of immersion, of losing oneself in the viewing experience, especially after one has watched the film at least once and therefore knows beforehand that the entire work lasts only seven minutes. Rather, the brevity serves as a prod to pay extremely close attention, whatever that turns out to mean, to the individual shots or scenes – by my count, twenty-nine in all — as they go by, both in their own right and in their relationship to one another. Why this, why that, why sometimes with the sound of the train jolting along the rails and over the points and sometimes with only the sound of wind moving through grasses or foliage (or so it seems), indeed why the difference in volume between one similar scene and another, why the sharply disparate durations of individual scenes, why just these scenes in this sequence? After a while it occurs to the viewer to wonder about what might be called the film's genre: what sort of work is it, which is to say what other films or videos or works in other media would it make sense to compare it with?

Third, elaborating on the theme of distancing, the viewer registers the image track and the sound track as essentially separate from each other, which is to say as deliberately conjoined by the artist in the making of the film. This is true despite the fact that the sound was recorded live: whatever synchronization of image and sound there may be, and presumably there is at least some, is experienced as an artistic effect, the product of a specifically artistic intention, as distinct from a typical instance of filmic "realism." Both the sheer volume of the sound at its loudest and the intervals of near-silence underscore the point. Put another way, the "world" of Parreno's film is an unabashedly esthetic one, and our task as viewers — and listeners — is somehow to shape up to this fact. The film, both image and sound, comes at one rather than invites one in; the vertiginous, close-up shot of track ties about to pass under the train toward the end of the long opening scene makes this point almost kinesthetically. [4]

Fourth, there is nothing in Fusco's photographs or the CBS footage quite like the treatment of nature in Parreno's film. Not that there are not, in the photos, some striking scenes in that regard, such as the one on p. 103 in which roughly twenty figures occupy different positions on a grassy slope overgrown with weedy plants. But everywhere in both photos and footage we recognize the semi-urbanized nature of the Eastern seaboard – weeds, bushes, some trees, unkempt fields, now and then a bushy hillside, fairly late on a lake or other body of water ringed with cars (pp. 145-51) – rather than the far more sensorially and cinematically compelling scenery on offer in the film, with its expansive vistas, distant mountains, gorgeous hillsides and dramatic, presumably quite ancient trees, trestle bridges spanning streams and gorges, power-line-bearing pylons set in fields of grass or weeds blowing in the wind, in short its distinctively Western American character.

The light too seems significantly different in the two cases: as we reach the last stages of Fusco's book we glimpse the sun settling toward the horizon, but there is nothing in his images to match the brilliant, intense, red-to-yellow late afternoon illumination and elongated cast shadows that prevail throughout Parreno's film, especially toward the end.[5] Also toward the end of his film the emphasis on landscape, on nature, becomes even more pointed: about four minutes and forty seconds into *June 8, 1968*(in other words, just over two minutes from the end) we are shown at close range a magnificent oak with heavy, curving branches, in fact the camera slowly pans down from its heights, with optical flares shooting through the camera lens (accompanied by only a silentish droning sound, as if the train has been forgotten); followed by a scene of a hillside partly framed by a giant branch at the left and, in the middle distance, an older couple evidently picnicking (we see their basket and their red picnic cloth), sitting on chairs facing to the left as the bright but waning sunlight plays on their faces, leaving much else in shadow (another not quite silent, almost valedictory tableau); then as if travelling backwards (i.e. toward the viewer rather than away; but which way in time?) a brief downward-looking shot of a stream and foliage (also another picnic, barely glimpsed); then a stretch of track with a relatively large group of "mourners" gathered to watch the train go by, also parked cars including a police car at a railway crossing and the sound of a bell signaling the passing of the train; then the straight-ahead crossing of a trestle bridge, a brief scene, with swelling sound; then back to the tracks, a few last "mourners," including a black woman holding an umbrella to shield her from the sun, adults and children standing at various distances from the tracks in an adjacent field, and a white girl in her late teens or early twenties wearing a pink two-piece sunsuit (we approach her slowly, from a distance, giving us time to take in the mountains at the horizon). The scene then shifts dramatically, to a younger girl in dark shorts and a sleeveless white top in a boat with an outboard motor; both girl and boat, unmoving, are framed by intensely blue water, itself not flowing but rippling. She seems lost

in thought (the scene, once again, is hushed; we catch the sound of water, lapping). Then comes a spectacular hillside with an astonishing spreading valley oak to the left; nine distant "mourners" are positioned on the hill, all but one partly silhouetted against the deep blue to indigo sky. This scene, like certain earlier ones, is accompanied by the sound of wind; it also turns out to be the longest static shot in the film, lasting almost thirty seconds – in a work of seven minutes an eternity. When it ends the film is over.

Fifth, in some ways most fundamental, the viewer of the film is required to take into account, to bring into focus experientially and intellectually, the effect of so many figures in the shots with tracks looking directly toward the train, which is to say toward the camera, which is to say – but is this right? it certainly seems what Parreno wishes to suggest — toward or at the viewer, the beholder. The same structure prevails in Fusco's photographs and the CBS footage – in fact it must have been this, more than anything, that inspired Parreno to make a short film loosely based on these sources. However, the facing structure takes on an altogether more pointed and, so to speak, more challenging significance in his film. In the photographs and news footage the fact that all those who have come to watch the train go by face the camera is explained by the nature of the occasion. It would be surprising, to say the least, if they were doing anything else. But precisely because, as we have seen, the film departs significantly from the actuality of June 8, 1968 – precisely because it presents itself less as a historical reconstruction than as an esthetic proposition – the relation of the "mourners" to the movie camera and beyond that to the viewer quickly looms as a central issue with respect to the meaning of the work as a whole. This is further complicated by the fact that in several of the shots, such as the post-picnic one mentioned above, the "mourners" are shown looking offscreen somewhere to our left. Nothing of the sort is to be found in the documentary material.

I want to suggest that Parreno's film belongs in this regard to a more general or indeed collective engagement, on the part of a number of significant contemporary visual artists, with the dual themes of posing and absorption – more broadly, with the fundamental question of the relation of the work to the viewer. A key figure in that collective engagement is the photographer Jeff Wall, who since the early 1990s has often deliberately and artfully posed individual figures in ways that suggest that they are nevertheless absorbed in what they are doing. (Classic lightbox photographs in that vein by Wall include *Adrian Walker, Artist, Drawing from a Specimen in a Laboratory in the Dept. of Anatomy at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver* [1992] and *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* [1999], both of which are discussed in some detail in my recent book, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before.*[6]) In terms of the original, Diderotian conception of absorption as a pictorial resource, this should have been a contradiction in terms: for Diderot and the critics who followed his lead, a personage in a painting could appear truly absorbed in what he or she was doing, feeling, or thinking only if he or she also conveyed the impression of being oblivious to being beheld. Put the other way round, a personage who did not convey the latter impression – and *a fortiori* one who could be seen not only as conscious of being beheld but actually as posing for the artist – was bound to strike the viewer as false and theatrical, for Diderot and like-minded critics the worst of all artistic faults. The same idea, more or less, has its photographic equivalent in Susan Sontag's unqualified statement, "There is something on people's faces when they don't know they are being observed that never appears when they do" (said in explanation of the "truthfulness" of Walker Evans's Subway Portraits).[7] In an important sense, Wall's practice flies in the teeth of these ideas: on the one hand, absorptive themes and effects have been basic to his art for almost twenty years now (to that extent Wall's thought remains close to Diderot's). On the other hand, his photographs have found various means of signaling the fact that they are anything but "candid" in origin, capturing persons who were literally unaware of being photographed, but rather are deliberate constructions involving something like a performance of absorption on the part of their subjects (thereby taking Diderotian ideas into new territory). In *Why Photography Matters as Art* I introduce the concept of to-be-seenness in connection with Wall's pictures, and suggest that some such acknowledgment of the frankly esthetic character of the works in question has become a hallmark of virtually all the recent art photography I discuss in that book. I also refer to what I call the "magic" of absorption, by which I mean the surprising ability of absorptive themes and motifs to retain much of their efficacy even in the case of works, such as Wall's, in which one recognizes that the figures are cooperating knowingly with the photographer. Indeed a more recent photo by Wall, the large black-and-white *Men Waiting* [2006], draws its force from the infra-thin difference to the eye between the standing men in question ostensibly waiting

for work, as in fact they had been doing in another venue when Wall first spotted them, and in actuality posing for the photographer.

In this connection it should be noted that Parreno himself was one of the two creators (the other, as already mentioned, being Douglas Gordon) of a recent work of major ambition that carried these sorts of issues to a new pitch of explicitness – the superb full-length film *Zidane: A Twenty-First Century Portrait* (2006). Briefly, the project was, with the great footbaler Zinedine Zidane's consent, to train no less than seventeen movie cameras on him throughout a regular Spanish league match, and then to make a feature-length film out of the results. What this turned out to mean is that the viewer's attention is riveted on Zidane, often at extremely close range, for the whole ninety minutes (more or less); the camera never leaves Zidane to follow the ball, or pulls back to show a considerable portion of the field, though at various moments we are given a glimpse of the TV coverage of the match and on two occasions we are shown a particular piece of action more than once so as to underline its importance. The gist of the film, I argue in *Why Photography Matters*, is that it thereby amounts to a concentrated study of real-life absorption under conditions of maximum publicity – that is, Zidane's mission, his professional and personal commitment, calls for him to remain as nearly as possible wholly absorbed in the match even as he understands himself to be observed by 80,000 spectators in the stadium, probably millions more via TV, plus the seventeen cameras following his every action, gesture, and expression. I should add that he was miked for sound as well. All this, it should be clear, at once relates to the Diderotian esthetic and puts it under maximum strain of a distinctly modern kind. [8]

My point in citing *Zidane* in this connection is to support the claim that *June 8, 1968* is importantly to be understood within the framework of these and related ideas, but with the following twist: the "mourners" by the side of the tracks are shown gazing directly at the camera, ostensibly so as to pay their last respects to the murdered RFK. But of course the viewer quickly realizes that this is not the case at all, that the "mourners" are in effect performers who have been placed in their respective positions and were no doubt also told how to comport themselves by the filmmaker, which of course implies that they are wholly conscious of being filmed as the train passes. Moreover, by virtue of their stillness they partake of the aura of persons in photographs, which further intensifies one's sense that they are posing for the camera. Yet the residual "magic" of absorption comes into play even under these circumstances in that something of the gravity of the original occasion – the original onlookers catching a glimpse of Robert Kennedy's casket as the train went by — resonates in the "mourners"'s simple stances, evident gravity, unwavering gazes, unbroken silence. This is why the title *June 8, 1968* is not a mere imposition on a blatant fiction.

I have a further suggestion: that that residual "magic," together with the awareness that the "mourners" themselves are not exemplars of genuine inwardness, throws into relief – gives added salience, even a sort of poignance to — the spectacular nature in which the figures are embedded. For there is a simple sense in which the "authenticity" of the natural environment contrasts quietly but unmistakably with the stagedness of the human participants, a contrast that is all the more telling owing to the sheer beauty and variety, which in this case is also to say the sheerly photogenic – cinematogenic? — quality, of the nature we are given to behold. The wind blowing through the grasses and trees at various moments in the film, being itself invisible, seems almost to allegorize "authenticity" as such. There is something Kantian in this: I am thinking of the Kant of the third *Critique*, for whom virtually all art is fatally compromised – condemned to inauthenticity, theatricality — by the mere fact of being intended for an audience. Only nature escapes this fate, along with, Kant adds, art produced by genius, whose special gift is somehow to achieve intentionally what nature accomplishes automatically. Obviously there is more than this to Kant's arguments (the tortuosities of the notion of purposiveness without purpose, for example), but for me much of what is most immediately gripping in *June 8, 1968* turns on the contrast or say the felt difference between the stagedness plus residual "magic" of absorption of the "mourners" and the wholly unselfconscious albeit dramatic, in certain scenes one might say over-the-top beauty of the natural world, as that world has been framed, photographed, and projected at large scale and in extraordinary, real-world-like fineness of detail (hence Parreno's preference for 70 mm rather than digital projection). It is as if a crucial motivation behind his remarkable film were precisely to explore this difficult-to-conceptualize territory between two distinct, not antitheatrical *tout court* (the thematization of to-be-seenness cuts against that) but antitheatrically inflected modes of relationship to the viewer. Heidegger also seems pertinent to this discussion, the natural world in *June 8, 1968* being thoroughly infiltrated by technology from beginning to end. But are we meant to feel that its beauty is in the least compromised by that fact? Any more than by the unexplained police car with its open door in scenes two and three? I say that we are not. What, however, is the police car doing in those scenes? Has there been a crime?

Another felt difference, operative throughout the film but gaining strength as it proceeds, concerns the relation between the original events, RFK's murder and the train journey between New York and Washington, D.C., and Parreno's not-quite-reenactment of the journey through very different terrain, using equipment – not only the vintage train but, it turns out, the camera lenses as well – that goes back to the 1960s, as does, more or less, some of the clothing worn by the "mourners." The sense of pastness is most acute in the not quite silent, slowly-gliding-by Oakland section of the film, with its period automobiles, black baseball players in their dazzling uniforms behind a grillwork fence, expanse of brick

wall painted white (not, as it happens, by the filmmaker), black mother and daughter looking on at a crossing, culminating, as the sound track hushes, in a curiously intense study of a young white boy in shorts and an old-fashioned peaked cap standing alongside his bicycle. The boy in particular seems to belong to a still earlier moment, the 1940s or even the 1930s. The difference in this case is between a certain deeply painful and in an important sense still unsettled historical past, the dreadful American year 1968, itself with historical roots, and a present state of the natural world that is itself marked – this is my claim, based on nothing more nor less than repeated viewings of the film — by an intuition of loss, the very gorgeousness of the scenery in the late afternoon light and shadow having something of the character of a spectacular finale to a long-running production. As if the form of Parreno's movie is ultimately that of a filmic elegy for nature itself, or American nature, or perhaps America by way of its nature in twenty-nine irregular stanzas. I am not alone in sensing an affinity with Terrence Malick in Parreno's sensibility. [9]

Finally, some thoughts on the "everyday" in connection with *June 8, 1968*. The basic idea is that precisely because the film does not depict the events of that particular day, or even a serious, thoroughgoing attempt to reconstruct those events, the day that is nevertheless pointedly thematized in and by the film, especially through the motif of the sinking sun, *but also as it were "negatively" through the title*, is indeed a kind of "everyday" – the grammar of the term in this context being analogous to that of the term "everyman." Put slightly differently, the brilliance of Parreno's film in this regard is that the overarching reference to June 8, 1968 gives it the fulcrum it needs to be something other than a much abbreviated evocation of a beautiful California afternoon.

What remains unclear at least to me is whether the pensive young girl in a boat in the penultimate scene is a figure of hope and possibility or simply of abandonment in or to her own unanchored subjectivity. The final shot, however, in its very protractedness and stasis (no movement besides the breeze audibly riffling the leaves and moving through the grass) — also in the distance it meticulously keeps from the artfully spaced "mourners" (or should one say onlookers or even witnesses?) on the brow of the hill – returns *June 8, 1968*to a mainly ontological register. More than just the sun would seem to be going down. [10]

NOTES

1. Evan Thomas, "June 8, 1968" in *Paul Fusco: RFK* (New York and London, 2008), p. 11. Photographs by Paul Fusco, with essays by Vicki Goldberg, Norman Mailer, and Evan Thomas, and a tribute by Senator Edward M. Kennedy. Further page references to the book will be in parentheses in the text.

2. In a personal communication. My thanks to Philippe Parreno for his willingness to answer various technical questions that I put to him in the course of working on the essay.

3. More recently (November 2010), I saw *June 8, 1968* a number of times at Parreno's one-man exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery. The room in which it was projected was considerably smaller than the one at Bard, which on the one hand intensified certain visual effects but on the other involved a regrettable loss of grandeur. A version of the present essay appears in the catalogue to the Serpentine exhibition, along with ones by Dorothea von Hantelmann and Nicolas Bourriaud; among the changes I have made are various corrections to my earlier account of the role of sound in individual scenes. See Michael Fried, "Sonnenuntergang: On Philippe Parreno's *June 8, 1968*" in Philippe *Parreno Films: 1987-2010*, exh. cat. (London, 2010-11), pp. 133-44.

4. Just how important the CBS footage was for Parreno can be gauged from the fact that the close-up shots of the tracks, which play a key early role in *June 8, 1968*, are taken almost verbatim from the original news film.

5. Parreno also mentions a desire "to celebrate Kodachrome, which stopped being manufactured by Kodak the year I shot the film."

6. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Never Before* (New Haven and London, 2008).

7. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977), p. 37, note. Discussed in Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, pp. 29-30, 101-2.

8. See Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, pp. 226-33.

9. See Simon Critchley, "A Puppet or a God? On Philippe Parreno's Films," in *Philippe Parreno*, exh. cat. (Paris, 2009), ed. Christine Macel with the collaboration of Karen Marta, p. 196. The title of Critchley's essay of course refers to Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810), one of the great texts in the antitheatrical tradition.

10. When I had finished a draft of this essay, I sent it to a friend, the philosopher Robert Pippin, who had not seen Parreno's film. Pippin's response included the following: "There seems to be some issue connecting the attempt to 'recapture' the past and esthetic construction. In a Hegelian sense, we only know now, or at least many years afterwards, what that one death turned out to mean. That is, a slide to and then from Nixon ever downward in national politics, and so an inability to ever 'recapture' (really re-experience) what RFK represented (or to recapture any form of innocence, better, genuineness, maybe, as in the girl and nature). But access to the past's meaning is not really recapturing anything; it is estheticizing memory, never memory *an sich*. And Parreno seems to want to insist on that, and so de-sentimentalize that moment. But as you say, the 'magic' works *anyway*, at an esthetic register, in a kind of solemnity and dignity that echo but are not the same as the 'original' grief. Recreating is thus not fanciful or imaginative in the constructivist sense, but neither is it recalling, just bringing back to mind. It can't be, and it would be sentimental and in that sense false if a truly historical reconstruction were attempted, down to every meticulous detail. Therein the paradox in another form. Its 'genuineness' on film is a function of just this refusal of the naïve hope to recapture. You are so right at the end. It is not just Kennedy who is gone." For more on the Hegelian background to these remarks, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge and New York, 2008). Readers interested in the argument of this essay may also wish to glance at my forthcoming book, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon* (New Haven and London, 2011). The title of the present essay alludes to Friedrich Hölderlin's short lyric poem, *Sonnenuntergang*.

Michael Fried is J. R. Herbert Boone Professor of Humanities and the History of Art, Johns Hopkins University. His many books of art criticism, art history, literary criticism, and poetry include *Absorption and Theatricality*; *Courbet's Realism*; *Manet's Modernism*; *Art and Objecthood*; *Menzel's Realism*; *Why Photography Matters as Never Before*; *The Moment of Caravaggio*; and, most recently, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon*.

nonsite.org is an online, open access, peer-reviewed quarterly journal of scholarship in the arts and humanities affiliated with Emory College of Arts and Sciences. ISSN 2164-1668.

NEOLIBERAL AESTHETICS:
FRIED, RANCIÈRE AND THE FORM OF THE PHOTOGRAPH

WALTER BENN MICHAELS

Works of art enchant us not because
they are so natural but because they
have been made so natural.
–Hegel, *Aesthetics*

Absorption and Intentionality

In his seminal text, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980), Michael Fried devotes several pages to a discussion of why Diderot didn't value still-life painting more highly than (with the exception of Chardin's) he did. The salience of the question is clear to anyone who knows Fried's basic argument: that Diderot articulated an aesthetic committed to denying what Fried calls the "primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld"[1] and thus to valuing above all paintings of figures so deeply absorbed in their own activities — sometimes solitary (like Chardin's *Young Draftsman*), often in groups organized (as in Greuze's *Filial Piety*) around some central action or figure — that they seem to be completely unaware of, oblivious to, the possibility of being observed. The great achievement of such paintings, according to Fried, was that, representing subjects who had no "consciousness of being beheld" (102), they established for themselves "a mode of pictorial unity" (76) (a removal from the world outside the painting) that sought to overcome what would otherwise seem the irreducible theatricality of painting — the fact that all paintings

actually are made to be beheld. And from this standpoint, the attraction of the still-life would seem to be obvious. No bowl of fruit runs the risk of looking self-conscious; no vase of flowers can be understood as posing for its audience. The subjects of still-life paintings are, as Fried puts it, "literally incapable of evincing awareness of the beholder" (102). So why didn't Diderot like them?

Fried gives two answers. The first is that precisely because the subjects of still-life cannot be aware of the beholder, they could not function "to deny his presence, to establish positively insofar as that could be done that he had not been taken into account." Only paintings of "conscious agents….fully capable of evincing awareness of the beholder" (103) could count as denying the presence of the beholder, which is to say as acknowledging the problem of the beholder and then overcoming it. The still-life cannot overcome it because it cannot acknowledge it.

The second answer is that in a still-life, the elimination, or anyway the rendering irrelevant, of any question about whether the subjects are posing or performing or soliciting a certain attention (since they are inanimate) puts all the pressure on the painting itself, which is to say, on the artist: "inanimate subject matter," Fried says, made "the artistic and presentational aspects of *the painting itself* all the more obtrusive by imposing almost desperate demands on technique and by calling attention to the fact that the objects depicted by the painter were chosen by him, arranged by him, illuminated by him, and in general exhibited by him to the beholder" (102). There is a sense, of course, in which this is equally true of all painting — how, without being chosen and depicted by the painter does anything ever get into a painting? — but the still-life, displacing attention from the figures in the painting to the painter himself, raises this question in an almost unanswerable way. It takes absorption's "supreme fiction" — the denial of the "primordial convention that paintings were made to be beheld" — and reproduces it as the demand for a slightly different (but entirely compatible and even more dramatically counter-factual) fiction — the denial that paintings were made at all. It's as if for the still-life to overcome its display of the way in which the painter is performing for an audience, it would have to replace the unawareness of the painted subjects (the girl reading, the family gathered around the dying man) with the unawareness of the painter himself. And it's this demand — the demand that the painter be as unconcerned with producing an effect on the beholder as the young girl reading is — that seems too desperate.

But, desperate though it may be, and whether or not it can ever be met, it's this demand — articulated not just as an aesthetic preference but as a theoretical requirement — that has, for the last half century been at the heart of aesthetic theory and a great deal of the most advanced aesthetic production. We can see its immediate pre-history in Fried's account of the great formalist critic Roger Fry and in particular of Fry's enthusiasm for El Greco who, "as a

singularly pure artist…expressed his idea with perfect sincerity, with complete indifference to what effect the right expression might have on the public."[2] What Fry means to emphasize, Fried argues, is that El Greco was concerned only "with the complete realization of an artistic idea and not at all with exerting an effect on an audience" (9). This is, of course, as Fried argues, a deeply Diderotian or absorptive aesthetic, and the point of the essay is to argue that Fry's formalism is an effort to understand and value paintings "owing to the play of forces internal to the work rather than because of a desire to appeal to the beholder" (16). The argument, in other words, is that the insistence on the unity of the painting and the insistence on the irrelevance of the beholder — and especially the opposition between the unity of the painting and the effort to affect the beholder — are all hallmarks of the formalist or absorptive critic, despite the fact that, as Fried reminds us, the effort to establish the unity of the painting must itself be understood as nothing but an effort to affect the beholder. "Needless to say," he says (but he says it in parentheses), "the conviction of unity and necessity…is itself the product of an attempt to affect the beholder *in a certain way*" (19).

If, however, this goes without saying for Fried, it's not obvious that it does so for Fry. Indeed, what Fried immediately goes on to remark in Fry is his "characteristic and recurrent" (24) use of phrases like "almost unconscious" and "half-conscious" in his descriptions of the activities of the artists he most admires.[3] And the point, as Fried puts it, is that Fry's appeal to the unconsciousness of his artists is "both a displacement and a radicalization of Diderot; to the extent that an artist is imagined as having been unaware of doing a particular thing, it cannot be claimed that he did it in order to make a particular impression on the viewer" (25).

But if he didn't do it to make some particular impression on the viewer, why then did he do it? This is a difficult question because the kinds of answers that come immediately to mind — the kind that Fried himself has already suggested in his discussion of establishing the unity of the painting — cannot really function as alternatives to the effort to make a particular impression on the viewer. You can't, in other words, say that the artist is trying to establish the unity of the painting as opposed to trying to make an impression on the beholder since, as we have already seen Fried say, "the conviction of unity" is itself "a product of the attempt to affect the beholder *in a certain way*." It looks, in other words, like once the absorptive commitment to ignoring the beholder is understood as the demand that the artist make no effort at all to produce any kind of effect, it becomes impossible to fulfil. It's no longer enough for the painter not to appear to be trying to produce an effect; it's no longer enough for the painter ("almost unconscious") not to be aware of trying to produce an effect– now the painter must really not try to produce an effect. But how can you make a painting at all — how can you make something that looks the way you want it to look — without seeking to produce an effect? The radicalization (or literalization) of the commitment to absorption thus produces

an antinomy — the works of art we value are those which seek to produce no effect on the beholder, but without the effort to produce an effect on the beholder (without the effort, as we might say, to make something that can be seen), there would be no works of art.

To put the problem in this way, however, is also to begin to see a kind of solution, one already suggested by Fried's addition of Roland Barthes (in particular in *Camera Lucida*, his book on photography) to the canon of Diderotian critics. Barthes' attachment to what he calls the *punctum* and his dislike of what he calls the *studium*, are as Fried convincingly shows, entirely "anti-theatrical" since where the *studium* is what the photographer tries to show you, the *punctum* is what the photograph makes it possible for you to see, independent of or even in opposition to what the photographer tries to show you. The very concept of the *punctum* thus depends upon the Diderotian distinction "between 'seeing' and 'being shown'"[4] and its attraction consists precisely in its being by definition something that is in the photograph despite the fact that the photographer has not himself meant to put it there. Indeed, from the standpoint of this problem about the agency of the artist, photography looks like an exemplary medium — a way to resolve the antinomy described above. On the one hand, it does not dispense altogether with the artist — no photographs without the photographer; on the other hand, the fact that it characteristically displays images over which the photographer does not have complete control and thus makes it possible to value just those images (the *punctum*) means that what the photographer has tried to do — the effect s/he has sought to produce — may have nothing to do with the beauty, value or meaning of the photograph. The difficulty of imagining an artist who isn't trying to create a work of art is resolved by imagining instead an artist whose efforts to create the work are irrelevant to its meaning.

The photograph thus presents itself as a kind of theoretical antithesis to the Diderotian still life and, of course, this view is by no means limited to Barthes. On the contrary, from the very start, the claims photographers have made to be artists have been contested by critics denying that the photograph has enough "intentional meaning" "to be considered fine art. "[5] And Barthes is by no means the only recent writer to maintain some version of this position. But it's a crucial fact about Barthes that (unlike, say, the notoriously sceptical Roger Scruton) his interest is not primarily in debunking photography's claims to art, and not at all in claiming that because the photograph is not fully or adequately intended it cannot count as art. For, in Barthes' own writing, art itself — with literature as the exemplary case — had already been disconnected from the question of intentional meaning.[6] That is, starting at least in the mid 1960s and emerging more fully in "The Death of the Author" (1968) and "From Work to Text" (1971), there is a crucial sense in which for Barthes the irrelevance of "the author's declared intentions" and the "removal of the Author"[7] more generally had come to be seen as constitutive at the very least of modern aesthetic production and at the most of the idea of

aesthetic production as such. "Writing begins," Barthes says, when "the voice loses it origin" and "the author enters his own death." [8]

Furthermore, as every student of literary theory knows very well — you learn it the minute you first read "The Intentional Fallacy" — this position was hardly unique to Barthes, or, for that matter, to Barthes and the others (Foucault, Derrida) who held some version of it. Beginning in the mid-1940s, the idea that the meaning of a literary work was not determined by its author's intentions was foundational for American literary criticism, providing the material (although this was by no means what it was designed to do) for a potential theoretical solution to an aesthetic problem. The aesthetic problem was how to create anti-theatrical works of art at the moment when the very effort to do so (indeed, any effort at all) had begun to register as theatrical. The theoretical solution was to deny not that those efforts took place but that they were in any way constitutive of the meaning of the work of art. It was the syntactic and semantic rules of the language, not the author's consciousness that determined the meaning of the work. Thus Fry's strenuous but not very compelling attempt to imagine a kind of psychology for the painter's desire not to produce an effect on the beholder ("half-conscious," "almost unconscious," "perfect sincerity," "complete indifference") is rendered supererogatory. The new theoretical anti-intentionalism rescues the critic from a psychological anti-intentionalism that, still committed to some account of the artist's agency, can only register the artist's actions as unconscious (and hence not fully actions) or as completely disconnected from all possible consequences (and hence, again, not fully actions). Now, the ontological irrelevance of the artist's intentions, whatever they are, makes it unnecessary to deny that he actually had any. [9]

For our purposes, however, Barthes's version of anti-intentionalism is more crucial than Wimsatt's and Beardsley's, and for two reasons. The first is that Barthes's is theoretical and *aesthetic* (in effect, the anti-theatrical aesthetic creates the necessity for the anti-intentional — i.e. theatrical — theory) whereas Wimsatt's and Beardsley's is theoretical and *methodological*. Barthes is defending certain aesthetic values; Wimsatt and Beardsley were seeking to establish the "public" and "objective" character of literary meaning. Their concern was with professional literary criticism. [10] And the second, which really follows from the first, is that insofar as Wimsatt and Beardsley were interested in establishing the public meaning of the text, they were just as opposed to considering the reader as they were to the writer; the companion to "The Intentional Fallacy" was "The Affective Fallacy." Whereas Barthes is just the opposite; he explicitly links "The Death of the Author" to "the birth of the reader" and he explicitly celebrates the refusal of what he calls an "ultimate" meaning, the refusal to "fix meaning" that the shift from writer to reader makes inevitable.

Thus we have both an aesthetic solution to the problem of the artist's agency — How do you avoid seeming to seek to produce an effect on the reader/beholder? Do nothing — and a theoretical answer to the question of the author's agency — How do the artist's actions determine the meaning of the work? They don't. And just as, in Barthes, the theoretical answer immediately and (as I shall show) necessarily produces an appeal to the reader, so too does the aesthetic solution. That is, the theoretical solution to absorption's aesthetic problem (the invention of an artist who could not be understood as performing for an audience because his intentions to produce certain effects were now understood as in principle irrelevant to the effects his work in fact produced) is simultaneously the transformation of absorption's aesthetic indifference to the reader or beholder into a total — indeed (as I will also show), programmatic — *appeal* to the reader or beholder. In *Camera Lucida*, this is the whole point of the *punctum*, which is nothing but an accidental and unintended effect of the photograph on the beholder — the "detail" that can "'prick' me" only if the photographer has *not* put it there "intentionally" and that can prick me but may not prick you.[11] That's why Barthes famously doesn't reproduce the Winter Garden photograph of his mother; it cannot have the effect on us (she's not our mother) that it does on him — for us, no *punctum*, for us, "no wound." The *punctum*, in other words, functions as an absorptive reproach to the "artifice" of the photographer, resisting and reproaching his inevitably theatrical efforts to produce a particular effect on the beholder while at the same time (and for the same reason) it transforms the photograph into a work dependent entirely on the beholder — a purely theatrical object. The absorptive demand of indifference to the reader/beholder becomes an insistence on the absolute primacy of the reader/beholder.

Theatricality is, from this standpoint, not exactly — or not only — the opposite of absorption; it is the inevitable outcome of the radicalization of the logic of absorption. Which is to say that the developments in the history of art that Fried would (in "Art and Objecthood") identify with theatricality — literalism, minimalism, more generally, postmodernism — are the dialectical working through of the logic of absorption. We can get a concrete sense of this claim by thinking about another major figure of Barthes's generation. Probably no one would think to call John Cage an absorptive artist (in fact, in "Art and Objecthood" he's the first example of the proposition that "Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre"[12]) but his description of his ambition for his music and especially in regard to his "silent" piece, *4'33"* — "I was intent upon making something that didn't tell people what to do"[13] – can only make sense in the context of the radicalization of the anti-theatrical. "Why would anyone write music in which nothing is performed?" asks the critic and artist Larry Solomon.[14] And although Solomon himself is not at all concerned with the Diderotian problem of performance, the relevance of a Diderotian answer is obvious: you write precisely in order to avoid performance, in order to avoid the effort to produce an effect on the

listener, in order, that is, to avoid telling "people what to do."[15] In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes, illustrating what Fried rightly calls, the "extremity" of his "antitheatricalism," proclaims that "to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close one's eyes" and goes on to insist that "the photograph must be silent," not "blustering," not, in other words, trying to get the beholder to respond the way the photographer wants him to respond. This "is not a question of discretion," Barthes says, but "of music" (53-55). And *4'33"* is, of course, the "silent piece," or at least, since, as is well known, Cage denied there was any such thing as silence, it is, as he said, a piece in which the only sounds were "accidental"; "there are no (intentional) sounds" (*Conversing*, 65).

Here the parallel with Barthes's hostility to the photographer's intentions is complete. "The essential meaning of silence," Cage says is not the absence of sound, but "the giving up of intention" (*Conversing*, 189). That is, the point of *4'33"*'s silence is not that the performance should actually be silent but rather that whatever sounds there are should not be controlled by or in any way come from the composer. Hence, as with Barthes, we have on the one hand the characteristically absorptive refusal of the effort to produce an effect on the listener — no intentional sounds. And, on the other hand, we have the inevitable primacy of the listener, since whatever sounds s/he happens to hear (during the famous first performance, the "wind stirring," "raindrops pattering on the roof," and, in the third movement "all kinds of interesting sounds" made by the listeners themselves "as they talked or walked out" [*Conversing*, 65-66]) are the sounds that make up the piece. And just as this absorptive repudiation of intention involved in Barthes a repudiation also of the idea that a work could have a single or "final signified" (the "multiplicity of writing" required the refusal to "fix meaning" [*Image*, 147]), so in Cage the abdication of the composer's agency is necessarily accompanied by an insistence on multiplicity: no two performances of *4'33"* can ever sound the same. Indeed, no one performance will produce the same effect on its audience. When Cage hears the rain falling, it suggests to him "the love binding heaven and earth," but he does not imagine that this response will "necessarily correspond with another's." "Emotion," he says, "takes place in the person who has it."[16] Emotion, like the *punctum*, is the response the artist cannot control.

4'33" can thus be understood as an exemplary case of the way in which a radicalized absorption — produced by the commitment to not impose one's intentions on the listener/beholder/reader, to not perform for an audience — becomes indistinguishable from an account of the work of art in which it is theatricality that's radicalized — the only thing that matters is the audience's response. The piece consists no longer in the sounds the composer or performer produce but in the sounds, whatever they happen to be, that the listener hears. The way Cage puts this is to say that for him and other composers "who have accepted

the sounds they do not intend" (*Silence*, 11), the tendency is toward musical performance as "theatre," which he values because it is the art that most "resembles nature" (12) and which he imagines would in its ideal form be indistinguishable from "everyday life," so you could then "view everyday life as theatre" (*Conversing*, 101); art would, in effect, become indistinguishable from nature. The artist who begins with the fiction that his work is not made for the world (not made to be seen, not made to be listened to) ends by collapsing the work into the world — it's whatever you see, whatever you hear.

Nature and Theatricality

In the recent history of theory, as opposed to the history of art and music, the site on which this collapse is most vividly either embraced or refused is in the structure of all the thought experiments comparing marks produced by chance (which is to say, by nature, by the world) with identical marks produced on purpose (by somebody who means something by them). Richard Rorty's response to the Knapp and Michaels "Against Theory" wave-poem example (marks that look like they spell out Wordsworth's "A Slumber did my spirit seal" produced not by some poet but by waves on a beach) was exemplary. "Anything," he wrote in 1985, "a wave pattern, an arrangement of stars, the spots on a rock" can be "treated like" a sentence.[17] The question of whether they were meant to be a sentence is irrelevant. Furthermore — and here Rorty was much more radical than Wimsatt and Beardsley or than philosophers like John Searle, who argued that such marks meant what they meant in English regardless of what they were or weren't intended to mean — Rorty imposed no requirement that the marks actually look like a sentence in some actually existing language. Any set of marks for which you could work out some set of semantic and syntactic rules that would give them meaning could count as a sentence. "'Linguisticality,'" he famously observed, is "cheap. You can impute it to anything simply by working out a translation scheme" (133).

The central idea here is that the question of whether a sentence is a sentence (or whether a work of art is a work of art) cannot be answered by an account of how or why or by whom the marks that make up the sentence were produced. Nature — the wave patterns and the spots on a rock — is just a name for the irrelevance of that account. Thus when, deploying a parallel example (monkeys on typewriters), Goodman and Elgin (1986) claim (contra Borges) that if the monkeys eventually produce a text identical to *Don Quixote*, it is in fact "the same text" open to the same "same interpretations" as the one "consciously inscribed by Cervantes,"[18] their nature is just a more mechanized one than Rorty's or Cage's. As is Barthes's photograph. The point each time is to insist that the way in which the marks were produced has nothing to do with what they are and that the question of whether the marks were intended to mean something has nothing to do with the question of whether or what they actually mean.

But Barthes and especially Rorty understand the force of this point a lot better than Goodman and Elgin (or Searle) do. Elgin and Goodman think that it's not the author's intentions but the marks themselves that determine the correct translation scheme; it's what "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme…" means in Spanish, not what Cervantes meant by it that matters. But Rorty sees that if we're not interested in what Cervantes meant, there's no principled reason for us to be interested in the rules of Spanish either. The reader who invents a different translation scheme (call it Spanish prime) for the marks made by the monkeys is just involved in a more labor-intensive version of the task performed by the speaker of Spanish: they're both applying some translation scheme to random marks, and there's no more reason to say that the marks are really in Spanish rather than in Spanish prime than there is to say (what Knapp and Michaels said) that the spots on the rock are not really in any language at all.

Thus, Elgin and Goodman's idea that the monkey marks are subject to all the same interpretations as the text of *Don Quixote* is true (insofar as it is true) only if some reader finds it desirable to treat them, arbitrarily, as if they were 17th century Spanish. They are also and equally subject to any meaning they might have in Spanish prime or in any other translation scheme a reader might come up with. More generally, the theoretical indifference to the author (Cervantes may have spoken Spanish but the monkeys don't) requires the transformation of all marks into the equivalents of spots on a rock, intentional acts reconceived as natural events.[19] Which is what makes the decision to treat them as any particular language, or as language at all, arbitrary. And which thus turns what they are — because what they are is what they're treated as — into what they are for the reader.[20] The emotions evoked in me by "nature," Cage wrote are, of course, evoked "unintentionally" (nature has no intentions)[21] and, because "Emotion takes place in the person who has it" (because one person's spots on a stone are another person's *Don Quixote*), my "responses to nature are mine" (*Silence*, 10). The goal for Cage was an art that, rivalling nature in its refusal of intentionality, would therefore exist as an art only insofar as it existed for the viewer. It would be, in Fried's terms, *essentially* theatrical, and since, Cage thought, theatre (more than music) is "the art" that most "resembles nature," it would in fact be "theatre."

In the event, however, for reasons that our discussion of Barthes has already begun to suggest, photography would be as crucial as performance (and much more crucial than painting or literature) in the effort to imagine an art that, as unintended as nature, would belong to the world and to the beholder (rather than to the artist) and would thus undo what Jacques Rancière has characterized as the "modernist project of separation" — the project of separating the artwork from the world by separating it both from the things it represents and from the spectator to whom it represents them.[22] Literature and painting can only achieve

what Rancière calls "this inclusion of non-art," he says, "by artistic means" (13). That is, a painting "can only imitate" non-art; it cannot actually be non-art. But a photograph can — in fact, must.

Why? Because a photograph is more like an object in the world than it is like a representation of an object in the world. This is what Barthes means when he begins *Camera Obscura* by saying that in looking at an 1852 photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother he "was looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor" (3). His point is not, of course, that the photograph is somehow a person — it is instead that looking at Jerome Bonaparte in the photograph is more like seeing him, say, reflected in a mirror than it is like seeing him depicted by a painter. Neither the reflection nor the photograph is a representation; they have a causal connection to Jerome that, unlike the painting, does not depend on the beliefs, desires or intentions of some other person.

And this is true even though in the case of the photograph (as opposed to the reflection), the photographer almost certainly did have relevant beliefs, desires and intentions. Often, of course (especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), this structural limitation on the photographer — the fact that every photograph is causally tied to the thing it's a photograph of in a way that almost no painting is [23] – was produced as an accusation. And more recently, when Roger Scruton writes that "in an ideal photograph it is neither necessary nor even possible that the photographer's intention should enter as a serious factor in determining how the picture is seen," [24] he still means it as criticism. His idea is that our interest in a painting, even in a painted portrait is an interest in how the artist saw the subject and in how he or she intended the beholder to see the subject. Whereas in a photograph, no matter what the photographer's intentions, we see the subject for ourselves. And although one way of responding to such criticism has naturally been to point out the ways in which the photographer is, after all, able to assert some control over the picture, that defense is obviously not one that Barthes or Rancière is interested in making. Just the opposite. It's precisely because the indexicality of the photograph (its causal connection to the thing it's a photograph of) counts as an obstacle to the aesthetic intentions of the photographer (who, because of that causal connection, cannot and (more strikingly) need not infuse the photograph with his or her intentionality) that photography assumes its contemporary importance.

Thus when Rancière praises the ability of the photograph to include "non-art" by non-artistic means, and when he insists on the inscrutability of the photographer's intentions ("We don't know what was going through Walker Evans's mind," he says of a famous photograph from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, "in framing his photo as he did" and

"the photo does not say whether it is art or not" [13]), he is preferring photography to painting in terms that echo even if they invert Scruton's. It's precisely its "poverty" as an art — not only the difficulty in deciding what some particular photographer's intentions were but the photograph's structural openness to the possibility that the photographer "simply photographed what was in front of him without any particular intention" — that makes photography valuable in simultaneously postmodern and what Rancière characterizes as Kantian terms. Postmodern because it refuses what, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, Rosalind Krauss called the claim to "Art" characteristic of the "aesthetic intention."[25] And Kantian for essentially the same reasons: "It is the order of the natural world that imprints itself on the photographic emulsion and subsequently on the photographic print."[26] So even when the photograph is made by someone who means something by it (even when, as Rancière says, it is "an intentional production of art which seeks an end"), what it gives you is nonetheless what the Kantian appeal to an art like nature requires: "the sensible experience of beauty without end."

Put in these terms, we can say that the internal crisis of absorption — the transformation of the refusal of theatricality into the refusal of intentionality, the refusal, that is, of the effort to produce any effect on the beholder/listener/reader at all — was already in a certain sense prefigured in the pride of place assigned to natural beauty in the *Critique of Judgment*. Because the appeal to nature is both the refusal of the artist's intentions and the embrace of the beholder's response (in the absence or irrelevance of the writer, it's the beholder who makes the spots on the rock linguistic), it undoes what Rancière calls the project of separation. The "big question of artistic modernity," he says (explicitly following Fried), is the question of how "a work" can "be made coherent," and the answer (again following Fried) is "by excluding the spectator" (14). The work that counts as unintended necessarily *includes* the spectator and thus cannot be made coherent. The invocation of Kant is thus in the service of the critique of modernity, which is to say, of intentionality, which is to say, unity.

But it's Hegel who, in Rancière is called upon to provide an alternative (Rancière calls it a "reply in advance") to a Fried-style account of modernist severing. And it's Hegel's reading of Murillo's *Beggar Boys Eating Grapes and Melons* that Rancière offers as a model for (or, at least, an instance of) the social or political project that he approvingly identifies with the refusal of modernist "severing." What makes the *Beggar Boys* relevant is that, on the one hand, Hegel is struck by what Rancière paraphrases as the boys' "total" "disregard towards the exterior" (in effect, what Fried would call their absorption) while, on the other hand, that disregard is not, he thinks, the kind designed to separate the painting from the world, to establish its coherence. Just the opposite. The Friedian "project of separation" is committed, Rancière thinks, to the representation of "characters absorbed by their task" (as in Fried's reading

of Greuze or in Jeff Wall's *Morning Cleaning*) and what's crucial to this project is not their activity but the way that activity produces their "passive absorption into the space of the painting" or the photograph. The characters are thus converted into a kind of formal device for establishing the coherence of the work: "What they are or do matters little, but what is important is that they are put in their place" (14). But the "disregard towards the exterior" of Hegel's beggar boys, Rancière says, is very different since what "shines forth" through their "poverty and semi-nakedness" is a "complete absence of care and concern." Thus, calling our attention to the "one notion in particular" in Hegel's description that, he says, most "grabs our attention" — "that of being carefree" — Rancière says that, far from being absorbed in some task, the boys are "doing nothing and not worrying about anything." And this doing nothing not only saves them from passive absorption, it aligns them with an art understood not in terms of the "project of separation" from the world (from nature) but in terms of its non-instrumentality, an art that is thus identified with the world (with nature, which has no projects at all) and with the refusal to be put into place — whether that place is the formal space of the painting or the social space to which their position would seem to consign them.

Thus the carefreeness of the *Beggar Boys* becomes for Rancière a kind of allegory of the refusal of art, an allegory that photography endorses by making supererogatory. For just as the photograph requires no "artistic means" to include non-art (it doesn't need to "imitate" non-art; it already is non-art), the photograph also makes it possible for "the characters themselves" to escape the (already-diminished — we don't know and needn't care what the photographer intended or whether, for that matter, he intended anything — it's "possible," for example, that Evans "simply photographed what was in front of him without any particular intention") "art of the photographer" and "to play with the image of their being" (15) — to refuse to be put in their place. After all, the "inner freedom" that Hegel sees in Murillo's beggar boys is there only because Murillo put it there; the photograph — insofar as it's open to every photographer to rid himself of the "attributes of the artist style" — makes it possible for the subjects of the photograph to themselves become its makers, "to introduce art into their sensible life," to display their inner freedom on their own.

And it's not just inner. Even, or especially, when the subjects are "obscure beings," the photograph's inclusion of "non-art" makes it possible for them to "appropriate the aesthetic capacities that subtract them from a social identification" (13), to assert their freedom precisely in a way that "their social condition is supposed to forbid" (15). Thus this "neutralization" of the "aesthetic hierarchy" functions also as a neutralization of the "social hierarchy" (14). That is, the photographer's (structural and hence more-or-less inevitable) sacrifice of his own position in the "artistic hierarchy" liberates both the beholder and the subject, making it possible for us to begin to give up our "hierarchical vision of the world,"

to stop seeing Evans's "poor peasants" as if they had no capacity to make their own art and to begin looking at beggar boys as if they were Olympian gods. Thus the aesthetic refusal of the modernist effort to establish the coherence of the photograph is also a social refusal of the vision that devalues peasants and beggars. Where the modernist project of separation puts people "in their place," Rancière's critique of that project frees them from it, or, more precisely, makes it possible for us to recognize and acknowledge that they are already free.

Rancière's critique of photographic form (the photograph's critique of form itself) thus embodies an egalitarian social vision, one that is central not merely to Rancière's own writing (see, for example, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* [1987, 1991]) but also to the most successful social justice programs of the last half century. That is, it is anti-hierarchical, and the hierarchies it's concerned to oppose are precisely hierarchies of vision, hierarchies produced by the way people see and treat each other. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière's particular target is the assumption by teachers of their own superiority; the pedagogical program articulated through his reading of Jacotot begins by recognizing "the principle of the equality of intelligence" and by describing the failures of mass education as a consequence of the "society of contempt's" refusal to recognize that principle, its insistence on imposing a (mistakenly) hierarchical vision of the distribution of intelligence.[27] And in *The Philosopher and his Poor,* it was the way in which philosophy (above all, in the form of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology) reinforced even as it seemed to question the hierarchies of culture. But, especially in the U.S. and the U.K., the structure of such a critique is even more familiar (and more uncontroversially compelling) in the areas of sex and race.[28] Feminism, for example, begins with the insight that women's supposed inferiority to men is a product of the ways in which they have been systematically seen as and therefore treated as if they were inferior to men. Women are inferior, in other words, only insofar as they are treated as inferior and so the way to eliminate their inferiority is to begin by recognizing that it never existed in the first place — and thus undo the hierarchy the vision created. The point is not, of course, that women have not been bound by real material conditions of inequality; it's that those conditions are themselves the product of a falsely hierarchical vision.

Thus the problem that feminism seeks to solve is sexism — a way of looking at the world and of women's place in it — and the same thing is true of anti-racism, which seeks to undo the hierarchies produced primarily by white people's mistaken sense of their superiority to people of other races. The idea that "blacks are an inferior race" is what the philosopher Tommie Shelby calls a "social illusion," an illusion that has subordinated blacks and that needs to be dispelled.[29] More generally, anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-homophobia (all the civil rights movements of the last half century) argue for the replacement of one way of seeing the group in question (as inferior) with another way of seeing it (as equal). Thus the core commitment

of these projects is to the recognition of an equality that already exists but that our falsely hierarchical vision has kept us from seeing. And the increased centrality of the rise of anti-discrimination law is an effort to guarantee that even if we fail to get rid of our false vision, we cannot continue to act on it: I may still see you as inferior but the law requires me to act as if I see you as equal.

Indeed, even more radical pluralist efforts to extend the range of anti-discrimination beyond the perception of inferiority to the perception of difference as such (perhaps one should say to uncover and disallow the perception of inferiority hidden in the perception of difference as such) work the same way. Here the offense is not anchored in a mistaken judgment (women can't do that job) but in the effort to impose a normativizing vision (she shouldn't look or dress like that).[30] The problem is different (it's otherness, not perceived inferiority) but its source is the same — how we see people. And its solution is also the same: to get us to see them differently or, failing that, to make it illegal for us to act on the way we continue to see them. Rancière's imagination of photography's potential to disrupt our "hierarchical vision of the world" thus participates in a larger political and juridical movement.[31] And this movement has been sufficiently successful that even those who think it hasn't gone or even tried to go far enough (like Robert Post, the lead author of the tellingly entitled *Prejudicial Appearances*) are nonetheless prepared to characterize its first anti-discriminatory phase as having produced a "revolution in gender and racial relations" of which we should be "justifiably" proud and to hope that a refocusing and intensification of anti-discriminatory efforts will produce even greater results in the future.[32]

Which makes sense. But the limitations of this revolution and of the conception of equality that has accompanied it can be suggested, just to begin with, by noting the difference between Rancière's understanding of the "poor peasants" in Agee and Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Agee's and Evans's own understanding of them. In Rancière, what the photographs of the poor enable them to do is "appropriate the aesthetic capacities" they're usually thought not to possess and thus to escape their "social identification." Whereas in Agee and Evans, what becomes central is the idea that they really don't possess the aesthetic capacities they're thought not to possess, and that the fact they don't is a consequence of their social identification.[33] There is "almost no such thing" as a "sense of beauty" among the three families, Agee writes, and he goes on to confess to "a strong feeling that the 'sense of beauty,' like nearly everything else, is a *class* privilege."[34] Where for Rancière the photographs are an occasion for the peasants to assert their aesthetic capacities, for Agee they are a kind of demonstration of what it is to be so "appallingly damaged"[35] that you no longer have any such capacities, and the beauty of the photographs themselves makes its political statement

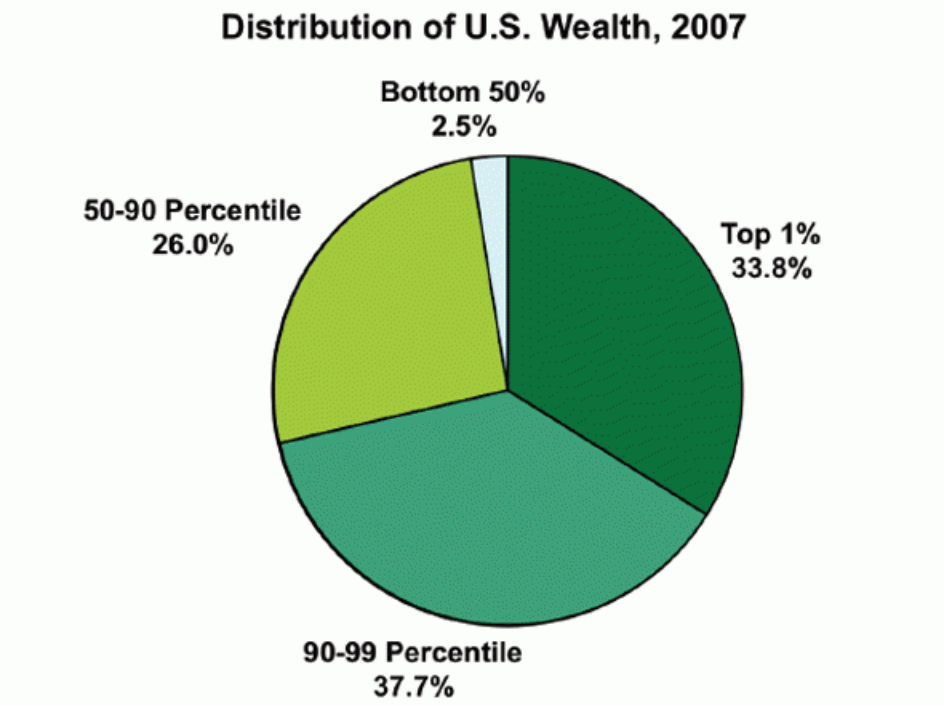
precisely insofar as and because it presents itself as art, as a beauty that their subjects could neither contribute to nor recognize.

The crucial difference here is just the difference between seeing the beggar boys and peasants as damaged by our falsely hierarchical vision of them and seeing them as damaged by conditions that our vision may sanction or critique but that it did not produce. In other words, it's one thing to insist that social hierarchies are illusory and therefore unjust; it's a very different thing to think that, although unjust, they are very real. Or rather, it's one thing to think that certain hierarchies are illusory and therefore unjust, it's another to treat all hierarchies on this model. This is the point of Agee's invocation of "class," and it's made vivid by the fact that his subjects are white farmers, not black. The distinctive damage to black tenant farmers is a function of the "illusion" of racism; the remainder, the damage common to black farmers and to white, is a function of capitalism. No illusion is required. More precisely, the damage done to the poor is produced by an economy not a vision.

Rancière's insistence on the peasants and beggar boys as victimized by the false hierarchies of vision should thus be understood as part and parcel of what Slavoj Zizek has called the "degradation of the sphere of the economy" characteristic of all "the new French (or French oriented) theories of the Political," a degradation that these theories share with their "great opponent, Anglo-Saxon Cultural Studies," which focus on the "struggle for recognition."[36] But, of course, it's not just (or even primarily) Cultural Studies that has privileged a commitment to equality that can happily co-exist with economic inequality. The New Social Movements hailed in the 80s by Laclau and Mouffe and, in the U.S., the revolution described above by Post — the elaboration and extension of anti-discrimination law — have proven to be entirely compatible with the evolution in capitalism that has matched the increased intolerance of discrimination in all its forms not just with an increased tolerance of but with an actual and spectacular increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. Or rather (since it's no longer just Agee's peasants who are falling behind), an increased gap between the rich and everyone else.

Charts like this one (http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/pages/interactive#/) and graphs like the ones below — the first charting out the path to the second — present an increasingly familiar picture[37]:

Source: http://beforeitsnews.com/story/167/421/Graph_of_the_Day:_US_Top_Ten_Percent_Income_Share,_1917-2008.htm



Source: http://www.businessinsider.com/15-charts-about-wealth-and-inequality-in-america-2010-4

Their particular relevance for our purposes – that is, for the purpose of understanding the relatively recent history of theory — is not just the simultaneity of the rise in economic inequality and of the theoretical relegation[38] of the economy to a secondary role. Or even, though this is obviously of the greatest social importance, the emergence of the critique of discrimination (and, of course, the celebration of diversity) and the deployment of that critique as a technology for legitimating all those inequalities that are not the consequence of racism and sexism.[39] It is rather the relation between both the rise in economic inequality and the hegemony of anti-discrimination on the one hand and the crisis of absorption and the emergence of a theory of the work of art which, imagining the escape from the artist's intention, insists on the primacy of the beholder and (especially in the photograph) of the subject, on the other. If, in other words, Rancière is right to see a certain egalitarian ambition in a photography that seeks to embrace its "poverty" (embrace the limitations on the photographer's intentionality, embrace the indexicality that links the photograph irreducibly to its subject), it's an egalitarianism of a very particular kind – the kind that's critical of hierarchies of vision but has no purchase on the hierarchies embodied in rising Gini coefficients and the redistribution of wealth upwards that is at the heart of neoliberalism. The political meaning of the refusal of form (the political meaning of the critique of the work's "coherence") is the indifference to those social structures that, not produced by how we see,

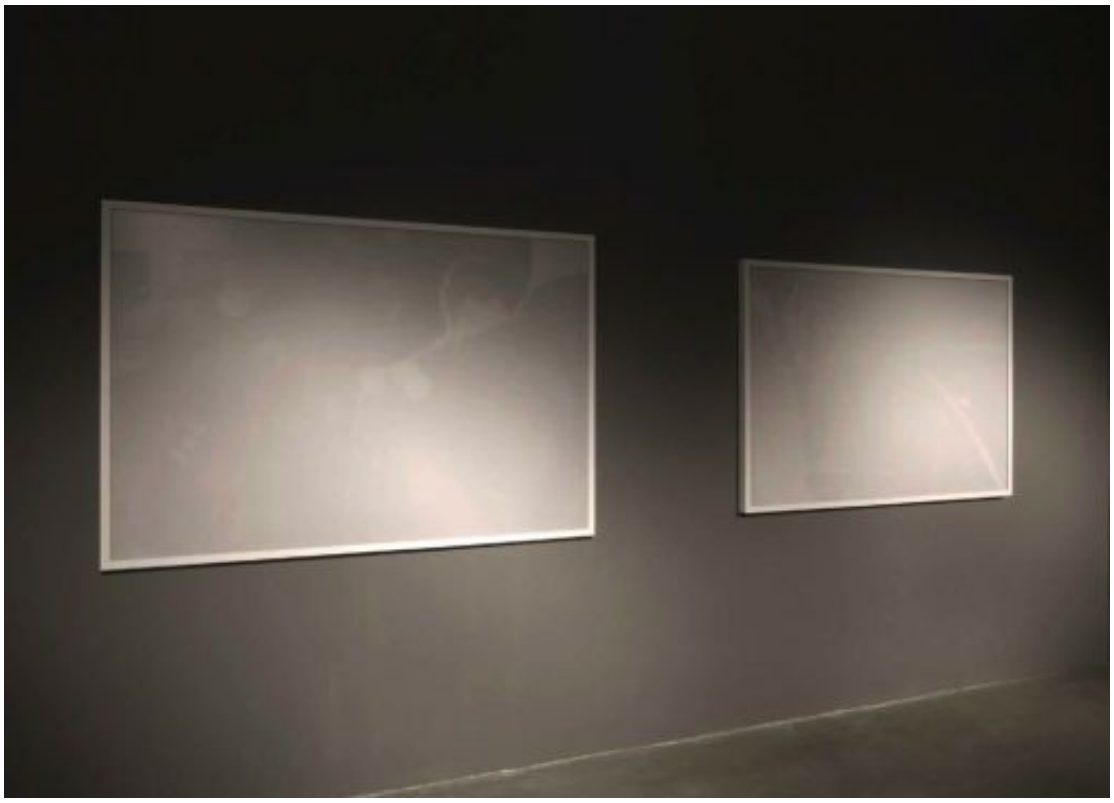
cannot be overcome by seeing differently. It's this refusal of form that is thus as the heart of neoliberal aesthetics.

Absorption and Invisibility

Viktoria Binschtok, Das große Medieninteresse, 2008 (Triptychon, C-Print)

The above triptych — it's called *Das große Medieninteresse* and is made up of three photographs in the *Spektakel* series by the German photographer Viktoria Binschtok — is obviously in some sense an absorptive one. What we see in each of the photos are photographers, cameramen and the boom mics of sound men, most prominently the one with a windshield (a mop-like cover that keeps wind from getting into the audio). We can't, of course, see exactly what they're all focusing on but it's clearly some celebrity or celebrities, and it's clear also that the photographers' absorption is serving to model photography itself as an absorptive activity.

Thematically then, we might say, this photograph suggests a certain reservation about the identification of photography with vision — since its focal point is something that can't be seen. And it also identifies photography not with the structural critique of absorption but with a kind of hyperbolic version of the absorptive — every figure in the photographs is intensely involved in some form of the recording process. Furthermore, the mere fact that it's a triptych at least gestures toward a version of the severing (an assertion of the work's form) that Rancière criticizes. In other words, *Das große Medieninteresse* begins to suggest a photographic practice that not only looks very different from the one imagined in "Notes on the Photographic Image" but that could almost stand as a systematic critique of all the values associated with the primacy of vision.



Binschtok, Spektakel installation, 2008

Almost, but only almost, since no one would think of identifying this picture — which so beautifully offers so much to look at — with a critique of vision. Indeed, as the other pictures in the *Spektakel* series make clear, *Das große Medieninteresse* functions in the series as the emblem of a merely thematic invisibility. These pictures, extracted from videos (again of celebrities in a crowd of paparazzi), are (as the installation shot above suggests) themselves extremely difficult to see. That is, it's hard to see what they're pictures of and it's hard even to see them as pictures. Furthermore the cause of this difficulty is photography itself. These pictures have been extracted from videos at moments when the apparatus required to make the celebrities visible — the camera flash– makes then almost invisible instead. That is, the people taking the pictures and especially the lights that make their pictures possible here function as an obstacle to rather than a technology of visibility. Although their subjects are, in effect, performing for the camera, here, the camera functions both to efface the performance it has solicited and not exactly to efface but to jeopardise its own performance, its own production of a picture to be seen.

Binschtok, Flash #5 from Spektakel series, 2008 (light-jet-print, acrylic)

This project is clearly an absorptive one — the harder the picture is to see, the greater its distance from the idea that it was made to be beheld. And if you were to make an object that was literally impossible to see as a picture, you would, of course, reproduce the crisis of absorption I described in the first section of this essay: you would produce an object without any form, only this time by hypostasizing intentionality instead of refusing it. In fact, as the example of *4'33"* once again illustrates, the two go together. On the one hand, the idea of *4'33"* was to refuse to impose the composer's intentions on the listeners; on the other hand, the problem with the first audience for the piece, which started walking out when the pianist didn't play, was that that they "missed the point," they "didn't know how to listen" to the "accidental sounds" (the wind, the rain, their own talking) that took the place of the piano music they expected. When the crisis of absorption requires you to refuse intention and valorize accident, the thing you weren't supposed to care about — the beholder's or listener's experience — becomes the only thing that matters. But when you seek to create a work in which only the accidents matter, then not only is the recognition of your intention to do just that crucial but also the audience's actual experience becomes irrelevant — all that that matters is that they recognize your intention. Indeed, insofar as no performance of *4'33*" ever sounds like other performances of *4'33"*, we might say that the identity of the work consists in nothing but its "point."

Something like that chiastic structure is no doubt at the heart of the emergence of conceptualism, but for our purposes the relevant point is that *Spektakel* involves neither the repudiation of the photographer's intentions (one way of refusing form) nor (the other way) their hypostatization.[40] Thus the difficulty in seeing the pictures in *Spektakel* is crucially the difficulty of seeing them as pictures, a difficult only made possible by the fact that they obviously are pictures. (As objects, they're easy.) And thus making something hard to see emerges as a distinctively photographic practice. Which is not to deny that the ambition to produce pictures that are so hard to see as pictures puts *Spektakel* near the limit of a recognizably photographic practice. But it's what the limit is a limit of that makes the ambition relevant for the present argument. If for Rancière, in other words, it's the refusal of form and the appeal to vision that constitutes photography's recent interest, in *Spektakel* we see an instance of a photography that can be understood instead as something more like the assertion of form through the refusal of vision. And just as Rancière identifies photography's critique of form with an aesthetic "vision" that imagines the "neutralization of the social hierarchy and the artistic hierarchy," we can begin to imagine the politics that find expression in the assertion of form.

Indeed, Rancière himself suggests what these might be in his discussion of Fried's account of Gursky and particularly of Fried's reading of the ways in which the human figures, the workers, in *Siemens, Karlsruhe*, "although by no means hidden from sight, are easy to miss…. they blend into the machinery…." (173). For Fried, Rancière says, "It would be off-key…to see here any form of representation of capitalist dehumanization." The difficulty in seeing them matters not because it signifies their victimization and thus demands our sympathy but, just the opposite, because it is one of the ways in which Gursky "resists or indeed repudiates all identification of the viewer with the human subjects of his images" (173). For Fried, in other words, the fact that the workers are so hard to see makes it (from one standpoint) impossible for the viewer to identify with them and establishes (from another standpoint) the separation of the photograph from the viewer. That is, not only do we not imagine ourselves as being in the position of the workers, we also don't imagine ourselves — or anyone, including the photographer — as being in the position of the photographer. The way Fried puts this is to say that Gursky's photographs characteristically make it seem "impossible that the images are grounded in an originary perceptual experience on the part of the photographer, with which the viewer is led in turn to 'identify'" (164). Rather, the photograph is severed from the world precisely by being turned into something that no viewer — beginning with the photographer himself — has ever seen or could ever see in the world. Of course, the photograph itself is seen, but it's seen as an intentional object, as form. It's not only *of* something (e.g. lines of workstations, sometimes with workers at them), it's *about* something (perhaps the invisibility of the worker in contemporary capitalism, or whatever you

think it's about), and its aboutness is what separates it from the things it's of. Indeed, it's the irrelevance both of the beholder's point of view (what it's about is not in any way determined by how the beholder sees it) and the photographer's view (what it's about is not necessarily what the photographer saw) that is the mark of its intentionality. [41]

In Rancière's analysis, as we have already seen, this assertion of intentionality through the refusal of vision — i.e. "the art of the photographer" — is just a way of putting "indifferent beings" like the workers "in their place," denying their "freedom" and "interiority." But we have also seen, the politics of that analysis — a politics in which the only objectionable hierarchies are precisely those of vision — have proven both in theory and practice to be entirely compatible with the intensification of a hierarchy of wealth that, not produced by how we see ourselves and each other, cannot be undone by how we see ourselves and each other. All of which is just to say that in neoliberal politics, as in neoliberal aesthetics, the structural difference between capital and labor (a difference that no degree of identification can alter) is imagined out of existence.

And which is also to suggest how we might begin to understand the political meaning of those theoretical positions and especially those artistic practices that seek to overcome vision with form. My idea here is not exactly that, just as the critique of form is the mark of a neoliberal politics, the assertion of form is the mark of an anti-neoliberal politics — if only because, despite the hopes raised by the recent financial catastrophes, [42] political and economic alternatives to capitalism seem as hard to conceptualize, much less to come by, as they did during the boom times (and, indeed, the upper echelons of the global economy seem to be doing almost as well as they did in the boom times). So the idea instead is the more modest — almost tautological — one that the assertion of form embodies an alternative to neoliberal aesthetics and, in that alternative, the possibility and, for some, the desirability of an alternative to neoliberalism itself.

My political point, in other words, is first, that the crisis in absorption produced an aesthetics that proved to be deeply compatible with the changes in capitalism which, originating theoretically in debates of the late 30s, emerged politically in the late 70s and have flourished ever since. At the heart of these changes was a commitment to the importance of efficient markets and an egalitarianism defined as equality of access to those markets. That egalitarianism is violated by the refusal to hire workers because of their race or sex (refusal of access to the labor market) but not by the inequalities generated by the market itself — not by the exploitation of labor by capital. Indeed, the very concept of "labor" is here rendered problematic, since the worker is understood instead as a kind of capitalist — that's the meaning of the wildly successful invention of the concept of human capital. Thus the very concept of class disappears from the analysis; as Dieter Plehwe discreetly remarks (in his

introduction to *The Road from Mont Pelerin*): "Neoliberals usually deny the existence of social inequality rooted in the capitalist class structure and instead prefer to speak of the diversity of individuals or possibly groups."[43] And it's this denial of class that we see embodied in the critique of "hierarchies of vision." Which is not to say, of course, that class can't be seen; it's to say instead that it isn't produced by how we see and that its inequalities cannot be ameliorated by our seeing differently.

Thus the emergence of a theory of the work of art (embodied, for our purposes, in a theory of photography) as offering above all the opportunity to see and be seen differently has its political role to play, simultaneously advertising the attractions of neoliberal equality and serving as its good conscience. And thus a photography that refuses the primacy of vision also refuses (whether it means to or not)[44] to play that political role.

*In thinking about the issues discussed in this essay, I am indebted, of course, to the people actually cited but also — and in certain respects even more — to many conversations with Jennifer Ashton and Nick Brown. I am grateful also to the members of my Fall 2010 seminar at UIC for discussion especially of the Rancière.

Editor's note: "Neoliberal Aesthetics" has generated a variety of responses. We've collected them in a separate posting: http://nonsite.org/feature/responses-to-neoliberal-aesthetics.

NOTES

1. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painter and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 93. Subsequent references are in the text.

2. Michael Fried, "Roger Fry's Formalism," http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/volume24/fried_2001.pdf, 8. Subsequent references are in the text.

3. Indeed, the very distinction between the form of a work and its content becomes an instrument of unconsciousness. Fried quotes Fry's remark that "It is one of the curiosities of the psychology of the artist that he is generally trying hard to do something which has nothing to do with what he actually accomplishes" (22), and the most common form of this dichotomy has the artist trying very hard to provide a certain content but succeeding instead in producing a certain form. It may be worth pointing out that Fried's own account of Stephen Crane in, for example, *The Red Badge of Courage* – thinking of himself as trying above all to represent Civil War battles while what he was really making visible was writing not fighting –has something in common with Fry. Unlike Fry, however, Fried is not trying to save Crane for anti-theatricality and unlike the figures discussed below, Fried's interest is in the structure of intentional meaning not in an alternative to it.

4. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 100. Subsequent references are in the text.

5. Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking Through Photography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 291.

6. The fact that in *Camera Lucida* (first published in French in 1980) Barthes doesn't deal primarily with photography as an art but rather with the photograph as such is thus somewhat misleading, since the claims he makes for the photograph as such are entirely compatible with claims he had already been making about the novel.

7. Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 160, 150.

8. Ibid., 142.

9. But while this theoretical argument solves a certain aesthetic problem, it also raises another — if the artist's intentions never matter, how can any work of art be more absorptive (or less) than any other? Which is to say, this theoretical argument counts as part of the crisis in absorption, a solution that threatens to destroy rather than preserve the absorptive project.

10. Furthermore, the most important criticism of their arguments — E.D. Hirsch's "Objective Interpretation" (1960) — shared this methodological goal; what Hirsch argued was that the rules of a language were insufficient to establish the objectivity they wanted and that, in fact, only the author's intention provides this. More generally, the question of linguistic rules is crucial for Wimsatt and Beardsley in a way that it isn't for writers (like Barthes) more concerned with the meaning of works of art as such than with the meanings of literary speech acts. Many philosophers of language may have agreed with Hilary Putnam's claim that what looked like a caricature of Winston Churchill made by an ant crawling on a patch of sand was not in fact a caricature of Churchill because it was not intended to be. There are no rules that can be understood, on their own, to make something that looks like a caricature count as a caricature. But many of the same philosophers have believed that the centrality of rules to language make speech acts different.

11. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982,) 47.

12. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 164.

13. Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight, 1988), 74. The people who are not supposed to be told what to do seem in this conversation to be both the musicians and the audience but in *4'33"*, which Cage thought of both as his best and most "radical" (67) piece, it's just the audience. Subsequent references are in the text.

14. Larry Solomon, "The Sounds of Silence," http://solomonsmusic.net/4min33se.htm, 4.

15. In fact, Solomon's own sense of *4'33"* (even though he regards is "in part, a theater piece") is interestingly anti-theatrical. He criticizes performances which create "distractions" by focusing "attention on the performers, intentional sounds, and extraneous actions" (15) (for example, that of the Geano Ensemble) where the performers "mimed playing their instruments" and singing. And he recommends that performers "Avoid all distracting, extraneous actions, choreography, intentional sounds, etc. that could detract from focusing attention upon the environmental, unintentional sounds" (16). He takes seriously, in other words, Cage's desire not to tell people "what to do." This, he plausibly thinks, is what's required of an art that has repudiated the "purpose of communication and expression" (6).

16. John Cage, *Silence (*Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 10.

17. Richard Rorty, "Philosophy Without Principles," in *Against Theory*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 133.

18. Catherine Z. Elgin and Nelson Goodman, "Interpretation and Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (l986): 573.

19. This is not, of course, what Elgin and Goodman (much less Wimsatt and Beardsley) were going for; it's just what, according to Rorty, they necessarily end up with. And, here, Rorty's position is identical to the one he's attacking — except that where Knapp and Michaels think of this as a *reductio ad absurdum,* since it makes interpretation impossible, Rorty thinks of it as a discovery — since it shows that there really is no such thing as interpretation.

20. Whether you regard this as a description of how interpretation actually works (which Rorty did) or as a demonstration of the impossibility of coming up with an account of interpretation that does not understand the writer's intended meaning as its exclusive object (as Knapp and Michaels did) is another story. The central point here is just that both for Rorty and for Knapp and Michaels, the idea that some set of linguistic rules can function as a constraint on what the text can (be used to) mean is a chimera.

21. "Does not a mountain unintentionally evoke in us a sense of wonder?" (*Silence*, 10).

22. Jacques Rancière, "Notes on the Photographic Image," *Radical Philosophy* 156 (July/August 2009): 14. Subsequent references are in the text.

23. Which is not to say, of course, that indexicality is irrelevant to painting. All paintings have an indexical relation to the brush, the painter's hand, etc. Indexicality (unlike linguisticality) really is cheap. And sometimes the particular character of that relation (the fact of how the painting was made) will be central to its meaning.

24. Roger Scruton, "Photography and Representation" in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 365. What Scruton means by "ideal" is just the distinctive logic of the photograph, in relation, say, to paintings. As we will see, however, for Rancière, a version of this ideal — represented as a kind of self-denial on the part of the photographer — will function in an aesthetic sense as well.

25. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 3.

26. Ibid., 211.

27. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 70.

28. The situation in France, a slightly less advanced neoliberal country, is in some respects different but the prominence of SOS Racisme in the late 80s and early 90s and the emergence of the *indigenes de la république* over the last five years suggests a similar trajectory, as does the graph in note 36 below.

29. Tommie Shelby, "Is Racism in the 'Heart?,'" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33, No. 3 (Fall 2002): 415. Of course, with respect to race, it's not just the sense of superiority that is a function of how we see each other; more fundamentally — if you accept the standard account of its social construction — it's racial identity itself. That is, the social construction of race depends entirely on our seeing each other as members of a race, and here the contrast with class is illuminating. Many people think (albeit, in my view, mistakenly; see "Autobiography of an Ex-White Man: Why Race is Not a Social Construction," *Transition* 73 [1997]) that you are black (or white) if people treat you as black (or white). No one thinks that you are poor if people treat you as if you were poor. Class is neither a biological entity nor (although it is obviously produced by social conditions) a social construction.

30. Thus, for example, the contributors (Robert Post with K. Anthony Appiah, Judith Butler, Thomas C. Grey and Reva B. Siegel) to the volume *Prejudicial Appearances*: *The Logic of American Anti-Discrimination Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) are more-or-less inevitably concerned with "stereotypes" and the ability to "rewrite" them, the "customary norms of gender appearance" (45) and the entire panoply of identitarian attributes. Once again, the contrast with class is useful — there may be norms of class behavior but it's not your adherence to the norms that constitutes your belonging to the class and it's not the enforcement of the norms that constitutes the advantage or disadvantage of economic inequality.

31. Not to mention, of course, all the photographs and the innumerable other works of art — literary and theatrical as well as photographic — which share his ambition; my focus is on Rancière not because he is unique but because he articulates precisely a more general formation.

32. Post, *Prejudicial Appearances*, 2. You get an immediate sense of the centrality of the question of how we look at and treat others in Post's opening discussion of the famous Santa Cruz City Ordinance designed to prohibit discrimination on the basis of "personal appearance."

[33.] Although "social identification" here is exactly the wrong term, since the question of identification is irrelevant — it's the fact that they *are* poor regardless of how they're identified that's the problem. Although, as the following pages suggest, the emphasis on identification produces it's own problems.

[34.] James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 1988), 314.

[35.] Ibid., 7.

[36.] Slavoj Zizek, "Afterword," in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. and intro. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 75. Zizek's discussion of Rancière is nonetheless largely appreciative and, indeed, "Notes on the Photographic Image" plays so central a role in my own essay both because of its own interest and because of the importance of Rancière's work more generally. And part of that importance is that, unlike the writers in the Anglo and especially American traditions to which Zizek refers, he is primarily interested in class rather than in racial or sexual difference. Which makes it all the more striking that his understanding of the injustices of class difference should take the form of the demand to see the poor differently. A more extended discussion of this topic in Rancière might begin by focusing on the difficulties produced by the centrality of education to his work and by his resistance to the idea that equality in education could be achieved either by educating everyone (the rich and the poor) alike or by teaching the poor (increasingly the children of immigrants) in ways that were specifically adapted to their condition. Since both of these strategies function, he argues, to confirm and reproduce the intellectual inferiority of the poor, the correct response is to insist on equality not as a goal of education reform but as "a presupposition, an initial axiom" (*The Philosopher and His Poor*, 223). With respect to the functioning of capital, however, and what Wendy Bottero (in her contribution to *Who Cares about the White Working Class,* ed. by Kjartan Pall Sveinsson [Runnymead Trust, 2009]) describes as its tendency to generate "large numbers of low-wage, low-skill jobs with poor job security" (13), it's not at all obvious that intellectual equality is the crucial question or, for that matter, that the most successful educational policy imaginable would make a difference. After all, those low-wage, low-skill jobs wouldn't be made better if the people who held them were better educated. And the amount of education required to do them isn't keeping even higher skill jobs from becoming lower-wage ones: underpaid Ph.D.s teaching English composition are as much the victims of neoliberal redistribution as underpaid check-out clerks at Wal-Mart. Which is just to say, there's no economic version of the axiom of equality.

[37.] France is still more equal than the U.S. although, as this graph shows, it has recently begun to follow the American pattern:

Source: http://lemaitre.blog.lemonde.fr/2009/03/30/remunerations-une-occasion-loupee/

38. By the left but not, of course, by the right, which is just to say that neoliberals on the right have a better understanding of the ways in which the critique of hierarchies of vision seeks to produce equality of access to markets and thus to legitimate the inequalities that those markets themselves produce.

39. See, for example, Adolph Reed's discussion of the ways in which "the persisting debate over whether and to what extent manifest inequalities stem from racism" — and to racism one could add sexism and even classism (a neologism only made possible precisely by the transformation of class into a "social identification") — functions to enable both sides to "acquiesce in the presupposition that only inequalities resultant from unfavorable treatment based on negatively sanctioned ascriptive distinctions like race qualify as injustice and warrant remedial action." Adolph Reed Jr., "The 'Color Line' Then and Now," in *Renewing Black Intellectual History*, ed. Adolph Reed Jr. and Kenneth W. Warren (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 271.

40. Hence Joseph Kosuth's famous dictum, "A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art is art, which means is a *definition* of art," and his citation of Donald Judd: "if someone calls it art, it's art." Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 165, 163. The question of whether calling something a work of art counts as intending it to be work of art is at least as much a question about what we think intentions are as it a question about what we think art is.

41. For an extended discussion of these issues — particularly in relation to photography and with special attention to the work of James Welling — see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

42. See, for example, Zizek's *Living in the End Times* and Cadzyn and Szeman's *After Globalization*.

43. Dieter Plehwe, "Introduction," in *The Road from Mont Pelerin*, ed. by Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 34.

[44.] For a reading of a work that does mean to, see Walter Benn Michaels, "The Politics of a Good Picture: Race, Class and Form in Jeff Wall's *Mimic*" *PMLA* 125, No. 1 (Jan. 2010): 177–184.

Walter Benn Michaels is currently at work on a manuscript called *The Beauty of a Social Problem*. His books include *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century*; *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*; *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*; and *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. Recent articles—some on literature, some on photography, and some on politics—have appeared in such journals as *PMLA*, *New Labor Forum*, and *Le Monde diplomatique*.

PAUL VALÉRY'S BLOOD MERIDIAN, OR HOW THE READER BECAME A WRITER

TODD CRONAN

I am brutal, but I have, or did have, a mania for precision.—Valéry to André Gide [1]

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West* (1985) bears an epigram from a surprising source, Paul Valéry. [2] Surprising because McCarthy's story is a nightmarish vision of brutal violence against Native Americans by American settlers during the westward expansion—hardly a typical Valéryean theme—and surprising given McCarthy's stated aversion to a certain strain of literary artifice. "Proust and Henry James," McCarthy has famously observed, were "not literature" because they didn't "deal with issues of life and death." [3] But Valéry, apparently, was not part of that tradition. Despite what we may know of Valéry—that he was a member of the Académie Française and an author of carefully constructed Symbolist poetry and prose in the tradition of Mallarmé—he was in fact an author of life and death.

The passage McCarthy cites is from a little-known 1895 essay by Valéry entitled "The Yalu," a sprawling meditation on the difference between Eastern and Western cultures.[4] "The Yalu" presents a dialogue between a European (we are meant to infer the poet himself) and a Chinese scholar "from the land of Tsin." The scholar announces his fear that Japanese forces are gearing up for war with China once again. "They are imitating us," the European reflects. The scholar is unimpressed by the comparison because the European is not worthy of imitation. Why? Because the Europeans "are afraid of death" (373). While the Chinese excel in patience, orderliness and a "feeling for the irregular," Europeans know only unbounded intelligence (372). Intelligence is a tool of fear; it is strictly a means to evade an awareness of mortality. The scholar offers a dark meditation on the failure of the European mind (the passage appears as McCarthy's epigraph):

> You are in love with intelligence, until it frightens you. For your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint. Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed with no calm, as if they were irresistible. Finally, you fear blood more and more. Blood and time. (373)[5]

While the European uses his intelligence to mask his mortality, the scholar, who is "learned in writing" as well as "war command," knows something "more powerful" than intelligence. "We do not wish to know too much," he reflects (375), echoing Euripides's sense that "it is not always wisdom to be wise." Although the Chinese can be "cruel, subtle, or barbarous," what makes *their* acts of pity and cruelty "reasonable" is that they are built on a foundation of blood (375).

The men from the land of Tsin "feed…in the most favorable valleys of the earth." To the outside world China appears a meaningless "sea of individuals," but in reality the men of Tsin form a living "family." There is an "unbroken line [of descent] from the earliest days" to the present, the scholar affirms. While the European is cut off from his roots by his haphazard intelligence, the Chinese empire forms a bloodline "woven of the living, the dead, and Nature." "Think of the web of our race," the scholar says, think how "we are joined by memory to our fathers" while the exhausted Europeans "endlessly re-begin the work of the first day" (374). The scholar analogizes his "family" to a massive wall, built up brick by brick through the ages that holds them together—and holds "the others" out. "Every man here feels that he is both son and father, among thousands and tens of thousands, and is aware of being held fast by the people around him and the dead below him and the people to come, like a brick in a brick wall." Outside this "miraculous structure of his ancestors" man is reduced to "nothing" (374).

Many years later in his essay "On Nations" (1927), Valéry drew again on the analogies between nations, families, and walls, now without the allegorical veil. "Nations are strangers to one another," he wrote, and however "sincerely they desire to converse, to understand each other" the conversation necessarily "comes to an end," because there is an "impassable barrier against depth and duration" between various nations (231). While there is an "inner bond that rivets together" a nation over time (the technology here has been updated), this bond effectively blocks others from passing through. But unlike in his early claim, wherein the racial family forms the only secure bond, he now suggested that race is only one of various possibilities. There are shared historical phenomena that can bind a nation together, including "language, or territory, or memories, or interests" (249). But these historical bonds, on closer inspection, are natural phenomena in disguise: they were "discovered, just as the nebulae were." "Just as it was discovered that the Earth is part of a certain system," he affirmed, "so it was discovered that a person is *this* by birth and *that* by his livelihood" (249). Valéry discovered that class, like race, is something you are born with.

The same year, in his "Notes on the Greatness and Decline of Europe," Valéry showed how the "actions of a few men" derive directly from "natural causes." "As natural causes produce hail, typhoons, and epidemics, so intelligent causes affect millions of men, the great majority of whom submit to them as to the vagaries of the sky, the sea, the earth's crust" (229). In order to restore Europe's greatness, Valéry concluded, a dictator must emerge to "act upon the masses in the manner of blind, physical causes"; only then would Europe have a real "politics" (229). To be sure, the dictator does not persuade either by his policies or by coercion, but, like the poet, with the direct power of his words.

And yet, a few years later, Valéry decisively altered his account of causality. For "even the coolest calculator," he wrote in "The Struggle for Peace" (1933), "one cannot figure with sufficient probability a definite end" (362). This led to a thought that he would repeat in virtually every scrap of writing from this point forward (especially, as I will show, in his aesthetics): "It has become impossible to foresee not only the final outcome but even the immediate effects" of one's efforts (362). "No one will ever be able to predict or circumscribe the almost immediate consequences of any undertaking whatever," he reflected in "On History" (115). This is the one "*transcendent*" fact of modernity. Man's means of "representation and understanding" the world have been fundamentally "outstripped" by the facts. The future "is endowed with *essential unpredictability*, and this is the only prediction we can make" (69). "Effects," he declares, "are so rapidly becoming incalculable from their causes, and even contradictory to their causes, that henceforth it will…[be] senseless to look for the causal event, to try to produce it or prevent it" (116).[6] So while in his early writings he was committed to finding the "exact conjunction between the sensuous *cause*, which constitutes

the form, and the intelligible *effect*, which constitutes the content,"[7] he later gave up this pursuit, leaving effects open to the "unpredictable" play of the reader's desires.

The consequences of Valéry's revision of causality are fundamental to a shift in the burden of artistic meaning from the *author*—the central figure of his early writings—to the *reader*, who dominates his later aesthetics. Nonetheless, as I will also argue, behind both terms lies an even deeper commitment to a form of literary materialism that turns *representation* itself into a self-generated *agency*.

Literary Sadism

"Imagine, I am seeing blood," Valéry wrote to Gide in May of 1891. Valéry was responding to the violence at Fourmies in northern France where gendarmes shot and killed ten workers at a mass strike at a textile mill.

> Those soldiers who fired on the crowd, I envied them and oh to fire on all the World! I detest the masses, and even more, the Others!…I am exhausting an art form in a quick spasm, and am so panic-stricken that I am haunted by a panorama of slaughter, and blinded by ravaged lights. I almost wish for a monstrous war in which to flee amid the shock of a crazed and red Europe….I don't know what blood is speaking in me, or what wolf of olden times yawns in my boredom, but I feel it there….Does this barbarian surprise you?…Ah! how much night there is! To grasp it! To brood it…and to laugh at holding it captive—a Star! It is difficult. Well then! Blood![8]

Gide was worried. "Can this warrior be you?" Like the soldiers firing on the crowd, "You dream of the impact of shuddering weapons as well."[9] But Gide assured his panicked friend that no matter how "drunk" one gets on words, they "are no more than literature."[10] Nonetheless, Gide shared his friend's sense that "we have literature 'in our blood,' like the germ of a disease." It is literature itself that provokes such immense "desires for battle." Gide coined a term to describe this literary impulse: "like those who, tired of loving, want to bruise some bit of white flesh—it is sadism, my friend—literary sadism."[11] It is the white flesh of the page that Valéry really wants to damage, despite his call to literal violence. But Valéry did not make much of this distinction; it was the identity of the two that generated his literary ambitions. To damage a page was to damage its reader in turn.

Gide's dream was starkly different from his friend's. Rather than literary sadism, Gide presented a picture of sado-masochism, of Mallarméan self-annihilation. "To forget oneself, to adore…it was for that, was it not, that we have loved all that literature," he reflected. Gide admitted that his dream was as "brutal and frantic" as Valéry's, and it too passed beyond literature; it was nothing less than mass suicide along with the workers at Fourmies.

> To end up like an animal, without thinking…completely numbed through intoxication, since otherwise we would be afraid of dying; to end up with *the others*, in a pile, without speaking, since we would not know one another. But what vinegar and gall it would take, O Lord!, at that supreme moment, to put our soul to sleep! [12]

Valéry resisted Gide's aesthetic of intoxicated self-annihilation, always placing the active mind against the passive contemplation of religious thought. Gide, on the other hand, was averse to Valéry's belief, stated over and over again, that art was a matter of cold calculation, of abstraction and "chemical study." "You speak ill of 'artificial flowers' and Wagner," he scolded Gide, "but note, and this is the essence of my system, that although they may not be as beautiful as the real ones, they come out ahead from the point of view of the doing." [13] Fake flowers require active control, while "two beings who make love are reduced to jelly." [14]

Valéry conceived of language as man's greatest means of controlling unstable matter, the most unstable matter of all being the *crowd*. "Of all possible feelings, the strongest in me is that of *security*," he told Gide. "I have no confidence in what comes and goes. I don't trust it." [15] Valéry's security system, his barrier against the crowd, was writing. To write was to order, shape, and mold the formless crowd. "The crowd rules," he told Gide in 1891, a few months after Fourmies. The crowd "invades one's brain…[it] submerges the inner temple and makes the individual a thing of the world." But "you don't understand," he told Gide, "you think of your public too much." [16] While Gide embraced the formless liberties of the crowd, and the loss of self it invited, Valéry sought to escape its clutches. "This Paris which I…detest more and more flows round me like a river, and it is a Lethe seething with resonant oblivion." [17]

Human Material

> There is something of the artist in every dictator, and an aesthetic element in his ideas. He has to fashion and mold his human material to make it adaptable to his designs.—Valéry, "The Idea of Dictatorship" (238) [18]

A year prior to the publication of McCarthy's novel, Gilles Deleuze published a study of Irish painter Francis Bacon that shared with the American author's work a similar set of concerns.[19] At the center of Deleuze's book lies a similar commitment to an aesthetic of blood, and once again Valéry is the inspiration. Deleuze cites Bacon's paraphrase of Valéry: "I don't want to avoid telling a story, but I want very, very much to do the thing that Valéry said—to give the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance" (*FB*, 32/28).[20] Throughout the book Deleuze discriminates between two forms of pictorial violence. "When talking about the violence of paint, it's nothing to do with the violence of war," he quotes Bacon as saying. Glossing Valéry and Bacon, Deleuze explains the crucial difference between the violence of form and the violence of representation:

> The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domains it traverses: being itself a Figure, it must have nothing of the nature of a represented object. (*FB*, 32/28)

Deleuze's claim is to be taken literally. "Great" works of art are able to produce unmediated affective experiences that directly attack the viewer's sensorium. Deleuze takes this view so seriously that he repeats the phrase "direct action on the nervous system" no fewer than eight times in the space of fifteen pages.[21] Like McCarthy, Deleuze extracts an image of Valéry that is violent and brimming with bodily excess. While McCarthy cites "The Yalu" as his source, Deleuze cites an even earlier text, Valéry's first essay, "On Literary Technique" (1889).

"On Literary Technique" was Valéry's manifesto, and he rarely deviated from its principals throughout his career. His opening remarks announced his primary ambition: "Literature is the art of playing on the soul of others. It is with this scientific brutality that the problem of the aesthetics of the Word…has been set for our age."[22] Valéry's concerns could hardly be more explicit. Above all, he was anxious about problems of communication with his reader. After all, metaphors work only if the reader can grasp the sense of at least two disparate terms and drawn them together. For Valéry this process invited failure. He was no longer certain whether audiences would grasp his metaphors, and even if they did the experience would take place over time and would thus be prey to potentially uncontrollable associations. The science of effect would overcome these problems and put art back on a secure foundation.

Valéry found support for his brutal science in Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" of 1846. As Valéry explained, Poe offered the reader "knowledge of the different notes that must be sounded in another's soul…[so as to] predict with certainty

the overwhelming effect of a bleak refrain" on a reader.[23] Valéry's fascination with tightly controlling the outcome of formal effects led him to analogize the work of art to an expressive machine: "the work of art takes on the character of a machine to impress a public; to arouse emotions and their corresponding images."[24] To stamp the audience like a machine, like a typewriter against white paper, was no innocent metaphor. Metaphors of the artist as machine dominate his writings: the composer is an emotional mechanic, the medium is the machine, and the reader is the raw material shaped by the poetic mechanism.[25]

A few years earlier, in his influential "Notes on Wagnerian Painting" (1886), Teodor de Wyzewa declared, "Art, as Wagner tells us, must create life…utilizing colors and lines only as emotional signs, marrying them to one another with the sole purpose of producing within us, through their free play, an impression like that of a symphony."[26] Valéry shared the Wagnerian view that the artist's role was to "create life" through colors and lines, but he believed that artists had more reliable means of creating their audience than broad waves of sound; they could precisely shape, mold, and form the viewer with a science of pictorial form.[27] Valéry mused of a future where pictures would be made in "a picture-making laboratory, with its specialist officially clad in white, rubber-gloved, keeping to a precise schedule, armed with strictly appropriate apparatus and instruments, each with its appointed place and exact function" (*Oeuvres*, 2:1174; *Degas*, 19).[28] The furthest thing from an Impressionist, Degas was imperious, cruel, and rigorous in his manipulation of form to shape the viewer's emotional state.[29]

But it was Valéry's great protagonist, "Monsieur Teste"—a character influenced by Degas[30]—who, although immune to aesthetic effects himself, achieved perfection in transmitting them to others. M. Teste "had known quite early the importance of what might be called human *plasticity*. He had investigated its mechanics and its limits." According to his anxious escort, if Teste had "turned upon the world the controlled power of his mind, nothing could have resisted him."[31] What kind of ideal is it that makes the artist and his work literally irresistible? If a work always takes effect on its beholder what kind of an achievement is it? And if there is no resistance, how do we judge a work's success? If success is defined in terms of the artist's ability to suggest complex, perhaps unrecognized or unfamiliar, states of mind or feeling to the viewer, then what is it to judge success in terms of the degree of physiological reaction?

In addition to Poe, Valéry found support for his machinic ideal in a more unlikely source. It was Leonardo da Vinci's writings, paintings, and technical drawings (often of machines) that authorized Valéry's vision of a violent and affective formalism. In his ambitious "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci" (1894), Valéry focused on the *method* announced in the

title. To maximize his effect on the public, the artist, like a mechanic, must render his materials properly:

> What is called in art a *realization*, is in fact a problem of rendering—one in which the private meaning . . . plays no part, and in which the principal factors are the nature of those materials and the mentality of the public. . . . on the basis of psychology and probable effects . . . every combination of elements made to be perceived and judged depends on a few general laws and on a particular adaptation, defined in advance for a foreseen category of minds to which the whole is specially addressed; and the work of art becomes a machine designed to arouse and assemble the individual formations of those minds. [32]

Metaphors pile up: The artist is at once scientist, mathematician, composer, and mechanic (he will also assume the role of zookeeper). With adequate knowledge of psychology, physiology and probability, Valéry argued, the artist can impress, assemble and shape his listeners' minds with utter precision. [33]

Just after the publication of the "Method of Leonardo," Valéry, like his fictive counterpart in "The Yalu," who is trained in both art and warfare, entered the War Department in Paris and commenced his first retirement from poetry. Before his retreat, he wrote a sequence of four essays dedicated to the problem of methods: "The Conquest by Method," "Instruction and Training of Troops," "Semantics," and "Time." [34] Valéry was explicit about the aim of these texts: "The most important phenomena of life can serve as the basis and the subject of sustained mathematical operations—that life is not above human calculation." As he ominously concluded, "Life can be dealt with." And when the artist went to work, he went to work on the senses: "In art we should see the artist working directly on each of the senses, on each of the psychological needs of his public and aim directly at his man. Wagner did it." [35] To be the Wagner of poetry was indeed Valéry's aesthetic ambition. Nonetheless, as though recognizing the sheer *effectiveness* of his aims—the ease with which he achieved aesthetic response from his readers, and therefore the non-artistic nature of the result—he (temporarily) withdrew from pursuing them.

From his first article in 1889 to his death in 1945, Valéry expanded and explored his singular theory of poetic affect. At the conclusion to *Monsieur Teste* he tersely reiterated the central claim of his earliest writings: "The effect on others, never forgetting their mechanics—. . . and not only treating them as *selves* but as machines, animals—whence an *art*." [36] This is a twofold process: first, to break through the resistant layers of the reader's self, and second, to tame the inner workings of one's animal-machines. Above all, Valéry maintained that

literature is "a question of fact—and, in short, of force"; only now he suggested that "if the reader—any reader—feels the effect of it, the poet *ipso facto* is *justified*."[37] On this point the only difference between his early and later writings is the chastened admission that if only *one* reader is physically altered by the poem, the poet's practice is justified.

Valéry came to acknowledge the limitations of his desire to produce an effect on others, and later in his career turned his attention away from the reader and literature more generally to better know and acknowledge himself.[38] At the conclusion to "Monsieur Teste's Logbook" (1925), for instance, Valéry offered a hint of disillusionment with the poetics of pure intentionality: "Disgusted with . . . doing what succeeds, with the *effectiveness of methods*, try something else."[39] It was as though the complete transmission of one's intentions at once limited what it was that one intended and, worse still, inevitably felt forced upon the reader. In his book on Degas, Valéry offered a mea culpa:

> If the habit of facility . . . becomes the dominating factor [in creating art, then] . . . it reduces to nothing the slightest necessity for concentration on the reader's part, in order to *secure* with *instantaneous effects*, *rhetorical shock tactics*. . . . Modern art tends almost exclusively to exploit sensory sensibility. . . . It has a marvelous flair for arousing our attention, and for exploiting every means to that end—intensification, contrast, the startling, or the enigmatic. It can capture, by the subtlety of its means or the audacity of its execution, certain very valuable effects: states of extreme transience or complexity, irrational values, inarticulate sensations, resonances, correspondences, intuitions of shifting depths. . . . But these things are bought at a price.[40]

As though acknowledging the very *ease* of producing results—that the poet achieves his aims with little effort and a range of literary tricks—Valéry sought more difficult material to render. This he found in his own mind, still conceived as a plastic material to be molded by his will, although perhaps of a more resistant kind.

To express one's intentions transparently, without resistance–to achieve an artistic effect with certainty, as Poe suggested–was equal to artistic failure. If the work succeeded in communicating its meaning directly, Valéry reasoned, then the work itself was flawed. Expressive transparency set the aesthetic bar both too high and too low. Too high because there will always be those who do not respond (or simply do not care) about a work, at least not according to the artist's intentions; too low because the effect produced, if it were certain, would be of such generality as to make it uncompelling as a stand-in for meaning.

Figure 1. Entrance to Palais de Chaillot, Paris.

The Reader as Producer

> Il dépend de celui qui passe. Que je sois tombe ou trésor. Que je parle ou me taise. Ceci ne tient qu'à toi. Ami n'entre pas sans désir.—Valéry's inscription at the entrance to the *Palais de Chaillot* (fig. 1)

Although it has gone unremarked in the literature, Valéry made one of the most decisive, and influential, turns in the history of modern literary thought. As I have shown, at the center of Valéry's thought lies the singular commitment to the "brutal science" of readerly affect. His emphasis throughout the writings discussed so far was on the author's imperative to control his words closely so as to calculate the desired effects on the reader. One of his most dramatic statements concerning the artist's prerogative to control the reader appears in an unlikely place, an essay on the art of Camille Corot:

> Delacroix, Wagner, Baudelaire—all great theorists, bent on dominating other souls by sensorial means. Their one dream was to create the irresistible effect—to intoxicate, or overwhelm. They looked to analysis to provide them with the keyboard on which to play, with certainty, on man's emotions, and they sought in abstract meditation the key to absolutely certain *action* upon their subject—man's nervous and psychic being. . . . [It was] the ambition of such violent and tormented minds, anxious to reach and as it were *possess* (in the diabolical sense of the term) that tender and hidden region of the soul by which it can be held and controlled entire, through the indirect path of the entrails and organic depths of being. They wish to enslave . . . and to bring us into bondage. (*Degas*, 136–37)

Delacroix, Baudelaire and Wagner formed an exclusive trinity of artists collectively "bent on dominating other minds by sensuous means." The beholder had no hope of resisting the effects of the artist playing him or her like an instrument. But what is striking about this description is that he offered it as the exact *opposite* of Corot's intentions. "Nothing could be remoter from Corot than the ambition of such violent and tormented minds," Valéry affirmed. Corot embodied the "spirit of simplicity" and as a follower of nature, followed "anything but a method" (137). We learn that although Corot started out with a strict pictorial method, he left it behind in the pursuit of "vagueness" and the "indefinable" emotion obtained by "improvisation," "chance" and "fortunate accidents" (141, 144). This more "poetic" approach lends itself to a new form of *reception*. The viewer is now free to discover whatever meanings he or she finds in the work. "We have reasons for liking what we like," and what we like is outside the artist's control. What we like are works that "act upon us an object would" (151).[41] When "works of art are…objects in the material sense of the term," they of course bear no intended meaning. Objects, of course, unlike works of art, have no intended meaning. Objects are significant from the perspective of the viewer; they apply only to "*each particular case*" (151). "The 'meaning' of a poem," Valéry explains, "like that of an object, is the reader's business. *Quantum potes, tantum aude* (Dare to do all you can)."[42] Every artwork, like any object, is open to an "infinite number of interpretations."[43]

Valéry embodied this new experiential approach in his description of a black and white Corot plate. Although it is a landscape without any historical subject, it nonetheless suggests to Valéry "a delicious episode from *Parsifal*" (143). While Corot did not–indeed, could not–intend anything of the sort, it is the virtue of landscape that it evokes in the viewer a vision from the past. In Valéry's case, a highly specific vision:

> At dawn, after the endless night of torment and despair, King Amfortas tortured by an ambiguous wound, mysteriously, voluptuously inflicted as a punishment on soul and body alike, has his litter carried out into the country air—The Impure One, come to breathe the cool of the morning. (143)

As though his description were not explicitly subjective enough, he insisted that it is "only a bar or two" of Wagner's score that the landscape evokes.

The dramatic oscillations in Valéry's views about intention are most evident in "Odds and Ends," a collection of thoughts written between 1924 and 1930. There he explained, "One is led to a *form* by a desire to leave the smallest possible share to the reader."[44] Just a few pages later he offered a very different picture of the reader's share:

> Once a work is published its author's interpretation of it has no more validity than anyone else's. If I make Pierre's portrait and someone finds it more like Jacques than like Pierre, there's nothing to be said against this; his opinion is as good as mine. My intention was merely *my* intention and the work is—what it is.[45]

If we are to believe his own account of the turn from a poetics of surefire machines to an anti-intentionalist reader-response aesthetic, it revolves around an encounter with the philosopher Alain. In a story recounted in his "Commentaries on *Charmes*"—his most influential statement of anti-intentionalism—Valéry explains how a friend lent a copy of his last book of poems, *Charmes*, to the philosopher Alain.[46] Alain returned the volume to its author with extensive commentaries filling up the margins. Reading over the philosopher's notes, Valéry was forced to reconsider the problem of intention. "Does he understand you? …Has he unfolded your aims?" he wondered to himself (155). His answer is clear: no. Or rather, there is no problem of meaning. Even to seek a meaning in a poem is misguided. Why? Because

> my verses have whatever meaning is given them. The one I give them suits only myself and does not contradict anyone else. It is an error contrary to the nature of poetry, and one which may even be fatal to it, to claim that for each poem there is a corresponding true meaning, unique and conformable to, or identical with, some thought of the author's. (155–56)

It is left to the reader to create whatever meaning the work might have. Like any physical object, "the action of a text modifies minds, each according to his nature and state, provoking combinations latent within a certain head, but whatever reaction is thus produced, the text is…capable of indefinitely generating other phenomena in other circumstances or in another person." It is the writer's job to make the poem-object, the meaning of which is generated by its various respondents. This is what Valéry meant when he said, "Content in itself has no…essential importance" for the writer; he has only to contend with the materialities of form.[47] Alain's interpretation is as good as any reader's, including the author's:[48]

> Once a work is finished and presented, whether in verse or prose, its author can propose or affirm nothing about it that would have any more weight or would explain it more exactly than what anyone else might say….An author can, no doubt, inform us of his intentions; but it is not a question of these; it is a question of what subsists, what he has made independent of himself. (157–58)

Once the author has released the work into the world, its meaning is beyond the control of the author and becomes a purely public property. "How can people manage to cling to their opinion once it has been voiced and has parted company with what created it?" he mused.[49] And again, in an essay looking back on *Le Cimetière marin*: "Whatever the author may have *wanted to say*, he has written what he has written. Once published, a text is like an apparatus that anyone may use as he will and according to his ability: it is not certain that the one who constructed it can use it better than another" (152).

Valéry virtually invented the position that dominated literary theory from this point forward. In William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's version of idea, the poem is "detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it. The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public."[50] While Wimsatt and Beardsley follow Valéry in his anti-intentionalism, they cannot abide by his affirmation of readerly affect. Although Wimsatt and Beardsley rejected what they called the "Affective Fallacy"—the notion that the reader's affect generates the work's meaning—more recent commentators have shown that they could not logically sustain that critique if they maintained a strong anti-intentionalist position.[51] Simply put, if the work does not mean what the author intended it to mean, there is no alternative available but that the reader is the one who creates meaning.

At the same moment as Wimsatt and Beardsley, Maurice Blanchot offered a similar critique of intention in *The Space of Literature* (1955). Citing Valéry, Blanchot explained that "Whatever [the writer] does, the work withdraws him from what he does and from what he can do."[52]

So while the work withdraws from the author, so the reader enters into that gap and recreates the book himself. Blanchot wrote:

> The reader…becomes an author in reverse. The true reader…is apt to return, drawn by an imperceptible pull, toward the various prefigurations of the reader which have caused him to be present in advance at the hazardous experience of the book. [53]

So by the time Roland Barthes wrote "The Death of the Author" in 1967, Valéry's double position—anti-intentionalism and readerly affect—was established as a powerful option within the literary-theoretical canon. Indeed, in his brief history of "writers who have long since attempted to loosen the Author's sway," Barthes places Valéry at the center. Valéry, he says, despite some hesitations, "never stopped calling into question and deriding the Author; he stressed the linguistic and, as it were, 'hazardous' nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works he militated in favor of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition." [54] And as Barthes further suggests, Valéry's critique of intention simultaneously led to the effort to "restore the place of the reader." [55]

Despite its current canonicity, Valéry's affirmation of the publicly defined work of art did not go unchallenged at the time. Pablo Picasso provided a cogent, if off the cuff, assessment of Valéry's claims. Valéry's poetics were a variant of the "old grab bag" view of art, he said. [56] Picasso took issue above all with Valéry's view that a "*creator is one who makes others create.*" [57] If the viewer was a creator on par with the artist, then it followed that the work was open "for everyone to reach into and pull out what he himself has put in." Valéry proposed exactly that: to each his own. "I want my paintings to be able to defend themselves, to resist the invader," Picasso retorted. He went on:

> Valéry used to say, "I write half the poem. The reader writes the other half." That's all right for him, maybe, but I don't want there to be three or four or a thousand possibilities of interpreting *my* canvas. I want there to be only one and in that one, to some extent, the possibility of recognizing nature. [58]

The point of Picasso's censure was not to suggest that nature carries an independent meaning that the artist could secure, but to say that whatever meaning the work expresses, it has that expression by virtue of the maker's intention alone, and not by virtue of a possible viewer's—necessarily unlimited—intentions. If the work does not carry one meaning, Picasso

argued, then it carries an infinite amount of meanings (or affects), one for each viewer. Of course what Picasso got wrong about Valéry is that Valéry did not actually think that there were a thousand possibilities of *interpreting* his work, but that the reader is actually making a new work when he or she reads it. Thus the force of Valéry's claim that "My *error* becomes the author" (*AN*, 562). (And yet, even here, Valéry continues to suggest that there is an author, and that he can even recognize the author's intentions, he just chooses to ignore them to make his own work.) Then again, if all readers are actually pulling themselves from the work, as Picasso lamented and Valéry seemingly celebrated, then they are not interpreting the work at all but creating it for themselves.

"Verbal Materialism"

Are we left with two Valéry's, one concerned with the author, the other with the reader? What could possibly bind the two accounts of meaning—intentionalist and anti-intentionaist, authorial and affective—that seem to bifurcate Valéry's career? Which, if any, is the real Valéry? Is he the brutal scientist of form, seeking to produce the most "direct and irresistible effects" on his readers? Or is he the linguistic and scientific skeptic who knows that "*the man who thinks he is having an influence is not* (or is having one contrary to his intentions)" (274). Is there a shared core around which both ideas circulate?

While an author may not be able to control reference, he may nonetheless produce autonomous configurations of language, what Valéry simply called "form." Strip away the author and the reader and we are left with material form.

> It is the form alone which commands and survives. It is the sound, the rhythm, the physical proximity of words, their effects of induction or their mutual influences which dominate at the expense of their capacity for being consummated in a defined and particular meaning. [59]

Around this core of sound, rhythm, and the physical characteristics of the page, devoid of any "particular meaning," there are *sensations* that get generated in the reader. The poem does not contain a meaning that requires interpretation, but rather embodies a dense material "presence" that induces sensations in the reader's body. Valéry continues:

> The action of its presence modifies minds, each according to its nature and state, provoking combinations latent within a certain head, but whatever reaction is thus produced, the text is found to be unaltered and capable of indefinitely generating other phenomena in other circumstances or in another person. [60]

From beginning to end, Valéry assumed that poems are an "action." Writing has a direct effect on the reader; only after 1927 did he see those effects as multiplied to infinity. Each body that comes into contact with the work generates a new affect. It follows that every encounter with a work generates a different affect depending on the viewer's state of mind and body and the setting of the work. [61]

What binds the early Valéry and the later, then, is a view of the work as a material action and *not as a representation*. For this reason Deleuze and McCarthy are right to see Valéry as committed to an aesthetic of "blood," or to a "direct action on the nervous system." Adorno too followed the inner logic of Valéry's poetics when he suggested that for Valéry "form involves no consideration of the receiver or the producer." [62] Rather, the work contains a living "material substratum," what Adorno portentously called the "language of things themselves." [63] That is to say, language and meaning leave the hands of living agents and get established in inanimate things. The literary action that Adorno describes is the "eruptive revelation of negative experience," [64] the emergence of a forgotten language that "precedes objectness." [65]

What makes Valéry a writer of "life and death," then, is his view of the work of art as something stripped of its meaning and replaced by its agency. When Valéry was asked what his poems meant, he turned the question around to show that they did not in fact mean anything, but they *did* something:

> If I am questioned; if anyone wonders (as happens sometimes quite peremptorily) what I "wanted to say" in a certain poem, I reply that I did not *want to say* but *wanted to do*, and that it was the intention of *doing* which *wanted* what I *said*. [66]

Valéry's difficult formulation almost embodies the thought it tries to communicate. The sentence turns on two opposed meanings of *intention*. The first involves the conventional meaning of intention: what an author wants to communicate, his message, as it is delivered in the poem. As Valéry suggests, this is an unsupportable (and uninteresting) notion of a literary intention. But the second meaning strips the poem of human agency altogether makes *language*

an agent; his words make him do what *they* want him to do.

Fictive Politics

"Law itself is the *interlude between acts* of force," Valéry observed in a series of notes titled "On Political Parties" (250). Laws, like predictions, are pure fictions. And behind every fiction lies its truth: material force. Many years later, Jacques Derrida closely followed Valéry's thought when he redescribed conflicts of interpretation as disguised "conflicts of force."[67] Derrida's well-known "substitution of mark for sign,"[68] further followed Valéry's course in their shared ambition to establish the authority of readerly affect. Marks, by their very nature, mean different things to different readers, while a work, composed of words, has only one meaning, the author's.[69] For Derrida as for Valéry, because there is no possibility of discovering the correct interpretation of a mark, every act of interpretation is necessarily the "imposition of meaning" (145).[70]

For Valéry, the result of the redescription of signs as marks, and interpretations as impositions was to show that "Everything pertaining to *practical politics* is necessarily *superficial*" (249). Valéry suggests a simple reversal of priorities. In place of practical politics (parties, policies, reform) appears a more effective means of control—*fictive* politics (words and ideas). To found a society based on policies, Valéry asserts, glossing Montesquieu, is misguided and destined to failure. "Mere coercion of bodies by bodies," he explains, "can never found an order." To truly persuade the masses, "fictional powers are needed" (215).

Anti-intentionalism is the technology that provides the new means of warfare. As a material thing, a word can be deployed by and against the public will. On this account, Valéry's literary and political ontologies are identical. This identity clearly emerged in his 1933 remarks on "Literature and Politics." "Nothing is more remarkable," he observed, than "to see that ideas, separated from the intellect that conceived them, isolated from the conditions of their birth," can "become *political agents*…weapons" (275). When words no longer mean what we intend them to mean, then political agency is no longer tied to political practice. In their place there are bodies doing battle with a new kind of weapon: "Language is good, it does its job when used…like a tool—pliers or a drill—or a kind of currency—or a weapon."[71] He called this new weapon "verbal materialism."[72] The verbal materialist "can *look down* on…all who are enslaved to words by credulity—who *must* believe that their speech…signifies some reality. But as for you, you know that the *reality of discourse* is only the words and the forms."[73] Beneath every intention, behind every meaning, beyond every representation lie the blood and viscera of form. And when one experiences the great work of art, its form can plunge into the reader's bloodstream and infect the reader like a disease. By its very nature, the work "acts

so powerfully, grips the viscera, collapses the diaphram. Indeed, a certain note in a certain register attacks the substratum of life."[74]

At the beginning of *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze seizes on Valéry's materialism. "Valéry had a profound idea: what is most deep is the skin," Deleuze observes. Deleuze does not offer a citation, but the phrase is taken from Valéry's *Idée fixe*, a book Valéry described as "exclusively for the medical profession"; it was published by a pharmaceutical firm.[75] Those beholden to the philosophy of depth, Deleuze insists, will inevitably be wounded by Valéry's intuition. "The more events traverse the entire, depthless extension," Deleuze writes, "the more they affect bodies which they cut and bruise."[76] Deleuze could quote Valéry's fictive Doctor on this account: "However much we dig beneath the surface, we remain…ectodermal." It is "viscera" all the way down.[77]

NOTES

1. "The thinking mind is brutal—no concessions," Valéry observed. "What, indeed, is more brutal than a thought?" (*Oeuvres* 14:256).

2. Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Vintage, 1985), n.p.

3. McCarthy quoted in Richard B. Woodward, "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction," *New York Times* (April 19, 1992): 31.

4. Valéry, "The Yalu," in *History and Politics*, ed. Jackson Mathews, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (New York: Bolligen, 1962), 371–78; hereafter cited in text. The editors include the French original as an appendix, see "Le Yalu," 502–08. According to the editor of the English edition, this "piece of youthful, finely imagined, and difficult prose" was "written during the first Sino-Japanese war" (371). "Youthful, finely imagined" is euphemistic for Symbolist–but that's not McCarthy's concern.

5. Valéry puts this same thought in his own voice and speaking of his own time in a piece entitled "Ashes" (1902). "Our age is equally afraid of blood and time. The great majority loathes durability and sees in it only repetition—and death" (*Analects*, trans. Stuart Gilbert [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970], 601).

6. A late essay simply entitled "Unpredictability" (1944) sums up his later thought along these lines. Looking back on his early writings he says that nothing gave him "the slightest hint, the slightest idea of the prodigious novelties we now know" and that "nothing in the very substance of [his] creative sensibilities, [his] power to dream, presaged the totally unexpected things that in fact happened" (71). "All the notions we thought solid, all the values of civilized life," he reflects, are "but dreams and smoke" (126).

7. Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, 145.

8. Valéry to Gide, in *Self-Portraits: The Gide/Valéry Letters, 1890–1942*, ed. Robert Mallet, trans. June Guicharnaud (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 57–58.

9. Gide to Valéry, *Self-Portraits*, 58.

10. Ibid., 58.

11. Ibid., 59.

12. Ibid., 59.

13. Valéry to Gide, *Self-Portraits*, 220. Valéry and Gide's image of Wagner was starkly different from T. W. Adorno's later view of the composer. While Adorno suggested that "the whole neoclassical movement in France was a counter-attack against Wagner," Gide and Valéry presented Wagner as someone "bent on dominating other minds" by controlled musical techniques (*Degas, Manet, Morisot*, trans. David Paul [New York: Bolligen, 1960], 136). Indeed Adorno was mistaken when he claimed Valéry fought against Wagner as a means to "resist the intoxication, the obscure mingling of the arts." While Valéry resisted Gide's aesthetic of intoxication, they both saw Wagner as aligned *with* the neoclassical call to order. See T. W. Adorno, "Valéry's Deviations," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 168.

14. Valéry may be referring to an earlier letter where Gide fondly recalled the "lewd intoxication [that] convulses me with supreme lyricism" after seeing a prostitute (*Self-Portraits*, 77).

15. Valéry to Gide, *Self-Portraits*, 224.

16. Valéry to Gide, *Self-Portraits*, 84, 223.

17. Valéry to Gide, *Self-Portraits*, 84.

18. "Let us wish for a brutal, disinterested man who will keenly sense the interesting things that need to be done," Valéry wrote to Gide concerning the Dreyfus case. He continued: "By some ineluctable law the exceptional man is born to serve as nourishment for the many. It is they who give and they who take" (14:603).

19. A recent study considers the relations between Deleuze and McCarthy, see Alan Bourassa, *Deleuze and American Literature Affect and Virtuality in Faulkner, Wharton, Ellison, and McCarthy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

20. David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 65. See also John Russell, *Francis Bacon*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 109.

21. The phrase appears on pages 31, 32 (twice), 34, 40, 43, 44, 45, 88 in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (Paris: Éditions de la

Différence, 1981), 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 36, 37, 70. Hereafter the English edition is cited as *FB* followed by the French original. There are two key sources for Deleuze's notion of works having a "direct action on the body." First, speaking of the writings of Antonin Artaud, Deleuze observes words that "act directly on the body, penetrating and bruising it" (*Logique du sens* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969], 107; Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 87). And second, Deleuze cites Bacon's distinction between "paint which conveys directly and paint which conveys through illustration." As Bacon puts it, "It's a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain" (quoted in *FB*, 26). The latter phrase was featured in the introductory wall text for the 2008–09 exhibition "Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective," at Tate Britain and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

22. If the artist has a feeling to communicate, he "must express it in such a way as to produce the maximum effect in the soul of a listener" ("On Literary Technique" [1889], in *The Art of Poetry*, ed. Jackson Mathews, trans. Denise Folliot [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989], 313). Every artistic effect "is entirely calculated by the Artist," Valéry declared. At this same moment Georges Lecomte admiringly observed of Seurat's work, "Everything will be calculated with this concern [for producing specific sensations] in mind" ("Société des Artistes Indépendants," *L'art moderne* [March 30, 1890]: 100–1; quoted in George Innes Homer, *Georges Seurat and the Science of Painting* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964], 185). As T. S. Eliot noted of "On Literary Technique," Valéry virtually "invents the role which is to make him representative of the twentieth [century]." Of course Eliot intended this comment as an indictment; it was Valéry who largely, if unintentionally, introduced the affective fallacy into modernist poetics (T. S. Eliot, introduction to Valéry, *Art of Poetry*, xviii).

23. Valéry, *Art of Poetry*, 319. The "poem's only aim is to prepare its climax" and to produce a "final and overwhelming effect," Valéry further observed (ibid., 317). Edmund Wilson offered a wry, but accurate, description of Valéry's aesthetic ideal: "A poem is like a heavy weight which the poet has carried to the roof bit by bit—the reader is the passer-by upon whom the weight is dropped all at once and who consequently receives from it in a moment an overwhelming impression, a complete aesthetic effect" (*Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* [New York: Macmillan, 1931], 80). In 1885, four years prior to Valéry's text on technique, Charles Henry spoke of the "directed stimulation of energy" produced by an artist through "the methodical excitation of nervous and psychic activity" (quoted in André Chastel, "Une source oubliée de Seurat" [1959], rpt. in *Fables, formes, figures* [Paris: Flammarion, 1978], 402).

24. Valéry, "Introduction à la méthode de Léonardo de Vinci" (1894), rpt. in *Oeuvres*, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 1:1185 (hereafter cited as *Oeuvres*); Valéry, "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci," in *Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 45 (hereafter cited as *Leonardo*). In his later "Note and Digression" on Leonardo he explains, "*To write* should mean to construct, as precisely and solidly as possible, a machine of language in which the released energy of the mind is used in overcoming *real* obstacles" (*Oeuvres*, 1:1205; *Leonardo*, 72). Those "*real* obstacles" are both the author himself and what he calls "*persons unknown*." The search "for the word that will tell most powerfully" must not confront the sympathetic reader but the "*unknown*" and perhaps disinterested reader. To confront that "obstacle" and succeed is the mark of literary success (*Leonardo*, 72).

25. As Michael Fried has shown, the machinic aesthetic has its origins in eighteenth century French art theory. Denis Diderot described the power of an artistic idea as akin to a machine which "must exercise its despotism over all the others." "The principle idea is the driving force of the machine," Diderot wrote, "which, like the force that maintains the celestial bodies in their orbits and carries them along, acts in inverse ratio to distance" (quoted in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986], 85). Even earlier, Roger de Piles spoke of painting "as a machine the parts of which must exist for each other and produce all together a single effect" (ibid., 85). But rather than the production of a "single effect," Diderot stressed the machinic nature of a work's *internal* ordering and arrangement. Diderot's machinic conception of pictorial unity stressed the persuasive force of a seamlessly conceived composition. So while Diderot conceived of a quasi-causal, machinic ideal on the level of the work, he abjured it in terms of the production of the effect. To produce a literally causal effect on the beholder would be tantamount to theater. On the larger context of the machinic ideal see Jörg Garms, "Machine, Composition und Histoire in der Französischen Kritik um 1750," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine kunstwissenschaft* 16 (1971): 27–42.

On this account, it is not surprising that Valéry found little interest in Diderot's writings. In fact for Valéry Diderot was the epitome of a theatrical writer. He compared Diderot to Stendhal, and both of them unfavorably, to actors. "To know yourself is simply to predict yourself; to predict yourself ends in playing a part. Beyle's consciousness [like Diderot's] is a theater, and there is a good deal of the actor in the author. His work is full of sallies aimed at the audience. His prefaces stand down in front and speak to it, wink at the reader, making signs of complicity, to convince him that he is the least foolish of the lot, that he is 'in the know,' that he alone gets the real subtlety" ("Stendhal" [1927], in *Masters and Friends*,

trans. Martin Turnell [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968], 36). It's hard to fathom a more damaging set of theatrical criticisms and Valéry's essay more generally is devoted to undermining Stendhal's imputed sincerity.

For an important critique of Valéry's claims in the Stendhal essay see René Girard, "Valéry and Stendhal" (1954), in *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005*, ed. and trans. Robert Doran (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 13–25. Girard seizes on Valéry's putative critique of theatricality in order to show how theater shapes his every move. "Valéry cannot score points against Stendhal," Girard reflects, "without leaving himself open to attack, and that he will not be out of danger so long as the enemy remains vulnerable" (ibid., 24).

[26.] Teodor de Wyzewa, "Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne," *La revue wagnérienne* 2 (May 8, 1886): 100, 113; Wyzewa, "Notes on Wagnerian Painting," in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, ed. and trans. Henri Dorra (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994), 148, 149.

[27.] Edgar Degas "was always ready to talk about the *science* of art: he would say a picture was the result of a *series of operations*" ("Degas Danse Dessin" [1936], in *Oeuvres*, 2:1163–64; "Degas Dance Drawing," in *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, 6).

[28.] Before Degas, Édouard Manet fulfilled this role for Valéry. Manet was "contemptuous of any effects not arrived at by conscious clarity, and the full possession of the resources of [his] craft. . . . [Manet has] no mind to speculate on 'sentiment' or introduce 'ideas,' until the 'sensation' has been knowingly and subtly organized" ("Triomphe de Manet" [1932], in *Oeuvres*, 2:1328–29; "The Triumph of Manet," in *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, 108). Manet is an artist with a relentless will to order, subject-matter was simply a prop for his designs on the audience. Manet, on this account, is no painter of modern life.

[29.] Valéry's account is at the farthest remove from existential accounts of the artist as doubter and outsider, prey to anxiety and a failure to realize his ambitions. Maurice Merleau-Ponty questioned Valéry on this point in "Cézanne's Doubt" (1945). Here Merleau-Ponty provides an ironic gloss on Valéry's "Method of Leonardo": "He has complete mastery of his means, he does what he wants, going at will from knowledge to life with a superior elegance. Everything he did was done knowingly. . . . He has discovered the 'central attitude,' on the basis of which it is equally possible to know, to act, and to create because action and life, when turned into exercises, are not contrary to detached knowledge." Merleau-Ponty goes on to reject Valéry's claims here, pointing to the essential "enigma" and "secret history" behind Leonardo's (and Cézanne's) "transparent consciousness" (*The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. Michael B. Smith [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993], 72, 73).

[30.] Monsieur Teste "had been more or less *influenced* . . . by the kind of Degas," Valéry noted (*Oeuvre*, 2:1168; *Degas*, 11).

[31.] While Teste's companion observed how "deeply M. Teste . . . reflected on his own malleability," Teste was more concerned with how he could "handle, combine, transform" others ("La soirée avec Monsieur Teste" [1896], in *Oeuvres*, 2:18; "The Evening with Monsieur Teste," in *Monsieur Teste*, trans. Jackson Mathews [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989], 12, 13).

[32.] Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 1:1197–98; *Leonardo*, 91–92.

[33.] Many years later, Le Corbusier took Valéry at his word. His ideal work of art, like a well-tuned automobile, was conceived as a "machine for stirring emotions" and for the bearer of the work, the malleable public, a "machine for living." Quoted by Jean-Louis Cohen in his introduction to Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, ed. Jean-Louis Cohen, trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 14, 22. Corbusier's theory of affect–along with Frank Lloyd Wright, Adolf Loos, Vassily Kandinsky, László Moholy-Nagy, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, and Richard Neutra–are the subject of my current project on theory and design in the age of affect.

[34.] These texts appear in two separate volumes of the English-language edition of Valéry's collected works, and "Une conquête méthodique" appears in *Oeuvres*, 1:971–87. "A Conquest by Method" (1897) and "Instruction and Training of Troops: A Review" (1897) appear in *History and Politics*, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (New York: Pantheon, 1962), 46–66, 489–95; "Semantics" (1898) and "Time" (1899) appear in *Aesthetics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 236–57, 258–77. All of the essays were initially published in the *Mercure de France*.

[35.] Valéry, "Une conquête méthodique," in *Oeuvres*, 1:987; Valéry, "Conquest by Method," in *History and Politics*, 65.

[36.] Valéry, "Quelques pensées de Monsieur Teste," in *Oeuvres*, 2:68; Valéry, "A Few of Monsieur Teste's Thoughts," in *Monsieur Teste*, 72.

[37.] Valéry, "Les droits du poète sur la langue" (1928), rpt. in *Oeuvres*, 2:1262; Valéry, "The Poet's Rights over Language," in *Art of Poetry*, 169. This view slightly conflicts with his earlier remarks in the "Method of Leonardo" where he baldly characterized the public as a "category of minds" that could be "played upon" at the artist's will.

[38.] Valéry, "Préface" [1925], rpt. in *Oeuvres*, 2:12; Valéry, "Preface," in *Monsieur Teste*, 4. Considered more broadly, Valéry's move to exploring the inner life of the mind marks no essential change in his project. As Jacques Derrida writes in his study of Valéry's sources, Valéry's most determined effort to break off communication with the exterior, to give up the

"affirmation of mastery by means of the exercise of style," leads to invention of the "Implex," a pure condition of "potentiality to act." The "Implex," despite its ostensive opening to the "contingent, conditional," is ultimately a form of "self presence whose dynamic virtuality" secures the inviolability of the self against the impact of an "irreducible difference" (Derrida, "Qual Quelle: Valéry's Sources" [1971], in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 295, 303).

39. Valéry, "Extraits du Log-book de Monsieur Teste" (1896), rpt. in *Oeuvres*, 2:45; Valéry, "Extracts from Monsieur Teste's Logbook," in *Monsieur Teste*, 46; emphasis added.

40. Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 2:1220; *Degas*, 76–77. Adorno closely considers this passage in his study of Valéry's *Degas*; see "The Artist as Deputy" (1953), in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 106. According to Adorno, Degas and Valéry were faithful to a utopian view of art as the "human being's possible image" (ibid.). For Valéry, Adorno writes, "to construct works of art means *to refuse the opiate* that great sensuous art has become since Wagner, Baudelaire, and Manet; to fend off the humiliation that makes works of art media and makes consumers victims of psychotechnical manipulation" (ibid., 107; emphasis added). My argument is precisely the opposite: Valéry actively sought to drug his audience with the sensuous means of composition. Adorno's account, as forceful as it is, remains a hopeful, or simply willful, reading of Valéry's concerns. Nonetheless, as I show, Adorno captures a crucial turn in Valéry's later writings.

41. The problems raised here, of works of art resdescribed as experiential objects for readers, bears directly on later debates surrounding Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" of 1967. See Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72. Indeed, the present account I take to be part of the larger historical framework of Fried's analysis.

42. Valéry, *Discours*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 6 (Paris : Éditions du Sagittaire, 1943), 118. The Latin phrase is taken from Thomas Aquinas's "Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem."

43. Valéry, *History and Politics*, 124.

44. Valéry, *Analects*, 105.

45. Ibid., 109. Two pages later Valéry offers a prescient account of postwar literary theory: "An active reader makes experiments with books; tries out, perhaps, reshuffling their contents" (ibid., 111). Valéry continued the thought in his "Commentaries on *Charmes*" (1930): "If a painter does a portrait of *Socrates* and a passer-by recognizes *Plato*, all the creator's explanations, protests, and excuses will not change this immediate recognition….The author can, no doubt, inform us of his intentions; but it is not a question of these; it is a question of what subsists, what he has made independent of him" (*The Art of Poetry*, 158). At the same moment Valéry offered a more chaste, if more confused, assessment of this "fundamental condition of literature": "One must reckon with the element of misunderstanding which is a fundamental condition of literature. It often happens that an attentive reader…will discover in a given text intentions and hidden folds the author did not know were there and would never have seen without this reader's intervention….So you see, a work is fashioned under such conditions that it completely escapes the author once it leaves his hands. It is virtually impossible for him to make an exact reckoning of the way in which that work will be received, judged, and understood….Paradoxical as it may seem, inspiration is more likely to come from the reader than from the author" ("Pure Intellect," in *Occasions*, 213-14). Valéry seems to suggest that the reader's "intervention" is to see something that the author intended but didn't see when he made the poem. He further suggests that the poet, at some limit case of intentionality, could potentially "make an exact reckoning" of how a work would be received. But these two claims stand in tension with Valéry's more ongoing claim (at least after 1930) that a poem, once it is written, is a object for the reader's productive usage, that it "completely escapes the author" upon publication.

46. Valéry, "Commentaries on '*Charmes*,'" in *The Art of Poetry*, 153—58; hereafter cited in the text.

47. Valéry, *Idée fixe*, trans. David Paul (New York: Pantheon, 1965), 106.

48. Alain's interpretations were so good that Valéry attended a course by the philosopher devoted to his own poems! There, he says, he was able to study his poems in the way his readers would, as though it they were "objects" ("Commentaries on '*Charmes*,'" 154).

49. Valéry, *Analects*, 222–23.

50. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. with Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 5. For a discussion of Valéry's poetics, see Beardsley, *Aesthetic Inquiry: Essays on Art Criticism and the Philosophy of Art* (Belmont, CA: Dickenson, 1967), 179–83.

51. See, for instance, Jennifer Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–11, 22–27.

[52.] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 87.

[53.] Ibid., 103.

[54.] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 144.

[55.] Ibid.

[56.] Françoise Gilot with Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: Penguin, 1966), 252.

[57.] Valéry, *Aesthetics*, xiii.

[58.] Ibid.

[59.] Valéry, "Commentaries on *Charmes*," *The Art of Poetry*, 156.

[60.] Ibid., 158. As Philip Wheelwright puts it in his introduction to Valéry's *Idée Fixe*, "By bringing the diverse elements together in a special way…the poet…has engendered a kind of special energy in whoever is susceptible to it, an energy arising from the modification of the normal semantic potentialities of words, and has thereby elicited a real creative act on the reader's (or hearer's) part" (xxi).

[61.] Valéry had various words to describe this presence. In one of his most terse formulations he wrote that "Poetry is nothing but a formation of words that have *resonance*. This quality is independent of any meaning. Its presence is manifest. We say: magic" (*Analects*, 442; 14:459).

[62.] Adorno, "Valéry's Deviations," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1. 166.

[63.] Ibid., 170.

[64.] T. W. Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Continuum, 2003), 37.

[65.] Adorno, "Valéry's Deviations," 171.

[66.] Valéry, "Concerning *Le Cimetière marin*," *The Art of Poetry*, 147–48.

[67.] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 145.

[68.] Ibid., 66.

[69.] While Barthes describes the shift "From Work to Text" (*Image-Music-Text*, 155–64), Derrida further raises the stakes by moving from text to mark. A mark, rather than a text, is constitutively available to every reader's interpretive–or rather affective, as one does not properly *interpret* a mark–account. Nonetheless, Derrida's account fulfills the logic of Barthes' argument.

[70.] Ibid., 149. For a discussion of the implications of Derrida's effort to turn texts into marks, one that I am indebted to here and throughout, see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[71.] Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, 144.

[72.] Valéry, "A Poet's Notebook" (1933), in *The Art of Poetry*, 183.

[73.] Ibid.

[74.] Valéry, *Cahiers/Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. Brian Stimpson with Paul Gifford and Robert Pickering, trans. Paul Gifford (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 479.

[75.] Valéry, *Idée fixe*, 31.

[76.] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 10).

[77.] Valéry, *Idée fixe*, 33.

Todd Cronan is Assistant Professor of art history at Emory University. He is the author of *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013); *Matisse* for Phaidon (2015); and articles on Brecht, Merleau-Ponty, Santayana, Simmel, Valéry and Richard Neutra. He is currently at work on two book projects. The first, *Seeing Photographically: Photographic Ontology and the Problem of Audience*, looks at photographic debates around the concept of "previsualization" from Alfred Stieglitz to Minor White including new considerations of the work of Weston, Adams, Callahan and Siskind. The second project, *Art at the End of History: Painting/Photography/Architecture/Theater/Film in the 1920s*,

examines the claims and results of a vision of art after modernization had achieved its ends. At the center of the latter are the intense debates over which artistic medium was thought to best express the realities of a post-historical world.

HISTORY AND THE WORK OF ART IN SEBALD'S *AFTER NATURE*

DOROTHEA VON MÜCKE

W.G. Sebald's long poem *Nach der Natur* (1988) contributed significantly to the swift recognition of his literary talent among fellow writers and poets, yet it received scant attention by the larger public and literary scholars alike.[1] To the English-speaking world it was not even available until 2002, a year after its author's death, when it appeared in Michael Hamburger's excellent translation under the title *After Nature*. Like a triptych, it is divided into three untitled parts, each with a distinct thematic concern involving a specific historical period and a writer or artist: the first focuses on the Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald, the second on the eighteenth-century naturalist, travel writer, and Arctic explorer Georg Wilhelm Steller, and the last on elements from Sebald's own biography.[2] As opposed to Sebald's later practice, apart from the landscape photographs that are reproduced on the end sheets of the first edition of *Nach der Natur*, there are no visuals in the volume, although paintings play a prominent role, especially in the first and final sections of the poem. In what follows, I shall support my reading of Sebald's poem with reproductions of Grünewald's paintings. I do so, however, in an attempt to provide a glossary, and I do not want to confuse this with Sebald's own, later practice of including visuals in his texts.

What fascinates me in this early poem by Sebald is its poetological dimension, the manner in which it provides a sustained reflection on the material aspects of the work of art and on the nature of art in its relationship to history. Moreover, what makes these meditations particularly interesting is their un-timeliness, their departure from what were then especially among literary scholars dominant critical clichés and pious practices, such as the presumed death of the author or the reduction of works of art to their historical contexts. For when he composed *Nach der Natur* in the late 1980's, Sebald was a literary scholar and a professor of German Literature at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom, specializing in Realism and the literature of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. In that sense one could ascribe a certain autobiographical dimension to this prose poem and read it as a reflection on crossing the threshold of the world of the academic and scholar into the world of artistic production. However, I shall only touch on this autobiographical dimension to the extent that I shall explore how Sebald makes use of another artist, Grünewald, in order to explore the way in which artists give their own face to their work and the way in which they borrow the faces of other artists as an acknowledgement of admiration and influence. Thus I shall focus on the poem's first part and show how Sebald reflects on Grünewald: the oeuvre, the artist, and the historical persona, but also art historical scholarship about Grünewald.

Fig. 1a. Matthias Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, First view (Crucifixion), c. 1512–15, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France.

Fig. 1b. Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, First view (Crucifixion), details.

Fig. 1b. Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, First view (Crucifixion), details.

Fig. 1b. Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, First view (Crucifixion), details.

Before approaching Sebald's meditations on Matthias Grünewald (c.1470-1528), a few remarks about the reception of Grünewald's work are in order. For the first three centuries after his death, this Renaissance artist did not attract much attention. But around 1900 the French writer Joris-Karl Huysmans made a passionate plea for the relevance and modernity of Grünewald. In his description of the altar at Isenheim, Huysmans called attention to Grünewald's shocking insistence on the physical details of Christ's suffering, alerting its beholder to the disgusting marks of torture and the signs of dying and decomposing flesh (figs. 1a and 1b). Such a Christ, Huysmans observed, is no longer the well-groomed, handsome man who has been venerated by the rich and powerful throughout the ages. Grünewald's Christ is rather the "God of the Poor. The one who chose the company of those in misery and of those who had been rejected, of all those for whose ugliness and need the world could only feel contempt."[3] And it was exactly this approach to pain and suffering highlighted by Huysmans that subsequently became a point of reference for many artists who invoked Grünewald's work, especially when they cited the triptych from the Isenheim altarpiece or *The Mockery of Christ* (fig. 2) from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. Otto Dix and Max Ernst in particular made specific reference to the altarpiece from Isenheim in their works depicting the suffering and destruction wrought by World War I and II (figs. 3a and 3b). Empathy with the suffering as well as the willingness to pay attention to all aspects of pain, decay, and death will also become an important concern for Sebald's poem, albeit, as we shall see, not through any direct focus on the depiction of the crucified but only in view of the other figures from Grünewald's work: the bystanders, witnesses, and patron saints.

Fig. 2. Grünewald, The Mockery of Christ, c. 1503–05, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Fig. 3a. Otto Dix, War, 1932, Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden.

Fig. 3b. Max Ernst, The Temptation of St. Anthony, 1945, Wilhelm-Lehmbruck-Museum, Duisburg, Germany.

Apart from the reception of Grünewald as the spokesman of the downtrodden and suffering creature, there were also diverse ideologically charged aspects of the uses of Grünewald and his work. Around the same time when he was being hailed by expressionist artists as a forerunner and primitive (figs. 4a and 4b), art critics intent on regarding the Expressionist movement as a particularly German form of aesthetic innovation forged the link between a Gothic, Nordic, Germanic Grünewald and contemporary art. Once national socialist ideology began to dominate art history in Germany, however, Grünewald was deemed too obsessed with the sick, excessive and degenerate. After World War II, Grünewald reception in the two Germanys differed considerably. Whereas in the East he was highly regarded for his realism, his expressivity, and his focus on suffering and pain, in the West it was the apocalyptic and fantastic aspects of his art that were especially appreciated.[4] In all of its conflicted and diverse aspects, the reception of Grünewald's work has continued to be interwoven with key aspects of German history.[5] As I will show, Sebald is acutely aware of this in his approach to

Grünewald, presupposing a familiarity both with Grünewald's work as well as with its artistic and scholarly reception.

Fig. 4a. Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, First view (Crucifixion), detail.

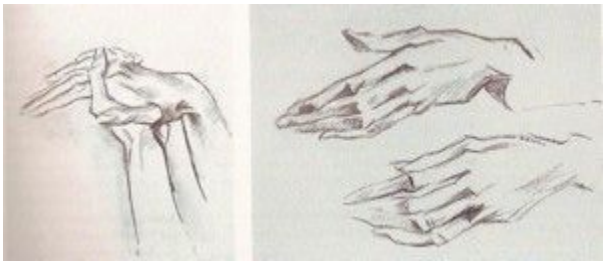


Fig. 4b. Heinrich Nauen, Zwei Studien zu den ineinandergelegten Händen and Zwei Studien zur linken Hand des Johannes, c. 1912, Kunstmuseum, Bonn.

Fig. 4b. Heinrich Nauen, Zwei Studien zu den ineinandergelegten Händen and Zwei Studien zur linken Hand des Johannes, c. 1912, Kunstmuseum, Bonn.

The scholarly and the artistic reception of Grünewald's work however play different roles in Sebald's poem. Whereas Sebald's poem addresses explicitly various aspects of the art historical scholarship on Grünewald, especially the debates about the biographical persona

of the painter, such as the question whether the hydraulic engineer Mathis Nithart and the master of the Isenheim altar Matthias Grünewald, were one and the same person, the productive reception of Grünewald's art by other artists, recruiting him into a wide spectrum of aesthetic, stylistic and political programs ranging from realism and naturalism to symbolism and surrealism, is not thematized in the poem. Instead, the poem engages directly in the productive reception of Grünewald by meditating on the identity of the painter from the position of a late twentieth-century observer. In fact, as we shall see, in doing so the poem re-writes or undoes the accepted art historical narrative and engages with the painter and his oeuvre in order to pursue questions about the relationship between artist and work of art and about the relationship between the work of art and history.

Mimetic Encounters across Time and Space

The poem opens with the following statement:

> Wer die Flügel des Altars
> der Pfarrkirche von Lindenhardt
> zumacht und die geschnitzten Figuren
> in ihrem Gehäuse verschließt,
> dem kommt auf der linken
> Tafel der hl. Georg entgegen. (7)
>
> —
>
> Whoever closes the wings
> of the altar in the Lindenhardt
> parish church and locks up
> the carved figures in their casing
> on the lefthand panel
> will be met by St. George.[6]

The first sentence doesn't just say what can be *seen* but rather what *happens* if one closes the altar's left shutter and encloses the carved figures in their housing. The opening sentence invites the reader of the poem to imagine herself in front of the altar of the parish church of Lindenhardt.

This approach treats the altarpiece stripped of its religious and devotional function and thus entirely like a work of art. There are two aspects of this work of art, two forms of presence that are highlighted in the opening sentence: By emphasizing the three dimensional nature of the altar that resembles the format of a bound volume, the fact that its wings need to be

closed and opened in order to be seen in its entirety, the poem begins with an emphasis on the unique physical object. The original work of art that needs to be visited in its own place is thus contrasted with the work of art in the imaginary museum of the art historically well-versed addressee, a memory that can be easily refreshed with the help of color illustrations in books or on the Internet (not in 1988, of course). Yet, while the poem draws attention to the concrete material object or vehicle of the work of art, in the same sentence it also draws attention to the imaginary aspect of the representational work of art. It is in the crossing of the threshold of representation that the encounter actually happens: the St. George that steps out of the painting to meet the beholder is not a series of lines on a flat surface (fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Grünewald, Lindenhardt Alterpiece, Left wing, closed (St. George), c. 1503, Pfarrkirche St. Michael, Lindenhardt, Germany.

At the beginning of this poem thus stands the model of an encounter between artwork and beholder. Moreover, and this will become the key theme for the entire first part of the poem, this encounter very quickly reveals itself to be one between the beholder of a work or art and its artist. For the poem reveals how the artist has lent his own physiognomy to some of the religious subjects in his paintings:

> Zuvorderst steht er am Bildrand
> eine Handbreit über der Welt,
> und wird gleich über die Schwelle
> des Rahmens treten. Georgius Miles,
> Mann mit eisernem Rumpf, erzen gerundeter
> Brust, rotgoldnem Haupthaar und silbernen
> weiblichen Zügen. Das Antlitz des unbekannten
> Grünewald taucht stets wieder auf
> in seinem Werk als das eines Zeugen
> des Schneewunders, eines Einsiedlers
> in der Wüste, eines Mitleidigen
> in der Münchner Verspottung. (7)
>
> —
>
> Foremost at the picture's edge he stands
> above the world by a hand's breadth
> and is about to step over the frame's
> threshold. Georgius Miles,
> man with the iron torso, rounded chest
> of ore, red-golden hair and silver
> feminine features. The face of the unknown
> Grünewald emerges again and again
> in his work as a witness
> to the snow miracle, a hermit
> in the desert, a commiserator
> in the Munich *Mocking of Christ.* (5)

As we have seen, St. George is not introduced as a painted representation of the Saint but as if it were the Saint in person, alive and active, just about to do something, just about to step out of the painting. This aesthetic transformation is somehow related to the artist's persona, his face and expression. Grünewald's practice of lending his face to select subjects

in his paintings was not one of inscribing himself into the religious, allegorical or historical significance of these subjects, rather it was a way for Grünewald to reflect on his own perspective. By extension, the poem marks artistic representation as a realist enterprise that works with a reference to a specific, identifiable referent (the face of the artist) but also one that is characterized by the artist's specific outlook towards the world, a set of specific observer positions (captured by the artist's ability to relate to suffering and misery, his ability to work like a hermit in utter isolation, and his ability to wonder at nature) (figs. 6a, 6b, and 6c).

Fig. 6a. Grünewald, Maria-Schnee-Altarpiece, Right wing, closed (The Snow-Miracle), detail, c. 1516–19, Augustinermuseum, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.

Fig. 6b. Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, Third view, left wing, detail.

Fig. 6c. Grünewald, The Mockery of Christ, detail.

Fig. 7. Grünewald, Self-portrait, c. 1512–16, Universitätsbibliothek, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany.

In order to support its claim that certain subjects from Grünewald's paintings have been given the painter's facial features the poem turns to a known self-portrait by Grünewald (fig. 7):

Zuletzt im Nachmittagsschimmer
der Erlanger Bibliothek scheint es hervor
aus einem mit weiß gehöhter Kreide angelegten,
später mit Feder und Tusche von fremder
Hand zerstörten Selbstbildnis eines vierzig bis
fünfzigjährigen Malers. Immer dieselbe
Sanftmut, dieselbe Bürde der Trübsal,
dieselbe Unregelmäßigkeit der Augen, verhängt
und versunken seitwärts ins Einsame hin. (7–8)

—

Last of all, in the afternoon light
in the Erlangen library, it shines forth
from a self-portrait, sketched out
in heightened white crayon, later destroyed
by an alien hand's pen and wash,
as that of a painter aged forty
to fifty. Always the same
gentleness, the same burden of grief,
the same irregularity of the eyes, veiled
and sliding sideways down into loneliness. (6)

Grünewald's face here has the status of the signified of the painting, the ideational object that the beholder of the self-portrait encounters as it emerges out of the material artifact compared to the way that St. George appears to step over the picture frame. The second sentence is elliptical; it is missing a verb. Pragmatically it can be described as a deictic gesture. The modifier "always the same" (*immer dieselbe*) implies the speaker's own position and affective disposition in relation to the comparison between the various Grünewald portraits. Like the first sentence of the poem, this sentence also invokes an encounter between an artwork and a beholder: in this case between Grünewald's self-portrait in the University library of Erlangen and not the unspecified "whoever" of the opening sentence but a particular person. For without using the first person singular, the deictic gesture of the "last of all" (*zuletzt*) is relative to the agency speaking or writing the sentence that describes this encounter. In addition, by mentioning the quality of the light, the sentence provides an atmospheric detail that invokes an embodied presence. By making the speaker or writer of the poem into a witness, into somebody who was physically present at a specific time and place, the poem authenticates its observation about Grünewald's representational practice.

Besides this reference to the observer of the drawing as the embodied speaker of the poem, the sentence invokes another, altogether different referential dimension. The second temporal adverb used in the subordinate clause, the "later" (*später*) in the form of the comparative invokes a different temporal axis. It shifts from the preceding "last of all" with its reference to the life of the speaker of the poem to the life of the drawing, its initial fabrication by the artist followed by its later defacement by an unknown hand. But the poem does not rest with these two distinct temporalities. The sentence that immediately follows leaves the reference relative to specific time lines in favor of an a-temporal presence of an "always the same" of a face expressing a gentle, melancholic disposition, lonely and burdened with sadness. Like in the initial encounter with St. George, here too it appears that the encounter takes place in the imagination of the beholder, in this case of the beholder who is writing the poem and identifying with Grünewald's face, finding in the facial expression of the admired artist support for his own psychic disposition. In other words, the reader of this poem is presented with a glimpse of a speaker/author by way of this network of identifications and might wonder whether the St. George who initially comes out of the frame to meet the beholder also shares the appearance and disposition of the Georg hiding behind the initials W.G. Sebald.

This is not the place to pursue the question as to how much of Sebald's own life experience has been embedded in his literary writings. It would be a mistake to read in the opening sections of *After Nature* a license for biographical criticism. It is more productive to recognize the programmatic aspect implied by this restoration of an authorial presence behind the work of art and to relate this gesture to the debates in literary criticism and literary theory from the 1970's and 80's. For the post-structuralist debates, especially, the now almost canonical reactions to what Roland Barthes's famous essay called the "death of the author," to which Foucault's "What Is an Author?" but also Said's "The World, the Text, the Critic" responded, are not to be reduced to the issue of biographical criticism. At stake in those debates were the more fundamental issues about the referential dimension of a work of art and the nature of truth claims of art and criticism. Seen in this context, Sebald's poem, which models the art work on the corpus of a famous painter as it then engages with questions of authorship appears to go back to pre-structuralist positions to the extent that it seemingly privileges, on the one hand, the unique concrete work and the original with its own life, and, on the other hand, the beholder's encounter with the personalized perspective of the artist or author. And yet this first impression fails to capture it all, for apart from the emphasis on the work's unique status as an original, which produces a certain re-auratization of the art work, there is also a strong emphasis on the referential dimension of a verbal or painted picture and the artwork's unique relationship to history.

In fact, the initial introduction of the artwork qua individual work and an artist's life-time oeuvre is quickly checked by an analysis of the artwork qua complex text, operating with a set of codes and presenting itself as a site of inter-textual references. As such the artwork is a constantly changing set of references, open both to the past and the future for powerful actualizations and misappropriations. The artwork as a site of intertextuality is especially foregrounded in the poem's meditations on the artwork's relationship to history, both, in terms of its own reception through history, including the ideological uses to which it is put, and in terms of its potential for a critique of history. What seems especially important to me in Sebald's insistence on both aspects—the inter-textual set of references as well as the reference to a concrete material reality of specific historical events—is that he does not keep the two separate and distinct from one another but tends to bring them into intimate proximity: the fate of a set of ideas and inter-textual relations, on the one hand, and the fate of the material object, the concrete vehicle of the artwork, on the other.

Critiques and Alternatives to History: A Realist Program After Nature

Apart from referencing Grünewald's self-portrait, the poem also cites the key scholarly source of the physiognomic approach to art history that informs the central focus for its approach to this artist:

> Auch kehrt Grünewalds Gesicht wieder
> in einem Basler Bild des jüngeren
> Holbein, das eine gekrönte Heilige zeigt.
> Es seien dies merkwürdig verstellte
> Fälle von Ähnlichkeiten, schrieb Fraenger,
> dessen Bücher die Faschisten verbrannten.
> Ja, es scheine, als hätten im Kunstwerk
> die Männer einander verehrt wie Brüder,
> einander dort oft ein Denkmal gesetzt,
> wo ihre Wege sich kreuzten. (8)
>
> —
>
> Grünewald's face reappears, too,
> in a Basel painting by Holbein
> the Younger of a crowned female saint.
> These were strangely disguised
> instances of resemblance, wrote Fraenger
> whose books were burned by the fascists.

> Indeed it seemed as though in such works of art
> men had revered each other like brothers, and
> often made monuments in each other's
> image where their paths had crossed. (6)

As the poem introduces the issue of how artists acknowledge each other, it turns to the famous historian of Renaissance art, Wilhelm Fraenger. In his *Matthias Grünewald in seinen Werken: Ein physiognomischer Versuch* from 1936, Fraenger traces the network of Grünewald self-portraits and portraits in order to elucidate the life and work of this artist about whom we have only very scant biographical information.[7] Apart from his scholarly achievements, Fraenger has been praised for his uniquely rhythmical prose style, which this particular section of Sebald's poem imitates.[8] With this mimeticism of Fraenger, the poem practices the same kind of artistic homage it attributes to Holbein or Grünewald.

Fig. 8. Grünewald, Lindenhardt Alterpiece,
Right wing, closed (St. Dionysus), c. 1503.

The reader might pause at the passage quoted above and wonder how there could be mutual admiration ("*einander verehrt*") and love between artists who lived in such disparate historical times? How is it possible for their paths ever to have crossed? And yet this is exactly what the poem proceeds to argue in the lines immediately following. Indeed, what follows could be characterized as the mis-en-scène of this crossing of paths as a complex scene of recognition, a sharing of glances and lending of faces (fig. 8):

auch in der Mitte des rechten Flügels
des Lindenhardter Altars in Besorgnis
den Blick auf den Jüngling auf der anderen
Seite gerichtet jener ältere Mann, dem ich selber
vor Jahren einmal an einem Januarmorgen
auf dem Bamberger Bahnhof begegnet bin.
Es ist der heilige Dionysus,
das abgeschlagene Haupt unterm Arm.
Ihm, seinem erwählten Protektor,
der inmitten des Lebens seinen Tod
mit sich führt, gibt Grünewald das Ansehen
Riemenschneiders, dem der Würzburger Bischof
zwanzig Jahre darauf auf der Folter
die Hände zerbrechen ließ. Lang vor der Zeit
geht der Schmerz bereits ein in die Bilder. (8)

—

Hence too, at the centre of
the Lindenhardt altar's right wing,
that troubled gaze upon the youth
on the other side of the older man
whom, years ago now, on a grey
January morning I myself once
encountered in the railway station
in Bamberg. It is St. Dionysius,
his cut-off head under one arm.
To him, his chosen guardian
who in the midst of life carries

his death with him, Grünewald gives
the appearance of Riemenschneider, whom
twenty years later the Würzburg bishop
condemned to the breaking of his hands
in the torture cell. Long before that time
pain had entered into the pictures. (6–7)

The speaker of the poem claims that the young man in Grünewald's painting is the same man that he had met at the railway station in Bamberg years ago on a January morning. How, one might wonder, is he able to claim that he met a figure from a painting more than four hundred years old? Surely, he can mean that only in terms of the similarity of the look, that worried concern of an older man for a younger man. But no, he claims that he actually met St. Dionysus, Grünewald's patron saint and protector to whom Grünewald had given the face of a much admired and beloved older artist colleague, the sculptor Riemenschneider. And why did Grünewald give Riemenschneider's face to St. Dionysus? The personal union between the saint and the sculptor, according to the poem, lies in their relationship to suffering and death. Dionysus was beheaded and is traditionally represented as carrying his head both on his shoulders and under his arm. This iconographic convention of identifying martyrs by their specific martyrdom is then transferred to Riemenschneider, who thus also becomes a martyr when we are told that works of art are distinguished by an anticipatory relationship to the infliction of pain and moreover, that art's extreme sensitivity to suffering has the power to unite artists across the ages.

Though the poem does not claim that art can predict the future, it nevertheless attributes to art an ability to register pain long before it is inflicted. And yet, the reader might ask how the painter Grünewald should have known that Riemenschneider was to be tortured on behalf of the bishop of Bamberg. What does this mean? As if anticipating exactly that question the poem continues:

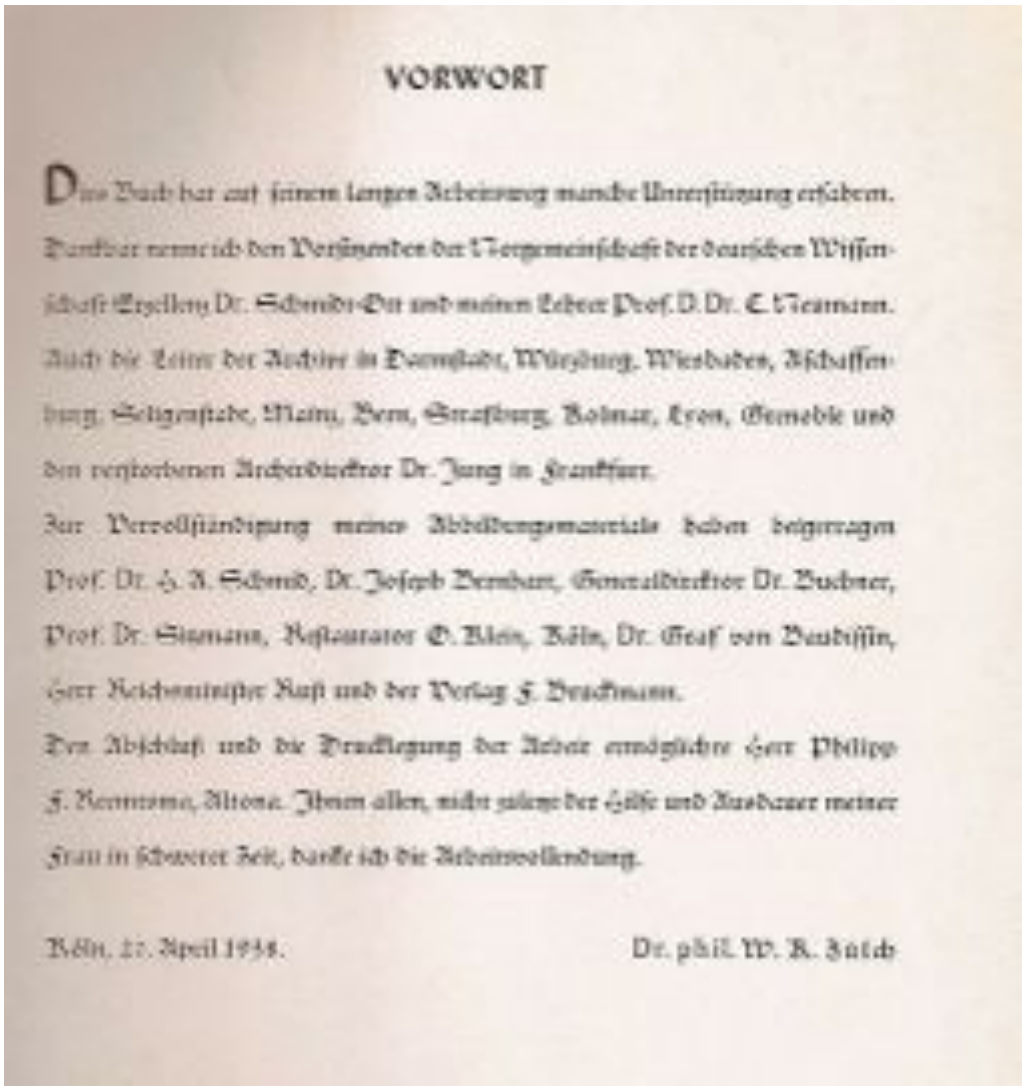
Das ist die Vorschrift, weiß der Maler,
der sich einreiht auf dem Altar
in die viel zu geringe Genossenschaft
der vierzehn Nothelfer. (8)

—

> That is the command, knows the painter
> who on the altar aligns himself
> with the scant company of the
> fourteen auxiliary saints. (7)

The rule or command (*Vorschrift*) that the painter knows is the one just mentioned, namely that pain enters into paintings long before it is actually inflicted. And the fact that the painter lends his own face to St. George means that Grünewald, according to Sebald, makes himself into a figure that carries his death already with him during his life. Sainthood is not defined by a particularly virtuous and religious life and by the ability to perform miracles but rather by a relationship to pain and suffering and to one's own death: indeed, in the penultimate and final sections of the Grünewald part, the poem returns to this claim by showing the mimetic resemblance between both Grünewald's reaction to the slaughter during the peasant wars in 1525 and by depicting his own death as a form of blindness.

Whereas Sebald's approach to Fraenger could be characterized as homage, as an admiring, identificatory, at times mimetic approach, this attitude is far from universal. On the contrary, Sebald also calls for a critical use of one's sources. This becomes clear in the contrast between the poem's attitude towards Grünewald's first biographer, the baroque scholar and artist Joachim von Sandrart, on the one hand, and its stance towards Fraenger's contemporary, the art historian Walter Karl Zülch, on the other. Whereas the poet's love for the baroque scholar is expressed in the mimicry of Sandrart's language, his lexical choices, even his spelling, those features of Zülch's work are not imitated but analyzed and criticized. As we learn, the preface to Zülch's biographical study of Grünewald is dated April 20, 1938, indicating that the book appeared on Hitler's birthday. And, as the poem goes on to suggest, the choice of font likewise reflects the author's pandering to Nazi sensibilities (fig. 9).



VORWORT

Dieses Buch hat auf seinem langen Arbeitsweg manche Unterstützung erfahren. Dankbar nenne ich den Vorsitzenden der Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft Exzellenz Dr. Schmidt-Ott und meinen Lehrer Prof. D. Dr. E. Neumann. Auch die Leiter der Archive in Darmstadt, Würzburg, Wiesbaden, Aschaffenburg, Seligenstadt, Mainz, Bern, Straßburg, Colmar, Lyon, Grenoble und den verstorbenen Archivdirektor Dr. Jung in Frankfurt.

Zur Vervollständigung meines Abbildungsmaterials haben beigetragen Prof. Dr. A. A. Schmid, Dr. Joseph Bernhart, Generaldirektor Dr. Buchner, Prof. Dr. Stegmann, Restaurator E. Klein, Köln, Dr. Graf von Baudissin, Herr Reichsminister Rust und der Verlag F. Bruckmann.

Den Abschluß und die Drucklegung der Arbeit ermöglichte Herr Philipp J. Reemtsma, Altona. Ihnen allen, nicht zuletzt der Hilfe und Ausdauer meiner Frau in schwerer Zeit, danke ich die Arbeitsvollendung.

Köln, 22. April 1938. Dr. phil. W. K. Zülch

Fig. 9. Acknowledgements page in Walter Karl Zülch's Der historische Grünewald: Mathis Gothardt-Neithardt (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1938).

Although most Grünewald scholars have come to accept the biographical identity of the painter known as Matthias Grünewald with the draftsman, painter and hydraulic engineer known as Mathis Nithart, Sebald's poem argues that Nithart and Matthias Grünewald were not the same person but loving, most intimate friends and collaborators instead:

> Und in der Tat geht die Figur des Mathis Nithart
> in den Dokumenten der Zeit in einem Maß
> in die Grünewalds über, daß man meint,
> der eine habe wirklich das Leben
> und zuletzt gar den Tod

des anderen ausgemacht.
Eine Röntgenaufnahme der Sebastianstafel
bringt hinter dem elegischen Portrait
des Heiligen nochmals dasselbe Gesicht
zum Vorschein, das Halbprofil
in der endgültigen Übermalung nur
um ein winziges weiter gewendet.
Hier haben zwei Maler in einem Körper,
dessen verletztes Fleisch ihnen beiden gehörte,
ihre Natur ausstudiert. Zuerst hat Nithart
aus dem Spiegel sein eignes Bildnis
gefertigt, und Grünewald hat es dann
mit großer Liebe, Genauigkeit und Geduld
und einem bis in die blauen Bartschatten
hineingehenden Interesse an der Haut
und am Haar seines Genossen übermalt. (17)

—

And indeed the person of Mathis Nithart
in documents of the time so flows into
the person of Grünewald that one
seems to have been the life,
then the death, too, of the other.
An X-ray photograph of the Sebastian panel
reveals beneath the elegiac
portrait of the saint
that same face again, the half-
profile only turned a tiny bit further
in the definitive overpainting.
Here two painters in one body
whose hurt flesh belonged to both
to the end pursued the study
of their own nature. At first
Nithart fashioned his self-portrait
from a mirror image, and Grünewald
with great love, precision and patience

and an interest in the skin
and hair of his companion extending
to the blue shadow of the beard
then overpainted it. (18–19)

Art historians have discovered that the face of St. Sebastian (fig. 10) is in fact painted on top of another, identical face, turned just slightly less to the side. There has been some debate among Grünewald scholars as to whether or not the face of St. Sebastian is also a Grünewald self-portrait or whether it might be a portrait of a younger student of his.[9] Sebald's poem presents another thesis altogether: the first portrait was a self-portrait produced by Nithart as he was looking into the mirror, thus accounting for the slight turn of the head. Grünewald then supposedly took his friend's portrait and adjusted the angle slightly to produce the final image of St. Sebastian. The result of painting over that original portrait thus appears as the document of a loving, erotic union between the two men. Saint Sebastian's martyrdom becomes "the representation of a male friendship, horrified and loyal, still palpable at the ridges of the wounds." Nithart's death and will, which in art historical scholarship has been used as an important document confirming the identity of the two men, is also reinterpreted: Nithart became the public face for the shy Grünewald, but the two men did not die the same death. Nithart died in Frankfurt in 1528, the same year as Grünewald. By recounting Nithart's and Grünewald's deaths separately, however, the poem reinforces the impression that we are dealing with two distinct biographical identities.

Fig. 10. Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, First view, left wing (St. Sebastian), detail.

If this poem offers alternative accounts of Grünewald's biographical identity, it does so not in the service of providing a better or more comprehensive narrative of Grünewald's life. Indeed, it is important to stress that throughout the Grünewald section there are only very few linear narratives. Even the section that mentions Grünewald's marriage to the young Jewish girl from the Ghetto, her conversion to Christianity and her institutionalization in a lunatic asylum, in the context of the speculation that she might have become so insufferably unhappy and belligerent because her husband had not paid enough attention to her, is much less a narrative than a citation of narratives that holds epic practice in abeyance, at a critical, ironic, ambivalent distance. This is how the third section commences, evoking the "epic sound" through its repeated use of hexameter:

> Lang ist bekanntlich die Tradition
> der Verfolgung der Juden, auch
> in der Stadt Frankfurt am Main.
> Um 1240 sollen 173 von ihnen

theils erschlagen worden, theils
eines freiwilligen Todes in den Flammen
gestorben sein. Im Jahr 1349
machten die Geiselbrüder ein großes
Massaker im Judenquartier. Wieder
besagen die Berichte, daß die Juden
sich selber verbrannt hätten
und es nach der Feuersbrunst
möglich gewesen sei, vom Domhügel
bis nach Sachsenhausen zu sehen. (12)

—

We know there is a long tradition
of persecuting the Jews, in the City
of Frankfurt as in other places.
Around 1240, the records tell us,
173 were either slaughtered
or died of their own free will
in a conflagration. In 1349
the Flagellant Brothers instituted
a great massacre in the Jewish quarter.
Again, the chronicles tell that the Jews
burned themselves and that
after the fire there was a clear view from
the Cathedral Hill over to Sachsenhausen. (12)

By introducing the history of anti-Semitic pogroms as if this were something of a long, heroic tradition, the three laconic sentences call our attention to the complicity of the reports with the actual pogroms. They achieve this by "quoting" the partial denial of the murder through the assertion that some Jews had voluntarily chosen to be burned to death, then by calling the reader's attention to the repetitive nature of that absurd claim, which makes the denial of the extent of the violence part of its long tradition. While the poem attends to both, the history of violence as well as its reporting, it also marks its own distance towards these representational practices.

The style, tone, and manner of representing historical events is itself part of history and bears historical responsibility. Realist art, to the extent that it engages with historical events, shares this responsibility in terms of how it depicts violence, pain, and suffering. It may do so by adopting a critical approach to historical sources, but also by bringing out the contingency of historical events and by imagining how it might have been otherwise. Art's critical stance towards history, as developed in the opening sections of Sebald's poem, can be summarized as follows: the artwork is bound up with history, it doesn't stand outside or above it, but it must not be defined by it or reduced to one narrow historical context. The artwork can transcend its own historical horizon in the manner in which it participates in, cites, and engages with other works of art and thus forms a network of intertextual relations open to the past and the future.

This characterization of art's critical potential, however, would be insufficient without commenting on the phrase "after nature" (*nach der Natur*), which both serves as the title of Sebald's poem and is used in some key phrases. When we use the phrase to paint after nature (*nach der Natur*), we generally mean it in opposition to the "imitation of art". This is also true of Sebald's use of the phrase, but his inflection can be further specified: it does not only mean a realist or naturalist bent in opposition to an idealizing bent, but it also means a certain devotion to nature and an understanding of the artistic, creative process as part of nature. This latter aspect if explored in much greater detail in the section on the explorer and naturalist Steller. In the Grünewald section it is used to characterize the painter's representational style as a realist enterprise devoid of both religious promises as well as utopian political aspirations. The poem introduces the phrase in the context of Grünewald's depiction of the apocalyptic landscape from the Basel crucifixion and asserts that that scene is painted "from nature" (in German: "*nach der Natur*"), meaning that it is based on a perfectly natural experience, the painter's view of the solar eclipse of 1502.

The poem's affirmation of realist aesthetics is further elaborated vis-à-vis Grünewald's critique of chiliastic hopes and religiously inspired apocalyptic visions, in the passages dealing with Thomas Müntzer and the peasant rebellion of 1525. This pessimistic and at the same time critical stance toward history is, of course, familiar to us from Sebald's other works. What I wish to stress here, however, is how this text also affirms the artist's loving devotion to realist detail, the depiction of highly individualized subjects as a loving re-investment in the world. This means that the artist must not be entirely consumed by the depiction of violence, suffering, and destruction, but can also preserve the ability to realize beauty in nature. As if to make a point that Grünewald's deeply empathetic response to learning about the peasant massacre, which consisted in blindfolding and secluding himself, must not be the artist's last gesture, that he cannot just stop painting and enter a world of self-imposed

darkness and depression, the poem includes a short narrative about the painter's ride through a landscape with his only child, whom he has begun to teach. This last landscape description in the Grünewald section is entirely devoid of any metaphysical overtones or allegorical interpretation and it is also the only real landscape rather than painted landscape that this part of the poem actually describes. It appears that in spite of all of the previous despair, here the purely aesthetic, momentary experience of a beautiful nature, the play of the light and shadow in the branches as father and child ride through the early autumnal afternoon is possible. Here, after all of the monstrosity and suffering, this brief, in itself insignificant enjoyment of a beautiful nature seems like a gesture of defiance.

And yet, the poem *After Nature* also insists that the view into the landscape is not to be mistaken as an escape into an idyll. For this scenario, the view of a landscape following the description of utter destruction and violence recurs in the poem repeatedly beginning with the view into the landscape from the cathedral hill to Sachsenhausen that concludes the passage about the pogroms in Frankfurt, Grünewald's seemingly otherworldly landscapes, such as the crucifixion at Basel or the snow miracle, the poem's description of Grünewald's ride through an idyllic landscape after the massacre of the peasants, Steller's encounter with the wild beauty of the Pacific Northwest after the ravaging scurvy and destruction on board his ship. This series of juxtaposed scenes of destruction and violence followed by views of a beautiful nature culminates in the poem's concluding image, which describes the poet's dream of flying across the channel and Germany to Munich at night in order to visit a painting. The point is simple: the experience of the beautiful landscape is not an alternative to dealing with the reality of war, violence, and suffering, but is embedded in the bigger picture. Art, in short, records beauty along with violence and destruction. Finally, art, according to Sebald, both the artist and the physical object of art, the printed page, the drawing or the altarpiece, are all utterly historical and datable. In that aspect art has the position and function of a witness. But it can also transcend any one specific historical context through the complex web of inter-textual borrowings and loans, homages, appropriations, and misappropriations. And it is in that sense art can and must transcend history.

NOTES

1. The most notable exception is an article by Claudia Albes, which reads Sebald's poem in line with Paul de Man's influential essay on "Autobiography as De-Facement" [*Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979), no. 5, pp. 919-930], a text which Sebald, as a literary scholar, must have known, but—as I would argue—would have been more likely to critique than to confirm and repeat in his own literary production. See Claudia Albes, "Portrait ohne Modell: Bildbeschreibung und autobiographische Reflexion in W.G. Sebalds 'Elementargedicht' *Nach der Natur*," in *W.G. Sebald: Politische Archäologie und melancholische Bastelei*, ed. Michael Niehaus and Claudia Öhlschläger (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2006), pp. 47-75. Quotations from the German original of Sebald's poem are cited parenthetically from, W.G. Sebald, *Nach der Natur: Ein Elementargedicht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995).

2. For a detailed analysis of the last part, in particular its reflections on the relationship between autobiography and art, as elaborated through its references to two paintings by Albrecht Altdorfer, see my "Autorschaft und Autobiographie: Bild und Gedächtnis in W.G. Sebalds *Nach der Natur*," in *Automedialität: Subjektkonstitution in Schrift, Bild und neuen Medien*, ed. Jörg Dünne and Christian Moser (Munich: Fink, 2007), pp. 145-160.

3. Quoted by Katharina Heinemann, "Entdeckung und Vereinnahmung: Zur Grünewald-Rezeption in Deutschland bis 1945," in *Grünewald in der Moderne: Die Rezeption Matthias Grünewalds im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Brigitte Schad and Thomas Ratzka (Cologne: Wienand, 2003), p. 9 (my translation).

4. For an account of the post-WW2 reception of Grünewald in the German-speaking world, see Brigitte Schad, "Heilige, Dämonen und Kreuzestod: Positionen nach 1945 in Westdeutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz," in *Grünewald in der Moderne*, pp. 18-31.

5. In my discussion of the reception of Grünewald's work I have relied on Brigitte Schad and Thomas Ratzka (ed.), *Grünewald in der Moderne. Die Rezeption Matthias Grünewalds im 20 Jahrhundert.* (n.p.n.d. Wienand). This study pays particularly close attention to Grünewald reception by other artists, mainly visual artists but not exclusively so, see, for instance, it's attention to Huysmans. More recently, Keith Moxey has also provided a survey of the Grünewald reception in contrast with the Dürer reception in twentieth-century art history. Keith Moxey's article foregrounds the extend to which art historical discourse on those two artists tends to swing between an emphasis on historical distance and "presentist" appropriations of the art work. He ends his article by wondering about the extent to which art historical studies need to take a position towards the past which is decisively different from other historical studies. It seems to me that the answer to this question depends entirely on the extent to which art historical studies make a difference between the work of art and any other historical document. The same would, of course, also apply to the history of literature, of music or any other art form. What this difference might consist of, as well as the historicity of constructing this difference, Moxey's article does not address in great detail. See Keith Moxey, "Impossible Distance: Past and Present in the Study of Dürer and Grünewald," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (Dec. 2004), pp. 750-763.

6. W.G. Sebald, *After Nature*, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 5. Subsequent page references appear parenthetically in the text.

7. Indeed in 1983 the Munich publishing house Beck published a wonderful collection of Fraenger lectures and publications on Grünewald together with an illuminating afterword that provides an overview of Fraenger's accomplishments and more recent Grünewald scholarship on the issue of the biographical identity of Grünewald and Nithart: *Matthias Grünewald von Wilhelm Fraenger*, ed. Gustel Fraenger and Ingeborg Baier-Fraenger (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1983).

8. The Fraenger passage that Sebald might have used for his assertion reads: "Es kehren also auf dem Holbeinschen Johanneskopf gerade jene Züge noch betonter wieder, die schon den heiligen Sebastian so augenfällig von dem angeblichen Jugendbildnis Joachim von Sandrarts unterschieden hatten, weshalb sich dieses sanftmütige Jünglingsantlitz in dessen auftrumpfendem Eigensinn und herbem Trotz erst recht nicht mehr zurückverknüpften läßt. Dieser höchst merkwürdige Fall von Ähnlichkeit wurde von Hubert Schrade 1925 zu unserer Bildnisfrage beigesteuert." Sebald's poem imitates the sentence rhythm and suggests the same similarities of faces. However, in contrast to the Fraenger text, the poem omits the subsequent two sentences, in which Fraenger states the sheer chronological impossibility that Hans Holbein might have ever seen the young Grünewald: "Doch muß er dabei leider selbst gestehen, dass mit dem Funde gar nichts anzufangen sei. Denn es ist chronologisch schlechthin ausgeschlossen, daß Holbein je den jugendlichen Grünewald gesehen hat." See *Matthias Grünewald von Wilhelm Fraenger*, p. 163.

9. See Fraenger, pp. 166–167.

Dorothea von Mücke is Professor of Germanic Studies at Columbia University. Her books include *Virtue and the Veil of Illusion: Generic Innovation and the Pedagogical Project in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Stanford U.P., 1991); with Veronica Kelly, *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford U.P., 1994); and *The Seduction of the Occult and the Rise of the Fantastic Tale* (Stanford, 2003).

MATISSE AND PICASSO:
THE REDEMPTION AND THE FALL

ERIC MICHAUD

We should give ourselves up to the lies of art to deliver ourselves from the lies of myth: it is by this very paradoxical and singular way of absorption into the framework of one of the "great works" of the Occident that Picasso belongs to myth. For if it is true that he always sought to combat myth, making him even more dependent on it, he only succeeded by turning myth's own arms onto itself—that is, the "lie."

The declaration he made to Marius de Zayas in 1923 is generally well known:

> We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies. [1]

But his ideas confided twelve years later to Christian Zervos are less remembered:

> We have attached ourselves to myths instead of feeling what motivated the men who painted them. There should be an absolute dictatorship…a dictatorship of painters…the dictatorship of one painter to suppress all those who tricked us, to

> suppress the cheaters, to suppress the objects of trickery, to suppress customs, to suppress charms, to suppress history, to suppress a heap of still more things. [2]

Upon closer reading, these concepts would suggest that in Picasso's eyes there existed two distinct kinds of lie, or two opposing types of lies. First, the lies that only trick, which would be nothing but surface and opacity, whereas the others would give access to the truth—a truth assuredly terrible, since it would be without attractiveness and having escaped from history.

Two famous works exemplify well these two notions of the lie—two works which themselves became mythic while clearly their constructions are each at the two poles that would magnetize the pictorial space of the twentieth century, as they establish themselves on the same elementary spatial structure that for a long time could not be distinguished from the function that our culture assigns to them. Undoubtedly Matisse's *Le Bonheur de vivre* and Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* first became mythic through their exemplary ability to embody two versions ordinarily difficult to reconcile with the power of art.

Figure 1. Henri Matisse, Le Bonheur de vivre, 1905-06 (Barnes Foundation, Merion, PA)

Matisse painted *Le Bonheur* in 1905–1906 (fig. 1). This painting of significant size was rather poorly received by the critics in the spring of 1906 upon its installation at the Salon des Indépendants: it was too abstract, too synthetic, too theoretical. "Emptiness" was a word that often appeared under the critic's pen—a symptom of the pain the painting incites, while its title announces the opposite: is *Bonheur* not read as what Baudelaire read in Stendhal, that "beauty is a promise of happiness"? Louis Vauxcelles was one of those who warned Matisse: "There must be no confusion between simplification and insufficiency, design and emptiness," he wrote, underlining here that even if the public seems ready to accept the structure of the image revealed by the schematic reduction, he cannot prevent the feeling of anxiety, a disagreeable feeling of "emptiness" produced by such a simplification.

Despite these proposed criticisms, Louis Vauxcelles did make an eloquent and actually praising description of the painting:

> In lounging attitudes, creatures with lovely hips, dream: one, standing, stirs, crosses her hands behind her head; others play Pan's flute; at the right, a slender girl throws her arms behind her, encircling her lover's head like a necklace, in a fresh embrace…at the center of the composition, a wild round. There are great qualities here: the masses rhythmically balance themselves, the green of the trees, the blue of the ocean, the pink of the bodies, immediately enveloped in the halo of complementary violet, in a harmony and marriage, produces a painting that emanates a sensation of refreshing joy. [3]

Rhythmically balanced, harmony, marriage, refreshing joy: these are still the terms that resonate today and are commonly associated with the merest evocation of the painting, while we are no longer fearful of the "void" that still pained his contemporaries, conferring on the work an ambivalence which at present it seems to lack. With time, Matisse would win his wager to revive the myth, to find the forms and the colors capable of gently immersing the spectator into the Eden-like world of the canvas, a bit as Baudelaire, whom he so admired, had found through his words in his poem *Invitation au voyage*—words capable of bringing us to "there where there is but order and beauty, / Luxury, calm and voluptuousness."

All of this is well known. And we also know that Matisse, two years later, sought to theorize and formalize this function that he attributed not only to all of painting, at the very least to his own: to tear the viewer from violence, chaos, and the perversion of reality to transport him to a utopia of a perfectly harmonious world, in which the painting serves as this miraculous passage. Or perhaps even better yet: in which his painting acts as an initiating outlet, permitting the viewer to reconnect with a primitive state of innocence and the plenitude that

we have since lost. This is an old romantic theme: thanks to art, paradise is not lost; it is not only behind us, as Heinrich von Kleist claimed, but it is also in facing us, as long as we know to taste once more the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And Saint-Simon would soon after add that one must "displace terrestrial paradise and transport it from the past to the future," and that the artists, at the forefront of society, need to present an attractive image, which would precipitate this realization.

But a century later, Matisse, who had first named his painting *Arcadie*, wanted for himself a painting that would bring the viewer not only to the promise of Paradise, but also a fragment of Paradise, *here and now*. One must recall the phrases published in 1908 in *La Grande revue* under the title of "Notes of a painter," where he exposed his major ambition: "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter—a soothing, calming influence on the mind, rather like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue."[4] Remarks he seems to have literally illustrated in this much later work, *Le Fauteuil rocaille*(fig. 2)—the entire work is made up by the armchair, which extends towards the viewer with its open arms to better invite him to tranquility.

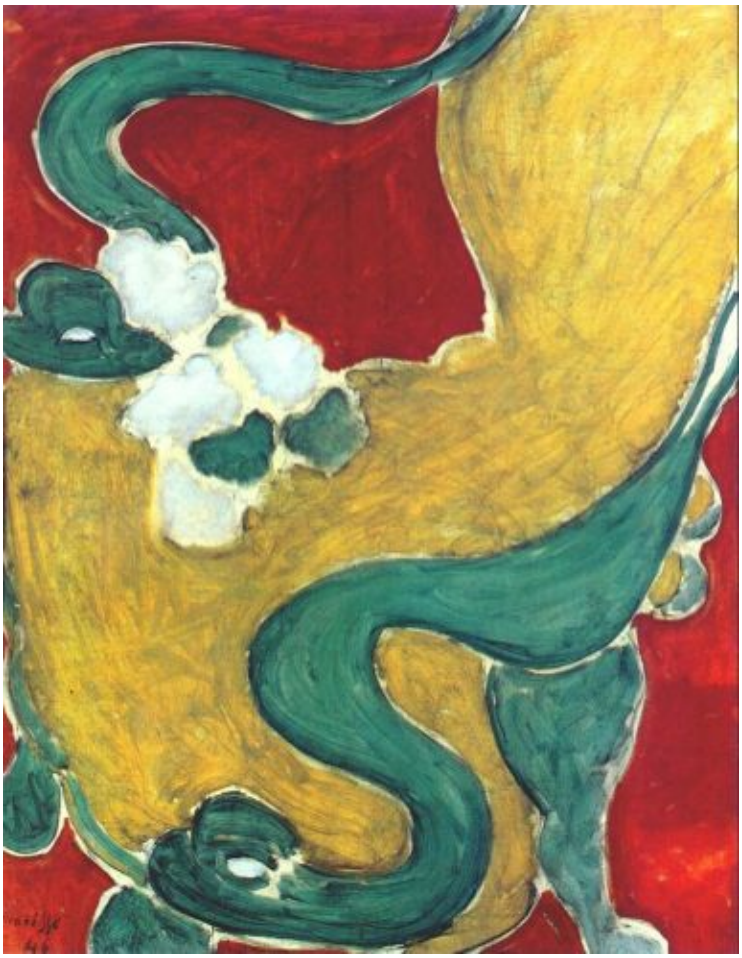


Figure 2. Henri Matisse, The Rocaille Armchair, 1946 (Musee Matisse, Nice)

It goes without saying that Matisse would pursue this unique dream for the rest of his life: it would be undoubtedly his biggest and primary obsession, up until the end. Then, in 1929, he confided to Florent Fels that "a picture [*tableau*] must be tranquil on the wall. It must not introduce an element of trouble and anxiety into the spectator's home, but direct him peacefully into a physical state such that he doesn't feel the need to divide or leave himself. A picture [*tableau*] must produce a deep satisfaction, the most pure repose and pleasure of the spirit fulfilled."

Twenty years later, in 1949, he declared to an American journalist: "Anxiety? It is no worse today than it was for the Romantics. One must dominate all that. One must be calm; and art should not be worrying or disturbing—it should be balanced, pure, tranquil, restful."[5] And then to Gaston Diehl again, shortly before his death: "I chose to stay in the presence of my torments and worries in order to record only the world's beauty and the joy of life."

Where this position is at once the aesthetic and moral one Matisse sought, its symmetrical inverse is the one adopted by Picasso. Françoise Gilot had understood this so well that one day while arguing about *Fauteuil rocaille* with Picasso, who compared the painting to an oyster, she retorted: "While Matisse opens up, you close in."[6] Matisse was without a doubt one of the rare artists of his century to hold and to strongly lay claim to this aesthetic and moral position—for which he would pay dearly since he often suffered under the title of a good bourgeois painter, ignorant of history and human tragedy.

It is not an image of a good-hearted bourgeois that is offered to the viewer in *Le Bonheur de vivre*, but rather a road that initiates and guides towards utopia through a fragment of terrestrial paradise. And this road consists precisely through a schematic reduction which Louis Vauxcelles criticized: in a remarkable simplification of colors, the elementary spatial structure presents itself as an opening—vaguely triangular in shape—to protective vegetation, under which the nudes abandon themselves. This very simple structure evokes first a glimmering curtain, opening onto a scene where, in the most profound serenity, it unfolds, in infinite slow motion, a vision of nudes that have rediscovered purity—while in the background the circle symbolizes perfect social harmony. This paradise is therefore a theater: the curtain exercises its spellbinding charms to attract and include the viewer into the welcoming concavity which protects the Eden-like space, with its warm colors and sensual figures. At once an opening and a passage, this curtain draws and creates, literally, a setting for the utopia.

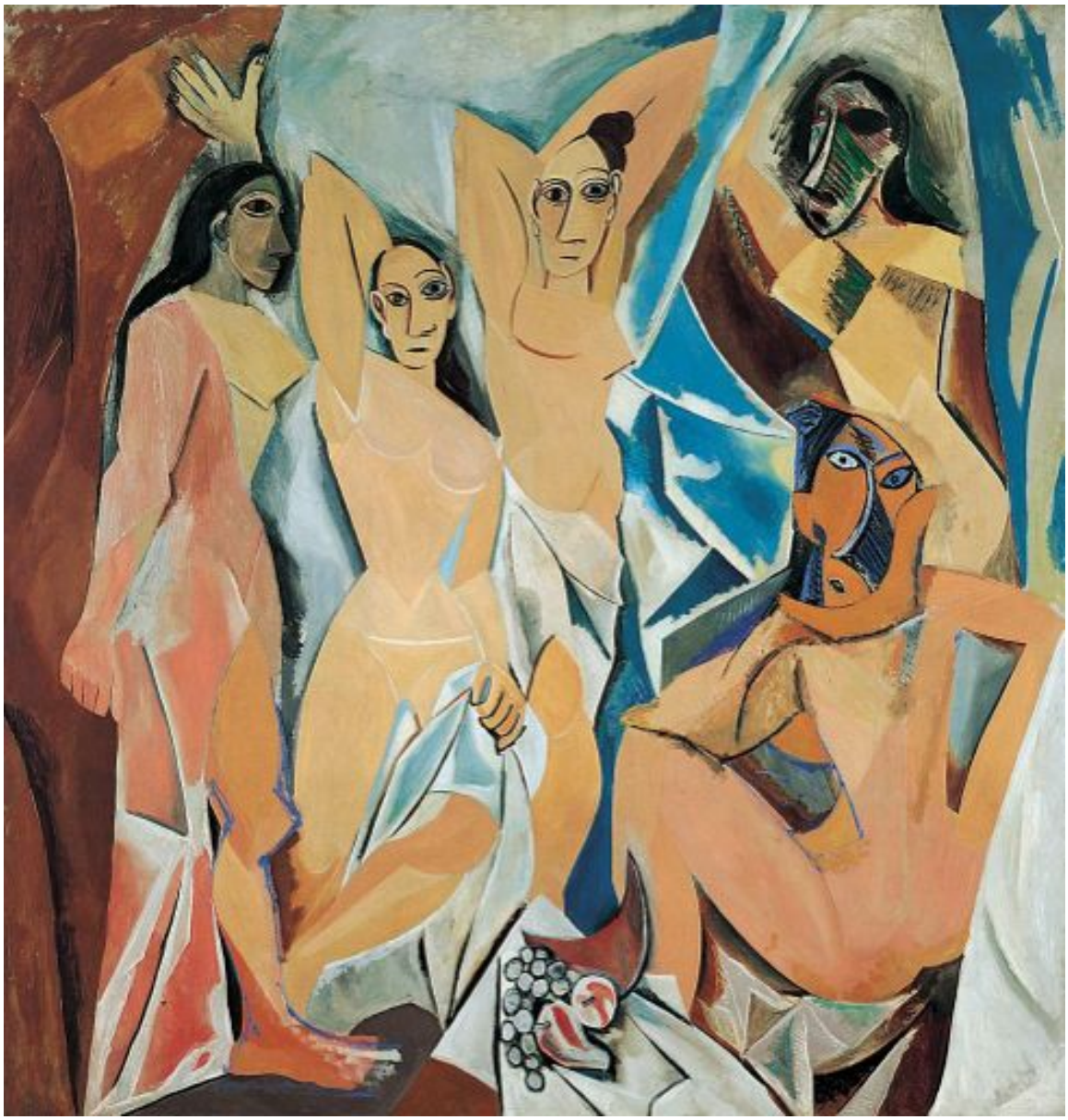


Figure 3. Pablo Picasso, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907 (Museum of Modern Art, NY)

It is in using methods symmetrically opposed to those of Matisse that Picasso begins, at the end of the same year in 1906, his first preparatory studies for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (fig. 3)—a painting that, at least since the days of Alfred Barr, has been construed as a polemical response to Matisse's *Le Bonheur de vivre*. A competition thereby engaged between the two painters—a competition that has often underlined the importance of one for the other. If it is true that few works of the twentieth century have been studied as much as these two, then no one has ever considered their shared theatricality or their similar qualities. While they demonstrate opposite working methods, they produce a new man with a shared conception of

the role of the image as a way to transform the psyche of the viewer through physical means. Surely any initiation should, in due course, produce a new man. But with Picasso's *Demoiselles*, the viewer is no more the recipient of an attractive and progressive "invitation au voyage" as with Matisse's work: as Leo Steinberg suggested, we are permanently in a state of change, immediate and brutal, "the totality of our ways of being and thinking." And yet, despite these two pedagogies rigorously opposed by the images themselves, it is this same theatricality that Picasso affirms, using also a curtain to open the scene of the painting. But here, there is no spellbinding vegetation offering the viewer protection and already sheltering the figures it is meant to invite. In truth the curtain here does not protect: it exposes the prostitutes to the gaze of the viewer, which in turn exposes the viewer to their gaze. If it concretizes a passage well, it is not in the same sense as *Le Bonheur de vivre*, guiding towards an ideal to appease as its goal, outside here of all horizon, into a quasi-mystical light. No, this passage is one of crossed looks: that of the menacing prostitutes to which we respond with our anxious gaze. Here, there is no escape or outlet to the infinite, but instead to a blocked space, opening a scene that lacks depth. Where Matisse built a welcoming space for the viewer, Picasso constructed a space so flat that its figures, projecting outward, on the contrary, seem to push the viewer away.

That these figures repulse the viewer was assumed by the first viewers who saw the work:[7] Georges Braque affirmed that seeing the painting gave him the impression of having "drunk gasoline" and "eaten an enflamed tow." Gelett Burgess saw "monolithic monsters," "terrifying, frightening…creatures." Kahnweiler, who found the faces "grotesque" and "hideous," added that the canvas, which he qualified as "monstrous," "horrified everyone." "Good God, what filth!" wrote Leo Stein while his sister Gertrude Stein, rather more moderate, contained her judgment to an observation that the figures were "rather frightful." With their cold and acidic color, their broken arabesques and the fragmented aspect of their barbaric forms, the figures display an aesthetic exactly opposite to that of *Le Bonheur de vivre*, whose figures are far more discrete in both their dimensions and their positions in the space.

Yet, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* also engage themselves in the initiation of the viewer; they also form the passage capable of making the viewer a new man. But why the sordid theater? Why make such an aggressive scene? To rediscover what innocence and to achieve what kind of utopia? At least two readings are possible; they overlap and, certainly, complete one another. The first, brilliantly given by Leo Steinberg in 1972, is enlightening in its demonstration. It is worth noting and summarizing his arguments, as the title of the essay of "Philosophical Brothel," derives from the first name given to the work.

Figure 4. Pablo Picasso, Study for Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, pencil and pastel (Basel Kunstmuseum)

Figure 5. Pablo Picasso, Study for Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, watercolor (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

In examining the long suite of drawings and preparatory sketches (figs. 4 and 5), Steinberg reminds us that in the first study for *Demoiselles*, conserved in the Basel Museum and dated on the left to the months of March-April 1907, two male figures were depicted, which Picasso proceeded to eliminate. The first entered into the scene from the left, standing just at the edge of the curtain that exposes the salon of the brothel. It was, according to Picasso himself, a student of medicine, holding in his right hand first a skull then a book, and then in some later compositions, both at once—symbols of cold scientific knowledge and detached from the aim of knowing. Steinberg makes this character, who is "placed in transit in the plane of the curtain" and never looks at the nude women, the figure of the *outsider*, which does not participate in the scene and is the "excluded one in the ultimate game of inclusion." The second character was, on the contrary, placed in the center of the brothel. This figure of *insider* was a sailor, a "timid candidate for sexual initiation" and "inundated by womankind." [8]

But once the sailor disappeared and a prostitute replaced the medical student—as a watercolor from 1907, now in the Philadelphia Museum, demonstrates—that is to say once opposition between intellectual knowledge and initiative experience was eliminated, what remains, asks Steinberg, of this allegory of the encounter between man and woman? There is nothing left, he says, but our own experience as viewers: that of the encounter and shock of art. If

we consent to deliver ourselves entirely to the aesthetic experience, if we let ourselves be swallowed up and "frightened" by the work (as said Gertrude Stein), then we penetrate the work and become insiders on our own. And, Steinberg adds by referring to Nietzsche, it is through the painting's state—confusing subject and forms—that it "strives against educated detachment."[9] To the unified and Eden-like state of Matisse, Picasso counters with a chaotic space of the hunt where women are prey, but who themselves stalk their game—that is, the viewer. And Steinberg concludes this magnificent interpretation by making the observation that, "like those mystics of old who used sexual metaphor to express union with the divine, so Picasso will have used sexuality to make visible the immediacy of communion with art."[10] Far from the soft path of initiation that Matisse proposes, it is through the harsh (and metaphorical) test of the loss of sexual innocence that we access the immaculate kingdom of Art. This convincing first reading is succeeded by a second interpretation given rather late by Picasso himself. Leo Steinberg did not know of it while writing his essay, in 1972, as it was only published in André Malraux's *La Tête d'obsidienne* in 1974.

It was in 1937, at the very hour he painted *Guernica* that Picasso confided to Malraux his sense of the activity of a painter. The "revelation," as he called it, came to him in 1907 while visiting the Musée de Trocadéro, when resisted the violent repulsion that the masks and fetishes inspired in him:

> The Negro pieces were *intercesseurs*, mediators….They were against everything—against unknown, threatening spirits. I always looked at fetishes. I understood; I too am against everything. I too believe that everything is unknown, that everything is an enemy! Everything! Not the details—women, children, babies, tobacco, playing—but the whole of it! I understood what the Negroes used their sculpture for….All the fetishes were used for the same thing. They were weapons. To help people avoid coming under the influence of spirits again, to help them become independent. They're tools. If we give spirits a form, we become independent. Spirits, the unconscious…, emotion—they're all the same thing. I understood why I was a painter.[11]

In retelling the same story ten years later to Françoise Gilot, he underlined this time the *non-aesthetic* character of their process:

> When I went for the first time…to the Trocadéro museum, the smell of dampness and rot there stuck in my throat [but…] I stayed and studied. Men had made those masks and other objects for a sacred purpose, a magic purpose, as a kind

> of mediation between themselves and the unknown hostile forces that surround them, in order to overcome their fear and horror by giving it a form and an image. At that moment I realized that this was what painting was all about. Painting isn't an aesthetic operation; it's a form of magic designed as a mediator between this strange, hostile world and us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires. [12]

The extreme lucidity of Picasso on the fundamentally apotropaic nature of an activity we insist in calling artistic should be emphasized: the artist, through his work, pulls away from danger, overcoming his fears and realizing his dreams by giving them form and color. But it should also be noted that Picasso's experience at the Musée du Trocadéro represents itself a kind of initiation: the shock of his encounter with the African objects precedes the encounter of the viewer and les *Demoiselles*, which Steinberg interprets as the shock of our encounter with Art. As the painting was made later, the viewer therefore reproduces the initiating experience the painter had at Trocadéro.

But what kind of initiation occurs for the viewer? Does it really consist of recapturing innocence in the immaculate domain of Art, as Steinberg thinks? What the *Demoiselles* say "truthfully" is, on the complete contrary, that a return to innocence is impossible through Art as well as in Art—that we can no longer access Paradise through Art, as Matisse still wanted to believe and make others believe. The *Demoiselles* tell us that we have been definitively chased from Paradise, and that this fall is irreversible. I think it is furthermore exactly this Fall that *Demoiselles* is meant to make us see: the Fall in Art, which is also *our* fall in (or for) Art, for which Picasso expels us as God expelled Adam and Eve from Paradise.

Figure 6. Picasso, Landscape with Two Figures, 1908 (Musee Picasso, Paris)

A few works, executed during this same period by Picasso and Georges Braque, would permit further understanding the sense of this lesson in *Demoiselles*. A year after *Les Demoiselles*, Picasso painted, between the spring and autumn of 1908, *La Dryade (Nu dans la forêt)*, a painting today conserved in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. In his essay, Steinberg notes that the first study for this large painting presented a figure having an air of "harlot slouching." But in the finished work, he remarks, the right hand, with the palm open, and at the left, with the clenched fist, signify acceptance and rejection, respectively—Picasso reuses here a traditional Christian iconographic motif to signify the passage of grace to damnation (a motif found in the work of Giotto, Gaddi, and even the *Last Judgment* by Michelangelo). Behind the large figure of the dryad, the space opens onto the obscurity of the forest: is it a grotto? Or rather vegetation so dense that it just becomes unsettling? This obscurity has nothing to do, in any case, about a welcoming paradise. It is a little after this moment, at the end of 1908, that Picasso painted *Paysage aux deux figures* (fig. 6) where the trees, creating this time a more general structure in space, appear here to have once more adopted the function of curtains, opening onto a scene that has become chaotic. But this time the two figures are *hamadryades*, those nymphs that live in the forest and embody the souls of the trees. They meld with the

trees, at least partially, making themselves almost part of the frame, or the curtain. If the structure of space is close to that of *Le Bonheur de vivre*, with this canopy made by vegetation, the ambivalence in contrast is far more radical: its hybrid character renders it welcoming at once menacing.

Figure 7. Georges Braque, The Viaduct at L'Estaque, 1908 (Centre Pompidou, Paris)

During this same period, Georges Braque, leaving Matisse's Fauvism to move closer to Picasso, painted in 1907 *Le Viaduc à l'Éstaque* (fig. 7) with even more vibrant color and also using this same spatial structure built by vegetation. The descent moves progressively towards the valley, where we find houses that seem accessible and whose gates, windows, and chimneys indicate their use. But the following year, another version of the same *Viaduc à l'Éstaque*, painted in the summer of 1908, returned to the tightened structure: this one now resembles a medieval mandorla—this almond-shaped form that would soon end up in Cubist paintings in oval form, affirming the autonomy of the painting in relation to its self-referential, concrete space. But the most remarkable aspect here is the imposing rock formations that block all access to the valley, to the extent that the space seems to have become entirely *uninhabitable*.

Figure 8. Piero della Francesca, Madonna della Misercordia, c. 1445-60

One can illustrate the image's "habitable" and "inviting" character, all like its "inhospitable" even terrifying character, by two images likely to reveal the nature of overwhelming that operates in painted representation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Opening also like a curtain, the protective coat in the famous *Virgin of Mercy* by Piero della Francesca (fig. 8) is a repetition of the architecture of edifice. But its merit is also as a metaphor for institution, even the Church: it is a place of refuge for the misled, for divine harmony, and above all for the Redemption by which the Fall is erased and access to paradise is once more accessible. All at once, this entire image accomplished a paradox of being a Utopia but also an uninhabitable

utopia—and inhabited moreover by the faithful who are "insiders," to reuse the expression given by Steinberg when describing the sailor in the studies of *Demoiselles* (that figure who is "inundated by womankind" as are here the faithful). It could be said that this Virgin of Mercy, like all others, is the archetype symbolizing the image's Matissean function: a function of salvation by absorption, or by the inclusion of the viewer.

The second image is a caricature by Cham produced in a reaction against the Impressionists: "*Bien féroce!*" was the phrase published in *Le Charivari* on April 28, 1877 with this caption: "The Turks bought many canvases at the Exhibition of the Impressionists to use in case of war." The image is used as a weapon, used to eliminate or repel the danger of the barbarians. It is evidently this "Picassoid" function of the image that is exposed here, since for him the image does not reveal an "aesthetic process" but constitutes a "weapon," where "a kind of magic intervenes between us and the hostile universe."

With Matisse, painting exercises bewitching charms that incorporate the viewer and absorb him into its eternity. With Picasso, painting is a weapon, it rejects and excludes, inhibiting or forbidding all access to its own space.

Throughout the twentieth century, the avant-gardes oscillated between these two approaches: the first making art a path capable of creating a rediscovered paradise, a road to Redemption possible; the second making art a constant reminder of the Fall, denouncing a world made uninhabitable and making it understandable by reminding the viewer that the image itself is uninhabitable.

This polarity of means specific to painting in order to exercise a force corresponds exactly to the distinction under which Sandor Ferenczi—the melancholy disciple of Freud—operates, between what he called *paternal hypnosis* and *maternal hypnosis*.[13]

The extreme form of paternal hypnosis, "hypnosis of terror," is provoked, he said, "by screams, menace, and if necessary a severe tone of voice, grimacing expressions, a waving fist. This terror—as seen historically in the gaze of the head of Medusa—can train the individual to a predisposition towards immediate paralysis or catalepsy." The inverse, maternal hypnosis wears away the dim light of a room, of silence, of "the yielding, friendly persuasion through monotone, melodious speech," even of "caressing gestures over the hair, the forehead, and the hands." Intimidation and tenderness: Ferenczi recognized in these two methods of hypnosis "the same modes of intimidation and softness […] which for millennia have been proven by the relationships between parents and children."

But Ferenczi does not grant much importance to the rigorous distinction between these two paternal and maternal forms, since the parental roles are always interchangeable. The important aspect for him was to show that the situation produced by hypnosis awoke in the patient the same effects of love or fear that he had felt, as a child, towards his parents.

We still do not know how to clearly distinguish the two poles that magnetize painting: their effects often interfere. While clearly obvious are the differences between the art of Picasso and of Matisse, this polarity supports the evident of only a single kind of painting in the twentieth century. These remarks by Roger de Piles, for example, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, suffice in situating with enough certitude the classical tradition, that of the rhetoric of passions the painter disposes:

> There are in the passions two manners of movement; the first are lively and violent, others are calm and moderate. Quintilian calls the first pathetic, and the other moral. The pathetic commands, the moral persuades; the first bears up under any trouble and powerfully stirs the heart, the other insinuates calm into the mind, and both require a good deal of art to be well expressed.[14]

But despite this classic polarity of violent commandment and subtle persuasion, which appears throughout art of the twentieth century, these two contradictory components often mix in a single work that the art of today has recapitulated by hurling us between the two poles, between Matisse and Picasso, that is to say between acceptance and expulsion, between the Redemption and the Fall, in a sort of impossible double bind. As it was understood, the "great narrative" of the West, into which I would suggest Picasso inserted himself in a singular

way because it was contradictory, this great narrative was in fact Christianity itself. And his rivalry with Matisse, who said to him one day: "You are like me: what we both search for in art is the climate of our first communion,"[15] this rivalry also served as his own explanation of Christianity and his theology on salvation through the image. Matisse still wanted to believe that the lie in art revealed the truth of myth—that is, more or less, Christianity. Picasso thought on the contrary that the lie of art could give access to that truth of myth as a lie. But to exorcize the lie of Salvation, the myth of the Fall must be conserved.

Translated by Alexandra Morrison

NOTES

1. *Picasso on Art: A Selection of* Views, ed. Dore Ashton (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 3.

2. Ibid., 13.

3. Louis Vauxelles, "The Salon des Indépendants (March 20, 1906)."

4. Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," in *Matisse on Art*, trans. and ed. Jack Flam, rev. ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 42.

5. Matisse, "Interview with R. W. Howe," in *Matisse on Art*, 186–87.

6. Françoise Gilot, *Matisse and Picasso: A Friendship in Art* (New York, London, et al.: Doubleday, 1990), 151.

7. Citations drawn from the catalog *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, ed. Hélène Seckel, vol. 2 (Paris: Musée Picasso, 1988), 650, 652, 665, 686 (note 2) and 683.

8. Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel," *October* 44 (Spring 1988): 37.

9. Ibid., 47.

10. Ibid., 64.

11. Picasso quoted in André Malraux, *Picasso's Mask*, trans. June Guicharnaud and Jacques Guicharnaud (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 11.

12. Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 242.

13. Sandor Ferenczi, "Introjection and Transference," in *Sex in Psychoanalysis: Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (Boston: Gorham Press), 35–93.

14. Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 92.

15. Matisse, "Propos sur la chapelle de Vence rapports par Marie-Alain Couturier," in *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, ed. Dominique Fourcard (Paris: Hermann, 1972), 271.

Eric Michaud is a Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

FALSE GODS:
AUTHORITY AND PICASSO'S EARLY WORK

CHARLES PALERMO

In his *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism*, Steven Knapp discusses some revisionist biblical criticism. This materialist criticism uses social history to recover contexts for biblical history, and does so specifically for the purpose of casting doubt on canonical biblical texts. The substance of the accounts is not my interest here, nor are the aims of their revisions. What I am concerned to trace is a problem Knapp finds in them generally. The problem is: if you question the sacred texts in light of historical circumstances, why do they still matter to you? "The answer," as Knapp puts it,

> seems to lie in a peculiar combination of two kinds of relation between the present and the past: a combination of, on one hand, the relation of *analogy* and, on the other hand, sheer historical continuity. Specifically, the present authority of Israel's or of the Church's actual social origins is presumed to derive from the intersection of two relations: first, the perceived analogy between ancient and modern social struggles; second, the influence, however remote, that the ancient struggles have exerted on the struggles in which participants in the tradition are, or should be, presently engaged. [1]

In short, we care about canonical texts, despite the social historical revisions, either because they offer analogies to our struggles today, or because they serve as explanations of how we came to be what we are (116). Or rather, because we conflate or in some other confused way combine the two. Knapp spots confusion in this combination of reasons because, as he points out, if the analogies between our struggles and those of biblical times compel us, it is not because the accounts of biblical times on which they're built are historically true, but because the biblical narratives offer analogies that speak to our values. Whether the narratives are true is irrelevant if the analogies are compelling. Analogies to fictional stories would be just as useful for illustrating our values to us. On the other hand, the historical continuity isn't really authoritative for us, either, since, should biblical history offer an analogy that would teach us lessons that aren't already underwritten by our values, we will not take that history as exemplary, much less as authoritative, for us now (116-17). "Hence," he goes on to conclude, "the pressure to focus on historical phenomena whose *combination* of symbolic resonance and explanatory uniqueness will make these two benefits seem mutually dependent" (117). But the problem persists even when we seem to find this combination, because:

> the locus of authority is always in the present; we use, for promoting and reinforcing ethical and political dispositions, only those elements of the past that correspond to our sense of what presently compels us. (117)

We should recognize that our interest in the past has nothing to do with establishing authority for ourselves. History can't tell us what to do.

The same goes for literary works. Following Fredric Jameson, Knapp describes "the division of critical attention between continuity and analogy, between the mere reconstruction of historical sequences and the use of past texts to stand for present values," or, in Jameson's own terms "'antiquarianism and modernizing 'relevance' or 'projection.'" [2]

Historical accounts of artworks may underwrite interpretations, but they aren't what makes a work of art compelling for us here and now. Our values do that. Perhaps we feel ourselves unmoved by works of art informed by values we don't share. And maybe that's as it should be. Surely we don't want to claim that we embrace misreadings or that we accept as authoritative certain imperatives we find in historically remote texts even though they, say, endorse slavery or demand the subjugation of women. The problem Knapp outlines may be troubling, but the alternative is worse.

Perhaps this seems like a challenge for theologians or biblical historians. But, as anyone familiar with the history of literary criticism knows, biblical criticism's problems are literary criticism's problems. We might rephrase the problem this way: You are a member of one

of two methodological camps, whether you think of it that way or not. You may believe that the meaning of a work of art is fully determined in its context of production, so to speak, by its author's intentions or by the expectations of the work's original audience, or you may believe that at least some part of a work's meaning evolves over time, or even that it is produced in the present, in its various encounters with beholders. The unity of the sides and the distinction between these points of view are unstable. I mean, those who believe that an author's intentions are the meaning of a work do not truly agree with those who believe that interpretation means recovering the original context of a work's production.[3] Those who see meaning as a product of historical context do not exactly disagree with those who believe the meaning of a work of art evolves. But to the extent they think they disagree, they are not (already) members of the same camp.

Whatever general implications we may or may not want to see in the opposition between what I will call the historicist position and what I will call the presentist position, there is nevertheless the fact of a difference. You cannot feel yourself to be a member of both sides without giving up your claim to a consistent method.

That is where the problem begins, though. If meaning is fixed in the past—let us say, for example, if Courbet's *The Burial at Ornans* is really about the politics of mid-nineteenth-century rural France—why on Earth would I care about it now? All of those people and their competing interests are long gone. We have our own problems now. So the painting has no implications for me. You may be another kind of historicist: you may believe that, since the picture was painted by a long-dead artist and in response to local circumstances the fullness of which is lost to us forever, we can never truly know its meaning. In that case, the painting cannot have any implications for me, nor could it even if I found some compelling reason to interest myself in the lives of Courbet's neighbors. The historicist route leaves us no reason to care about an old painting.

On the other hand, if a painting's meaning is produced in my encounter with it, in the here-and-now, then (whatever the merits of my interpretation of it) it only really interests me insofar as my interpretation of it addresses my current concerns. Or, which may be another way of saying the same thing, I'm only interested in it if I can put it in terms of my own values. Which is to say, I only really care about whether it can be made to underwrite my values. (Perhaps that means I admire the picture because it supplies a good pedigree for my democratic values. Perhaps one might endorse it for its rough handling of brutish rural clergy and other unworthy authority figures. Anyway, it's important to you because it affirms your ideas, not because it is irrelevant to them or because it challenges them.) And there's nothing to say that my interests are the same as yours; my values yours. If your values are different from mine, you will interpret the picture differently, so that it engages your concerns. And,

if I am of the presentist camp, I'll concede that that is as it should be, which means that, although I may respond to the picture, my response will be merely my own, so much my own, in fact, that I will have no reason to recommend it to you. Still more to the point, one may say that, insofar as you see the production of meaning as taking place in the present, you have abandoned the historical work of art altogether—you are no longer talking about it or its meaning at all.[4]

Either way, then,—whether you travel the historicist or the presentist route—it is far from clear how the *Burial* could have implications for us. It may have a meaning or it may have a lot of them, but no consequences for us, no authority. Yet—terrible irony—it was meant to. (It was also meant to overcome or evade our awareness that it was painted in order to elicit a reaction, but that is another matter. But the two aspirations are not separate, as I hope the following argument will suggest.)

Does this mean that paintings are like newspapers, which one reads because of their relevance to events of the day and then discards? Or, worse yet, like newspapers that one uses to light a fire because, after all, whatever the intentions of their authors, they are still pieces of paper that can be put to any purpose they can be imagined to suit? Does it mean, in short, that all works of art are failures?

Perhaps you think this dilemma is a little artificial. After all, we do respond to works of art, even very old ones, and there is something coherent about our responses to them. That is perfectly true, but it is also important that our methodological positions (I think all methodological positions can be placed in one of the categories I mentioned above) do not obviously make any room for works of art to compel meaningful responses from us. That is to say, I think our methodological reflections are hollow unless they can also be part of our reflection on the way works do or do not have authority for us.

In what follows, I shall work out the response to this problem—the problem of authority—of a handful of artists and writers who were active at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1903 Guillaume Apollinaire published an essay titled "Des faux," "On Fakes." In it, Apollinaire recounts the story of the so-called "tiara of Saïtapharnes." He berates French officials for removing the tiara from display simply because it was found to be a modern forgery and not an artifact of the third century B.C.[5] He explains that it had been universally lauded for its beauty and craftsmanship, and so deserved to remain on display—albeit, perhaps, in the Musée Luxembourg, among the modern works, rather than in the Louvre. He calls scholarly outrage at the forgery "purely archaeological" and therefore "of no importance whatsoever" (9). He goes on to cite some examples of great works that are, in a "purely archaeological" sense, fakes. Among them, he lists the Gospels, which, he explains, "are later

than those to whom they are attributed"—a charge that calls into question their status as historical documents without quite impugning their value as revelation (11). He concludes with the story of a forger of his acquaintance who counterfeited medieval pottery. The forger took delight in his creations, saying: "'I have created a god, a false god, a real, pretty, false god'" (12). I take the forger to mean that his work, like the tiara of Saïtapharnes, was false (even fraudulent) in the archaeological sense, but real or true (even divine) in some other, unnamed sense.

Apollinaire was not being merely mischievous or blasphemous—against Christianity or against art. Rather, I think he was making a point about authority. The critique of religious revelation holds a special, central place in accounts of modernity and of modernism. By referring to disputed claims about the authorship of the Gospels, I take Apollinaire to have been connecting his thoughts about art to the problem of modernism in the broader sense—as a refusal of received authority and an effort to establish another kind of authority, one based on reason and historical method. Ultimately, Apollinaire's point is also a point about theology, about modernism and about understanding art.

In Christian theology, this modernism process may, I think, be said to have begun with historical biblical criticism—that is what Apollinaire was referring to when he remarked that the Gospels were later than those to whom they had been attributed. Historical biblical criticism in the liberal Protestant tradition had gone much farther, even, than Apollinaire's remark would suggest. In fact, by the turn of the twentieth century, it had reached a radical conclusion. A couple of years after Apollinaire wrote "On Fakes," Albert Schweitzer could write, in his classic study *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, that historical biblical criticism had destroyed the notion of the "Dual Nature of Jesus," leaving two Jesuses in place of the traditional one—a historical Jesus and a timeless one:

> But the truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world. [6]

On Schweitzer's account, the Jesus of tradition is a lot like Apollinaire's tiara of Saïtapharnes: a counterfeit in an "archeological" sense but invaluable in another sense—specifically he is crucial and powerful on account of the response his word can produce in us here and now—because of our response to his call. Obviously, Apollinaire treats his "real, pretty, false god" less gravely than Schweitzer does his liberal Protestant Jesus, but Apollinaire sees that they are engaged in the same, profoundly modernist project: letting go of received authority

and seeking to reestablish authority on new bases, in terms of reasons and reflections and experiences accessible to the modern subject. Both Schweitzer and Apollinaire want you to forget about truth in the archaeological sense and let yourself be moved—to belief, to conviction—by your own experience. They can both be understood to be preaching what one theologian around the turn of the century called "faith without belief."[7] The disjunction between faith and belief means that a difference arises in practice between one's ability to affirm beliefs and one's ability to live them. The theme returns, slightly more subtly inflected, in Apollinaire's great poem "Zone," where he speaks of Catholicism and modernity:

> You alone in all Europe are not antique, O Christian faith
>
> The most modern European is you, Pope Pius X
>
> And you, whom the windows look down at, shame prevents you
>
> From entering a church and confessing this morning.
>
> You read prospectuses, catalogues and posters, which shout aloud:
>
> Here is poetry this morning, and for prose there are the newspapers.
>
> There are volumes for 25 centimes full of detective stories,
>
> Portraits of famous men and a thousand titles.[8]

Pius X represents an insistence on orthodox belief, so he can also stand for a radical denial of historical distance, of the difference between faith and the archaeological sense of doctrine. Even in the light of Pius X's refusal of such distance the narrator finds himself trapped between the impulse to visit the confessional and the impulse to turn away from it. This is the connection between modernism's transformation of religion and its role in art: losing authority, such as that of dogma, does not mean renouncing Catholicism, it means losing one's ability to respond to it fully. We moderns are not free of belief; rather, we are blocked from it, distracted from it. We live in an age that has, as Kierkegaard put it, forgotten authority.[9] The literature Apollinaire turns to immediately after his bout with the confessional continues that thought: the authority of poetry has ceded its place to the ephemeral chatter of the newspaper, which is the emblem for him, as it was for Kierkegaard, of our age of forgotten authority.

The equation between the experience of art and religious experience was hardly Apollinaire's invention.[10] But it had a special and rather specific currency toward the turn of the twentieth century among certain writers and artists in France. A friend of Apollinaire's, the symbolist

writer and critic Charles Morice, gave a fascinating lecture on some works of Eugène Carrière's that makes the point clearly. Carrière was also a friend of Morice's, and they shared what was then a common, vaguely Christian humanistic faith. In fact, Morice also discussed such matters with another, similarly minded friend of his, Paul Gauguin. The easiest way to characterize their common faith would probably be with a term they themselves invoked: *Jésus homme*, or Jesus man.

Fig. 1: Eugène Carrière, Christ en croix, 1897 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

The titular topic of Morice's talk is Carrière's *Christ en croix* or *Christ on the Cross* (fig. 1), but Morice approaches his thesis slowly, first reviewing a number of Carrière's other works. Morice considers Carrière's maternity pictures altogether, as a class, drifting between general statements and what seem like specific references (fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Eugène Carrière, Maternité, ca. 1897 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Morice speaks of Carrière as aware of lines or arabesques that unite mothers and their children making of "the members of a family," as Morice puts it, "a unique being, a harmonious whole." "I know such a sleeping mother," he continues, "holding her child in her arms; sleep has not effaced the traces of thought itself, of vigilant preoccupation, of concern; sentiment is fixed in it like an attempt at waking that will not delay." Morice then adds that "the hand that holds the little pressed body is not asleep." So, the two bodies are a single being, but the mother's body is also two separate beings—a sleeping woman and a vigilant hand. Now, as I have said, Morice does not say precisely which painting, if any, he has in mind. There is no guarantee, in fact, that his description will line up with any one painting of Carrière's. Nor am I sure I would describe the mother in the picture I have selected as "sleeping." On the other hand, since Morice's account insists on an expression of concern on the mother's face, how appropriate could it be to a painting in which the mother was *obviously* asleep? At any rate, this example does well enough, I think, to illustrate a contrast in vitality, in purposefulness, like the one Morice describes between the unselfconscious expressivity of the mother's face and the tension that closes her hand on the child's foot. What is important, especially important, to Morice about Carrière's approach to rendering the maternities is the internal difference,

like two persons in one, which is figured in the hand's liveliness as it is in the mother's unconsciousness. He concludes:

> Did the artist want precisely to mark maternal solicitude on this face, the constant and urgent terror of the thousand dangers that menace the little being? It is there, that solicitude, that terror and with many other secret complications, with all that escapes analysis, with the irreducible synthesis of all of life itself, with the serious and the light, with the devastating and consoling occasions that comprise the religious drama of Maternity.
>
> *Religious*, I said. Yes, and inevitably we are lead to suggest this word apropos of Carrière's art. The maternities he recreates with such love and veneration all have the noble character of traditional holy families. [11]

Ultimately, this "drama" (by which I take Morice to refer to the play of conflicting emotions and the unfolding of the connections and divisions between the persons pictured) is "religious." Morice drops the latter word like a bomb, anticipating surprise or resistance from his reader by following his use of the adjective immediately with an explanation: Carrière reverently appropriates the "noble character of traditional holy families." "Only," Morice adds, "there is no aureole around the forehead of the Mother and of the Child" (Morice 1899, 17).

The theme of a mother and child certainly seems, again in a general sense, ready for assimilation to the tradition of the Madonna and Child. But it is not just that fact about iconography and its cross-genre resonances that Morice has in mind. He wants to see Carrière's work as representative of a certain religious sentiment—one that conforms closely to the radically modernist theological sentiments I mentioned earlier in Morice and his colleagues' references to *Jésus homme*. "I see well that such an art is religious." Morice says, but he adds: "I do not see that it is Christian. And so what is its religion?—The Religion of Life—or, if you prefer, the cult of humanity, in the infinite." [12]

When Morice finally gets around to discussing the painting that is the nominal subject of his talk, Carrière's *Christ on the Cross*, he returns to his rumination on Carrière's way of mixing the divine and the mundane:

> This Christ is human, and this woman who cries for him has no superhuman recourse… I am mistaken: he is divine, in all the beauty of his sacrifice. She is divine, too, because her pain is without limits.—This man is no wrongdoer, his

> face is noble and the crown of thorns attests to his royalty. He is a sacrifice. She who cries over him cries over a victim, not over a guilty person.—What! An innocent sacrificed! Yes, and he celebrates and consecrates by his voluntary death that eternal law of the necessity of pure sacrifices.—Ah! I wish this painting were in a church: the votive painting of the future church where humanity will celebrate the rites of the religion of the ideal, this immutable deposit, eternal, of all the changing religions.
> And this church, which will it be? [13]

What Morice describes is not what we would call secular humanism. He loudly insists on the central role of the divine in it, and even refers to an eternal and immutable deposit, which I take to be a pointed allusion to the Catholic Church's immutable deposit of faith. But Morice's idea of a deposit of faith is importantly different from Catholicism's in two respects. First, it is, by definition, shared by all people who feel a religious sentiment—hence his reference to "eternal law," which he takes to include the notion that sacrifices must be pure, and therefore different from punishment. To this universal deposit, Morice opposes the contingent and evolving expressions of such truths, which are the various religions of mankind. These ideas—"religious sentiment" and vital immanence or relativism—are features of theological modernism that Pope Pius X, whom you will recall from Apollinaire's "Zone," explicitly and vehemently denounced as heretical. [14] The quasi-Christianity Morice projects approvingly onto Carrière's Crucifixion is understandable, then, both in terms of the traditional iconography of orthodox Christianity and in terms of a generically human religious sentiment. But it is not Catholic.

Fig. 3: Eugène Carrière, Théâtre populaire (or Le Théâtre de Belleville), 1895 (Paris, Musée Rodin)

So what, as Morice asks, is this church, where Carrière's Crucifixion may hang? He lets the question itself hang, and then, changing topics, resumes his discussion with a different picture altogether—this one on a secular subject. It is Carrière's *Théâtre de Belleville* (*The Theater of Belleville*) (fig. 3). It shows a theater in the *faubourgs*, so a theater for workers, rather than for elite society. In such a theater, Morice explains, "one may best study the expression of emotion in faces." In the more sophisticated theaters, he says, one "sneers" or "whimpers"; in these popular theaters, one "laughs" or "cries boldly." But it is not just the amplitude of the emotions in the popular theater that impresses Morice—it is something more like a transformation the play induces in the crowd: "As the curtain rises," he writes, "the face of the naive spectator divests itself of borrowed grimaces; just now, it was an employee, a clerk, and the livery of his profession imposed on his physiognomy and on his attitude something conventional. But the drama begins, and, before this contest of love and hatred, the clerk and the employee have become men." This has little to do with what Morice calls "the literary value of the play"; for the people who have come to watch, it is simply "about Life and Death." "It is into its own soul," he says "that this human crowd gazes." Then, he concludes, "In a moment, when the curtain has fallen again on the scene, banalities and vulgarities fall again over this soul."[15]

The frankness of the audience's expressions is a release from the masks they wear daily, the conventional expressions forced on them by their trades.[16] A clerk is made, by the action of his métier, into something thing-like, something less than human. So the play does more than entertain him—it frees him, redeems him. To speak of redemption may seem out of place—it may seem as though I am forcing an issue—but not in view of Morice's more general thesis about Carrière's religious themes, and certainly not in view of the way he concludes his lecture:

> And so what does it see, this crowd, on that stage, or rather in its soul? [. . .] It is true that, until now the Painter had hidden the drama from us. But finally, here it is! It is, do not doubt it, this sublime dialogue of heroic devotion and inconsolable pain,—it is this Christ on the Cross, this human Christ, and this weeping woman—this human Christ, greater than a God! Because the God knows that in dying he saves the world, and the man has no certitude. His last thought, his frightful last thought was, perhaps, a despairing conviction in the uselessness of his sacrifice.
>
> There it is—that is the supreme tragedy of our destiny—what the crowd watches, and that is why this crowd is so great. It participates with its years in the bloody effusion of a holocaust that is also an apotheosis, and it rises above itself by the nobility the drama's intensity confers on it. It has submitted to the counsel of the

> poet, and of all these souls a soul, a collective consciousness, is formed, which exalts itself and becomes ecstatic, with the suffering hero, in the joy of sacrifice. [17]

So ends Morice's lecture on Carrière—with the conceit that Carrière's *Christ on the Cross* is actually the dramatic spectacle that transfigures the audience in the *Theater of Belleville*.

Carrière "read and reread" Morice's lecture and wrote Morice to praise it. [18] What Morice's remarks do is work out a relationship between divine and mundane and between beholder and art that illustrates and extends the problematic we have been following. In other words, I want to say, the members of Carrière's audience are not only witnesses to the act by which his *Jésus homme* gains divine authority (his "apotheosis"), but they demonstrate what it means to *share in* that authority (and freedom from the oppression of ordinary life) by "submitt[ing] to the counsel of the poet," and thus permitting themselves to be transfigured by its truth. Carrière's theater crowd is a model for us who experience art, and his Christ is a model artist. Or, at least, he is Morice's ideal artist.

If I have spent a considerable time explaining these notions of modernism and authority, it is because I think they are an important context for understanding Picasso's early work. Morice was a friend of Apollinaire's before either of them knew Picasso. Morice was also an early supporter of Picasso's in Paris. He probably met Picasso by around 1902 through one of Picasso's friends. He wrote favorably about Picasso in that year and gave Picasso a copy of his collaboration with Gauguin, *Noa Noa*, which Picasso kept all his life. Further, Morice was instrumental in arranging a particularly important exhibition of Picasso's paintings in early 1905 at the Galeries Serrurier. On that occasion, he wrote another important piece of criticism on Picasso's works. I will come to that presently.

My claim about Picasso's paintings of the so-called Blue and Rose periods is that they participate in a paradigm close to that of Carrière's pictures as Morice interprets them. The quasi-religious iconography of Picasso's early work has been well remarked. Further, the mask-like quality Morice associates with the faces of ordinary people consumed by the routine cares from which they need liberation (if they are to be saved), takes on the status of a theme in Picasso's early work. (This, too, is well known, but I have a few points to add.) By contrast, I see many signs of a contrary sense of liberation from that oppressive care in Picasso's works—as if, even in the most wretched scene of despondence, Picasso includes at least the germ of redemption. Finally, I shall explain how Picasso often builds in a more or less clear, more or less direct address to the beholder, a call that shifts the beholder into the scope of the conflict he stages between oppression and redemption. In the end, I hope I will have

complicated the commonplace view of the so-called Blue Period as a collection of pictures of sad, alienated, marginal figures.[19]

Fig. 4: Picasso, The Two Sisters, 1902 (The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

Let's proceed with examples. In the summer of 1902, Picasso was working on *The Two Sisters* (fig. 4). We have several drawings Picasso made for the painting. Almost all of Picasso's drawings on the subject—every one I know of, except what looks like the very first, crude formulation of the idea[20]—show the two women holding hands (fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Picasso, Study for The Two Sisters, 1902 (Sotheby's, inventory number 356, N08486, 11/05/08; formerly Rosengart Collection, Luzern)

In none of these drawings do the women make eye contact—in fact, only in more advanced drawings does the woman on the left clearly open an eye. As in figures in other works of this period, the contours of the woman on the left are nearly straight through much if not most of her height, reinforcing the impression created by her bowed head and (in the majority of cases) closed eye that she is inward-turned almost to the point of being inert. (The stiffness of her pose reiterates itself in the shape of the archway behind her in some preparatory drawings and in the finished painting.)

I want to draw attention to three significant departures from the drawings that distinguish the painting. First, the women do not appear to hold hands in the painting as they do in the drawings—the woman on our right may rest her hand on her companion's far arm, but

she may also simply fold her own arms together in front of her without touching the other figure. The important thing, as I see it, is that Picasso changed his mind and decided *not* to show their clasped hands, which had been a central feature of his preparatory drawings. Also, the women's naked feet nearly or barely touch. (It is probably impossible to say whether they touch or not, but the fact that they make contact on the surface of the painting is no less pointed because of the uncertainty.[21]) The change displaces the gesture of contact from the eloquence of the hands to the dumb feet—it is no longer a gesture of sympathy or commiseration, but a furtive rapprochement, perhaps accidental, perhaps embarrassed. In fact, I hesitate even to call the meeting of the feet a gesture—the feet that touch are the load-bearing ones, the ones the women *cannot extend* toward each other; moreover, these feet are too clumsy and too little articulated to gesture. And yet, the feet take over from the hands the expressive task of defining the implicit communication between the women. Finally, the right foot of the bowed woman turns outward—I want to say inexplicably—toward the beholder, as if to open her figure in counterpoint to its general closing-up. We will see this turning-out again, which will make its meaning and its meaningfulness more forcefully apparent.

The encounter of the prostitute and the mother (as Picasso identified them[22]) has been interpreted variously—as a transposed Visitation or an allegory of sacred and profane love or a meditation on woman's wretchedness.[23] The most specific and firmly historicized interpretation of the painting's subject matter claims that the painting represents the "two risks" that accompanied sex at the turn of the twentieth century: venereal disease (syphilis, as is clear from the white bonnet of the inmate of the syphilis ward) and pregnancy.[24] So it is especially striking, the combination of this double personification of consequences with the themes of closing-in and touching. The figure on the left, the syphilitic, closes herself up so completely and locks herself so firmly into the architecture of the composition that one feels the need, I believe, to wonder whether she *has* an inner life. Only her feet seem to say she does. So, apart from the ambiguous and minimal (and crucial) sign her foot makes, I take her expression and posture to signal the benumbed condition Morice felt it so urgent—or holy—to deliver the people from. Her companion shows little sign of awareness, either—her open, staring eye fixes on nothing in particular, so that one might imagine her to be lost in thought or sleepwalking.

Against the adults' abstracted or distracted reverie, the little hand of the child curls upward, as if to remind the beholder that the little creature is hidden away in the woman's garment, and that it is aware, in no way abstracted from its surroundings but with no understanding of any predicament, risk or gravity, either—just as infants always are. Further, the infant's hand goes apparently unnoticed within its fictional world, which is plausible as part of the fiction. But since the infant's is the only hand visible in the picture's final form, and since it is placed

so near the dramatic center of the picture—at the location of the former expressive hand-holding—, and since its delicate and lifelike fingers stand out so in contrast to the stony faces and postures of the women, it seems like a marked feature of the painting. Emerging as it does from within the closed form of the mother, whose contour also completely contains it, the infant's hand might read as an extension of the mother herself—it appears near the end of the form her arm makes under her cloak, like a miniature replacement for her own hand, or a limb sprouted by her heart to signal, in contrast to her body's stillness, a vitality hidden even from her. It is suggestively like the infants united to their mothers and the mothers divided within themselves in Morice's account of Carrière's *maternités*.

Indeed, since neither woman is shown as if she were paying attention to it or even aware of it, it is plausible and even clearly right to think of Picasso as directing the infant's little gesture to *your* attention *as opposed to* theirs, just as in Carrière's maternities hands and faces betrayed the secret and unconscious thoughts of infants and their sleeping mothers. So, like similar features of Carrière's pictures and like the women's feet, the infant's hand represents a sense in which the picture turns itself outward to address itself to the beholder. (A sense of the picture's address, so to speak, that opposes that sense in which it is about the silent, prolonged, introspective or unconscious encounter of the figures shown.)

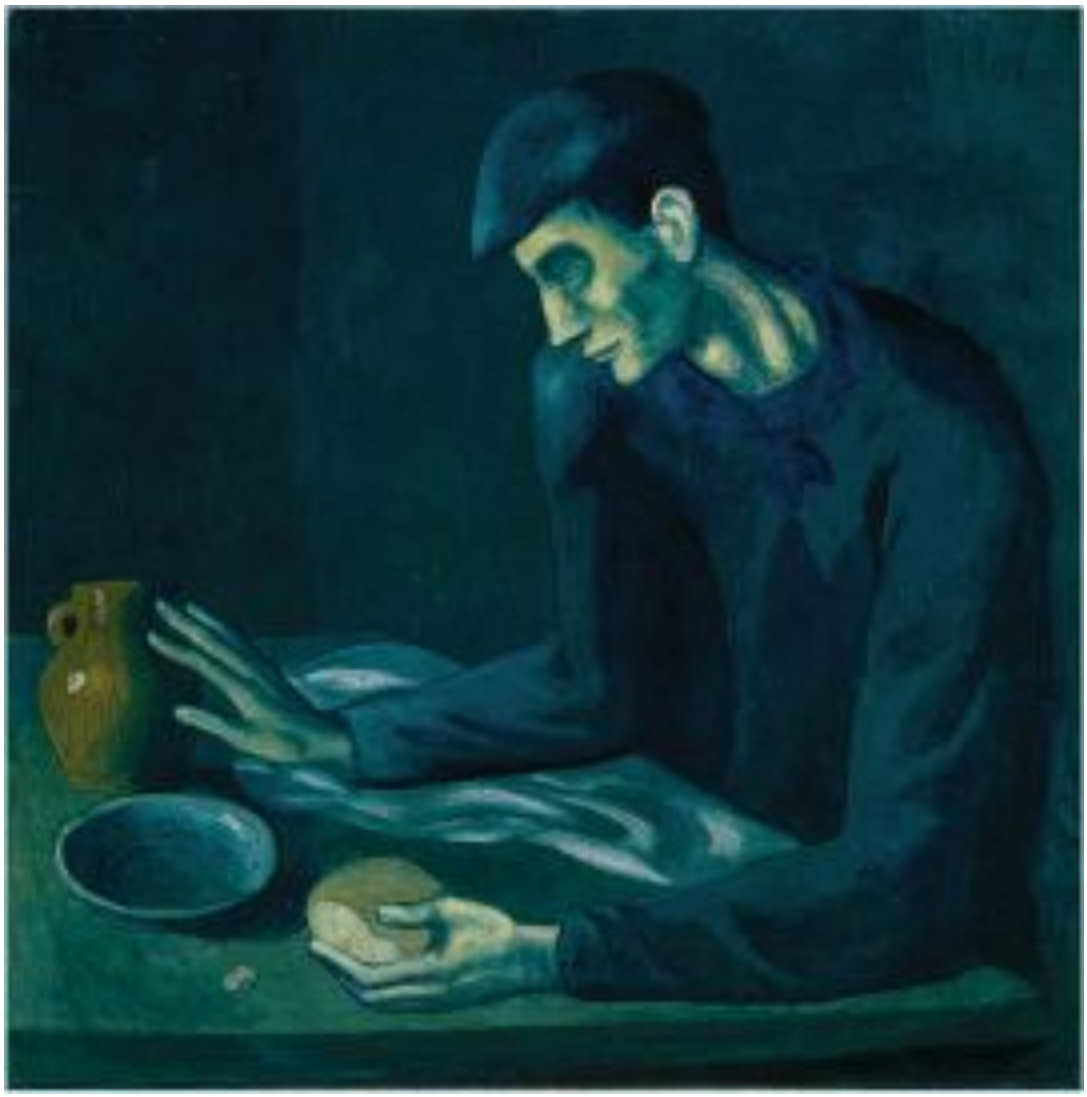


Fig. 6: Picasso, The Blind Man's Meal, 1903 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Now, consider another painting of the Blue Period, from 1903: *The Blind Man's Meal* (fig. 6). The blind man feels the jug before him with his fingertips while he holds his bread in his left hand. Clearly enough, the man's blindness represents his isolation, the limitedness of his knowing, while his hands make visible his struggle against his separation from the world. His hands are large and the stark opposition between the dominant blue and the touches of cream and brown emphasize the solid volume of his hands along with the bread and jug, and do so at the expense of his body's fullness. His long, awkward, improbable arms attach to his volume-less body mysteriously. Indeed, the man's inability to see the things he touches heightens—and charges with meaning—both the selective effect of volume in the painting and the effect of a disjunction between his inexpressive face and his searching hands. It is his hands, not his eyes, that are his windows onto the world and our windows onto his soul. In

this I sense a kind of similarity to the displacement of expression in the persons of the two sisters and even to Morice's account of Carrière's mothers, with their unconscious faces and their tense hands.

Further, one might even imagine that it is the man's contact with the bread and jug that calls the objects forth into solidity. In that sense, it is as if his touch illuminates his world for our vision as it does for him. Conversely, the pointed resemblance of the man's blind eye socket to the empty bowl on the table lets us suppose that his blind eye is as shallow and as empty as the bowl—a hollow without, one might suspect, a real interior. [25]

Fig. 7: Picasso, Poor People on the Seashore (often called The Tragedy), 1903 (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Now look at another 1903 painting, *Poor People on the Seashore* (fig. 7). The three figures turn together, but their downcast eyes do not meet. The three remain more or less isolated, unified by nothing, perhaps, but their misery. I say "more or less isolated" because the boy might be thought of as caressing the man's hip. The gesture is ambiguous—a marked fact, if only because his hands are the only two visible in the painting. If the boy's hand does rest on the man's hip, then the gesture may be read as an expression of sympathy, or love, or as an attempt to get or direct the man's attention. In any case, it will reduce the isolation they suffer—or at least, it will make them aware of one another. But it may not be a touch we see at all. This raised right hand may be making one of the cryptic gestures that are common among Picasso's early figures—a gesture so unreadable that, even if the other figures were looking at it, one supposes it would remain unintelligible to them as it is to us.

So one might say the representation of volume assumes even greater importance here than in *The Blind Man's Meal*. Insofar as our conjectures about the disposition of objects in the fictional volume determine whether we see the boy as touching the man, our understanding of volume in the picture becomes decisive for understanding the drama. This is why I find it particularly telling that the boy makes virtually the same gestures as the blind man in the other painting, as if to imply that he probes his obscure world the same way the blind man at his table does, but without objects to hold.[26] Instead of feeling for his jug and bread, the boy at the seashore grasps for his own world, summarized here in his companions, who form something resembling a family.[27] In the two paintings—between them, so to speak—Picasso constructs a comparison between touching and communication. He does so in *Poor People on the Seashore*, though, in such a way as, on one hand, to identify touching with communication. (If the boy is touching the man, they *are* in communication.) But, on the other hand, *Poor People* also suggests a difference between physical connection and communication. (That is to say, if we could determine that the boy is making a hieratic gesture in the air, whether he is signaling or reaching for phantom bread and wine, his reaching would be about another kind of communion.[28]) Since Picasso leaves the two readings in pointed suspension, I propose that we take the two as superposed, one on the other, as if Picasso were trying to convince us the two gestures were synonyms (or homonyms, so to speak). Just two different expressions of the impulse to communion.

I will offer one more observation about this picture, and sketch some of its implications, before I move on. This time, it is the figures' feet. Each figure plants one fully visible foot on the shore. (Indeed, the prominent feet are among the most solid-looking objects in the picture.) One of the woman's feet is hidden beneath her long skirt. The foot at the end of the man's long left leg is truncated and mostly hidden behind the boy's left leg. And the boy's right foot is a ghost—a transparent foot at the end of a solid trouser-leg. In these 1903

pictures Picasso uses a variety of techniques to mobilize a sense that reality and dream, matter and symbol, profane and sacred, line up—ambiguously—with solidity of paint and fullness of modeling and qualities of line. [29]

Note also that the feet are arranged in a conversation like that of their owners, but directed somewhat differently. The figures' faces turn into a center within the space of the painting, toward a point apparently located beyond the woman and before the man. The feet converge on a point outside the figures' circle, located on our side of the woman, because her right foot turns, a little strangely, along or even beyond her shoulder, so that it points out of the painting. In the directness of their meeting, as well as its outward-facing orientation, the conversation of the feet provides a contrast to the awkward encounter of their owners. The outward turn of that circle of feet is a move toward the beholder—an embrace that opens itself to you, addresses itself to you.

Fig. 8: Picasso, The Frugal Repast, 1904 (Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA)

Other paintings show limbs belonging to separate bodies acting in unison, and even against their owners. A well-known etching of 1904 called *The Frugal Repast* shows two café patrons sitting together (fig. 8). As in *Poor People on the Seashore*, their expressions, especially their eyes, make them seem introspective and, insofar as they are lost in their thoughts, isolated from one another—an impression that inflects the physical intimacy their pose evokes. I imagine that their ability to withdraw from one another, even within such an embrace, points either to a particularly deep, habitual closeness, or, on the other hand, to an alienation that remains undiminished by physical contact. (One might even conclude that those two types of embrace are more similar than they first seem: no matter how deep it runs, the implicit understanding between intimates is still a silence, with its own conditions and prohibitions.)

Now, look at the way their bodies are represented. The man's right arm is bounded by straight, nearly vertical lines, as are similar features of other figures. And as in those cases, the long, straight contour acts as an exaggerated expression of his thinness—so exaggerated as to seem like a given, a straight line determined *a priori*, in advance of and irrespective of his body and its volume. The straight contours of the arm (and for that matter, the torso beside it) suppress the effect of a body's volume, despite the minimal play of light and shadow that makes the bony shoulder project as much as it does. Compared with the very similar form of his companion's right arm, he seems like a shadow she has cast on the wall behind her. This would be another case of technique selectively distributing different levels of presence, physical and psychological, to persons and parts of persons—just as if they depended for their very selves on what their companions could impart. Maybe the shallow, empty, tipped-up bowl in front of them refers in some way to the man's lack of volume and commensurate lack of interiority. (One might see the bowl's void as a match for his eye, just as the bowl matched the eye of the man in *Blind Man's Meal*.)

In direct opposition to the straight and flattened silhouette of his right arm, her left arm and shoulder are inflated to an improbable size. The man's left hand helps cover up the anatomical anomaly. Moreover, resting on the woman's shoulder, the man's hand completes a circuit of four hands that extend themselves along the outer edges of the square defined on three sides by the woman's arms and along the top by the line of her shoulders and jaw. Against the distraction and disconnectedness of the two persons, the four hands seem alive and purposeful. The hands even pair off to face partners (top and left, upper right and lower right), forming two direct confrontations. It is as if the hands busily carry on the exchange the couple cannot begin, or can no longer sustain, between them. Further, that conversation takes place on the woman's body, around her full and powerfully modeled breasts. The lively asymmetry of her breasts and the movement of the hands on the square perimeter of her torso evoke the promise or recollection or need or waste of sexual, fecund life within her and between the two figures—a mode of life that neither of them so much as begins to express outside that square, unless the woman can be felt to look at the beholder in such a way as to intimate her awareness of or desire to release that hidden life. So again, since that mode of life reveals itself most directly in the independent actions of the autonomous hands, one is left to wonder whether the figures in the picture know of it, or whether Picasso has perhaps addressed it behind their backs, as it were, to the beholder—something like the baby's gesture in the *Two Sisters* or the puzzle of the boy's gesture in *Poor People on the Seashore*. In fact, since they sit in front of another meal of bread and wine, as did the man in *Blind Man's Meal*, Picasso may be attaching the same, double significance to their communion that we spoke of before. It may be their meal and also represent the prospect of their redemption. And, to the extent that the hands show something secret to us and to the extent that we are like the audience in

Carrière's *Theater of Belleville*, this communion may hold out the prospect of redemption for us, too.

But Picasso's drama of authority is not altogether like Carrière's. In fact, in March 1905, writing on the occasion of the show he had arranged for Picasso, Morice criticized some of Picasso's earlier work—work such as we have been seeing, from his so-called Blue period—by saying that they made Picasso seem to "enjoy sadness without sympathizing with it."[30] Given the salvific force Morice attached to the sympathetic attention of the theater-crowd, that is a quite literally damning charge he makes. Morice means to make up for it, though, by saying that he felt Picasso's more recent paintings showed his subjects in a more hopeful light. But I think Morice saw this difference between the Blue and Rose period works because he was missing the hints in Picasso's Blue-period figures, the ones I have been describing, the subtle indications of the possibility of redemption. And missing them amounts, on the account I am putting forward, to missing the point of Picasso's Blue period works altogether. Apollinaire responded to Morice's judgment in his *Revue immoraliste* the following month, writing:

> It has been said of Picasso that his works bear witness to a precocious disenchantment.
>
> I believe the contrary.[31]

Apollinaire goes on to say that Picasso is, rather, enchanted by every aspect of humanity and specifically by its versatility. He illustrates the point with an example:

> In Rome, at Carnival, there are some maskers (Harlequin, Colombine, or the *cuoca francese*) who in the morning, after an orgy sometimes ending with a murder, go to Saint Peter's to kiss the worn toe of the statue of the prince of the apostles.
>
> These are the beings who would enchant Picasso.[32]

In fact, Apollinaire represents Picasso as just such a figure, referring to a "mysticism that in Spain lies at the bottom of the least religious souls." Apollinaire supposes that Picasso is not religious, but believes that he must nevertheless retain "a refined veneration for Saint Teresa or Saint Isidore" (13).

Apollinaire's point is clearest, I think by contrast with Morice's popular theater-goers. Both writers describe divided people—people who live profane lives behind masks, lives that are transformed in moments by a redemptive sentiment conveyed to them by works of art (such as a play or a statue). Whereas Carrière's audience is redeemed from the soul-

numbing routine of ordinary care by their response to the power of the Passion play they witness, though, Apollinaire's revelers engage *spontaneously* in both crime and piety. I take him to mean that Picasso's people embody—they are themselves—both the oppressive force and the redemptive impulse. Rather than struggle for freedom from their circumstances or seek an external redeemer; they struggle with themselves. They represent the failure, or the incompleteness, of the authority we establish for ourselves, in ourselves. If Apollinaire's struggle with the confessional and Picasso's supposed vestigial cult of the saints are any indication, they, too, are blocked from authority.

But it is not just a matter of representing the dividedness of their subjects or of themselves. The divided impulse, the blocked or forgotten authority Apollinaire evokes, is also written into the mode of the pictures' address to their beholders. Morice admires an art that changes its audience unconditionally, completely—even if it only does so temporarily. Picasso, on the other hand, does not represent his audience; he turns his pictures outward, so to speak, to address to you their accusation (insofar as you recognize in yourself such indifference, such slavish submission to the drives and cares of ordinary, profane life) as well as their call (for sympathy, for transformation). Perhaps you will transform yourself completely like Morice's popular theater-goers and enter into a communion of sympathy with the baby in the *Two Sisters* or the child on the seashore. Or perhaps Picasso's paintings will elicit a divided response from you. By referring to such a divided response, I have the following in mind. One might compare the thing-like exteriority of the wraiths and golems in Picasso's Blue-period pictures with the thing-like quality, the objecthood, so to speak, of the painting. Or of a stage set, or a worn statue, or a mask, or a tiara, or a clay jug. An object suitable for your merely archaeological interest. On the other hand, the signs of life in those works, the as-it-were secret indications of emotional response, suggest the possibility of the beholder undergoing a transfiguration, of the kind, if not the degree, that Morice described in the popular theater-goers. These works are, one might say, in one sense counterfeit, in another divine; moreover, one might say that their divided nature is their theme, so that we are called on to acknowledge both of their aspects and hold them together—and not to overcome or bracket (except provisionally, momentarily) one in favor of the other. Perhaps the right response to Picasso's paintings is to see after all that they are "real, pretty false gods." I feel sure Apollinaire would want to insist further that we are, too.

NOTES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the Research and Academic Programs of the Clark Art Institute for a fellowship and the College of William and Mary for a research leave that allowed me to write the core of this essay and the book project from which it derives. I also want to express my deepest gratitude to the many friends, colleagues and students who have contributed to my thinking on these matters. Some of them who read and commented on this essay are thanked in the text, but I would also like to name Harry Cooper, Todd Cronan, Michael Fried, Herbert Kessler, Margaret MacNamidhe, Keith Moxey, James Rosenow and Nanette Salomon.

1. Steven Knapp, *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 114.

2. Knapp, 118, citing Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 17.

3. For a compact explanation of the deep conflict between those who think of "original" meaning as being the author(s)'s intention and those who think of it as being the way the text (or work, etc.) would have been understood in the context of its production, see Walter Benn Michaels, "A Defense of Old Originalism," *Western New England Law Review* 31 (2009): 21-37.

4. For an explanation of this argument, see Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (Summer 1982), 723-42, and Knapp and Michaels, "Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction," *Critical Inquiry* 14.1 (Autumn 1987): 49-68.

5. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman, The Documents of 20th Century Art, gen. ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Viking, 1972), 9 and n. 1, 476.

6. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, pref. F.C. Burkitt (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 401.

7. Lucien Laberthonnière, "Dogme et théologie," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 5 (1908), 511; cited in Gabriel Daly, O.S.A., "Theological and Philosophical Modernism" in Derrell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96.

8. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Zone," trans. Roger Shattuck, in *The Yale Anthology of Twentieth-Century French Poetry*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 7.

9. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, ed., trans., intro. and notes by Howard H. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998):

The whole book is basically an ethical inquiry into the concept of a revelation, into what it means to be called by a revelation, into how the one who has had a revelation relates himself to the human race, to the universal, and the rest of us to him, into the confusion the concept of a revelation suffers in our confused age. Or, what amounts to the same thing, the whole book is basically an inquiry into the concept of authority, what it means to have divine authority, into the confusion, so that the concept of authority has been completely forgotten in our confused age. ("Editor's Preface," 3-4)

See also Stanley Cavell, "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*" in *Must we mean what we say?*, 164 and passim. My understanding of Kierkegaard's study of Adler proceeds largely from my reading of Cavell's essay.

10. I'd like to thank Keith Moxey for sharing with me his "Mimesis and Iconoclasm," *Art History* 32.1 (February 2009): 52-77, and Nanette Salomon for recommending several readings to my attention, including John Roger Decker, "The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geergten tot Sint Jans: Manifestations of Soteriology in Material Culture" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2004).

11. Charles Morice, *Le Christ de Carrière* (Paris: Edition de la Libre Esthétique, 1899), 16-17.

Les mères qu'il nous montre à leur tendresse passionée mêlent souvent une sauvagerie d'amour qui fait songer à l'ardeur même de la terre dans ses invincibles expansions d'avril. On sent que, pour lui, les lignes sont visibles, à travers la mystérieuse atmosphère de la vie, qui rejoignent entre eux les êtres; pour lui, l'arabesque n'est pas interrompue qui fait des membres d'une famille un être unique, un tout harmonieux. On sent que ces bras maternels, où les enfants sont si étroitement serrés, ne dénoueront jamais complètement leur étreint. Je sais telle mère endormie, tenant son enfant dans ses bras; le sommeil n'a pas effacé des traits la pensée elle-même, la préoccupation vigilante, l'inquiétude; le sentiment s'y est fixé dans comme une attente du réveil qui ne tardera pas,—et la main qui tient le petit corps serré ne s'est pas endormie. L'enfant reste corporellement uni à la mère; il vient d'elle comme elle va à lui et la ligne des deux formes est unique; unique

aussi la ligne des pensées et des sentiments à travers les divers états de veille et de sommeil, d'angoisse ou d'apaisement.—L'artiste a-t-il voulu précisément marquer sur ce visage les sollicitudes maternelles, la terreur constante et instante des mille dangers qui menacent le petit être? Elle y est, cette sollicitude, cette terreur et avec bien d'autres secrètes complications, avec tout ce qui échappe à l'analyse, avec l'indécomposable synthèse de toute la vie elle-même, avec les graves et les légères, avec les prostrantes et les consolantes péripéties qui concertent ce drame religieux de la Maternité.

Religieux, ai-je dit. Oui, et inévitablement nous sommes amenés à proférer ce mot, à propos de l'art de Carrière. Les maternités qu'il retrace avec tant d'amour et de vénération ont tout l'auguste caractère des saintes familles traditionnelles.

12. Morice 1899, 18-19.

Je vois bien qu'un tel art est religieux. Je ne vois pas qu'il soit chrétien. Et quelle est donc sa religion?—La Religion de la Vie—ou, si vous préférez, le culte de l'humanité, dans l'Infini.

13. Morice 1899, 23.

Ce Christ est humain, et cette femme qui le pleure n'a pas de surhumains recours… Je me trompe: il est divin, de toute la beauté de son sacrifice. Elle est divine aussi, parce que sa douleur est sans bornes.—Cet homme n'est pas un malfaiteur, son visage est noble et la couronne d'épines atteste sa royauté. C'est un sacrifié. Celle qui pleure sur lui pleure sur une victime, non pas sur un coupable.—Quoi! Un innocent sacrifié! Oui, et il célèbre et consacre par sa mort volontaire cette loi éternelle de la nécessité des sacrifices purs.—Ah! je veux bien que ce tableau soit un tableau d'église: le tableau votif de l'église future où l'humanité célèbra les rites du culte de l'idéal, ce fond immuable, éternel, de toutes les changeantes religions.

Et cette église, quelle sera-t-elle?

14. Pope Saint Pius X, *Pascendi dominici gregis: Encyclical of Pope Pius X on the Doctrines of the Modernists, September 8, 1907* in *The Papal Encyclicals*, vol. III *1903-1939*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, NC: McGrath, 1981), 73-74, § 8.

15. Morice 1899, 23-24.

Je me rappelle, devant celui-ci, un autre tableau de Carrière: ce *Théâtre populaire*, exposé au Champ-de-Mars, il y a quatre ans, et qu'on vit à Bruxelles deux années plus tard.—Le théâtre, dans les faubourgs, est un des lieux du monde où l'on puisse le mieux étudier sur les visages l'expression des émotions.—On ricane souvent, dans les théâtres mondains, et quelquefois on pleurniche; mais dans le faubourg ouvrier on rit et on pleure franchement. Avec le rideau qui se lève, le visage du spectateur naïf se dépouille des grimaces empruntées; tout à l'heure, c'était un employé, un commis, et la livrée de son métier infligeait à sa physionomie et à son attitude quelque chose de conventionnel. Mais le drame commence, et, devant ce débat d'amour et de haine, le commis et l'employé sont devenus des hommes. Peu importe, n'est-ce pas, la valeur littéraire de la pièce; les gens qui sont là n'y entendent point malice, et c'est de la Vie qu'il s'agit pour eux, de la Vie et de la Mort. C'est dans sa propre âme, exaltée par un instant d'héroïsme ou de douleur (d'abnégation personnelle aussi, car elle ne craint point pour elle-même), que cette foule humaine regarde. Tout à l'heure, quand le rideau sera retombé sur la scène, banalités et vulgarités retomberont aussi sur cette âme. Mais maintenant les attitudes ont une singulière noblesse. Il y a de ces corps, demi-penchées sur le gouffre invisible de la scène, qui semblent des cariatides antiques supportant un poids vénérable avec leurs mains crispées aux balustres.

16. Morice's reading of Carrière clearly engages absorptive themes such as those Michael Fried has traced, beginning with his *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980). This is not the proper place to work out the relation of absorptive motifs to the issue of authority, but I believe there is such a meaningful relation.

17. Morice 1899, 24.

Et que voit-elle donc, cette foule, sur cette scène, ou plutôt dans son âme? Et que parlais-je, tout à l'heure, de la valeur littéraire de la pièce? Il est vrai, jusqu'ici le Peintre nous avait caché le drame. Mais enfin, le voici! C'est, n'en doutez pas, ce dialogue sublime du dévouement héroïque et de la douleur inconsolable,—c'est ce Christ en croix, ce Christ humain, plus grand qu'un Dieu! Car le Dieu sait qu'en mourant il sauve le monde, et l'homme n'a pas de certitude. Sa dernière pensée, son affreuse dernière pensée a été, peut-être, une conviction, désespérée de l'inutilité de son sacrifice.

Voilà—c'est la tragédie suprême de notre destinée—ce que cette foule regard, et voilà pourquoi cette foule est si grande. Elle participe de ses larmes à la sanglante effusion d'un holocauste qui est aussi une apothéose, et elle s'élève au-dessus d'elle-même de par la noblesse que lui confère l'intensité du drame. Elle a cédé au conseil du poète, et de toutes ces âmes une âme, une conscience collective s'est formée, qui s'exalte et s'extasie, avec le douloureux héros, à la joie du sacrifice.

18. Letter from Eugène Carrière to Charles Morice, dated September 3, 1899, Charles Morice archives, Temple University, box 3, folder 8. On Carrière's paintings, and Morice's remarks on them, see *Eugène Carrière: 1849-1906* (exh. cat., Musées de Strasbourg, Ancienne Douane, Strasbourg, October 19, 1996-February 9, 1997), 134, 149.

[19.] It makes sense to place these pictures in a kind of subgenre, well represented among Catalan modernists, of representations of poverty and injustice. See, for instance, Pool, n.p., remarks accompanying figs. 53-84 and passim, and Patricia Leighten, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). And I am sure the works of artists like Isidre Nonell form an important background, or one of them, against which Picasso meant his paintings to be seen. But Picasso's major paintings of the early years of the twentieth century have more to say, too.

This is probably also the best place to point out that, although I'll use the terms "Blue Period" and "Rose Period" in referring to Picasso's early work, I don't find the terms very helpful. In fact, I feel they misidentify the important features of Picasso's early work (the dominant colors aren't the keys to understanding these works) and tempt one to see the discontinuity between the two phases as absolute. Still, and partly because one matter at issue between Morice and Apollinaire is how to describe the difference between the two sets of pictures, I'll use the terms in this essay. I urge the reader not to take them too seriously.

[20.] See Baldassari, "Picasso 1901-1906," as below.

[21.] This is also suggested in at least one preparatory drawing.

[22.] Letter to Max Jacob, [July] 1902, reproduced and transcribed in "La correspondance Max Jacob – Picasso," *Max Jacob et Picasso* (ex. cat., Musée des Beaux-Art, Quimper and Musée Picasso, Paris, 1994), 9.

[23.] See John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 1, The Early Years, 1881-1906, with the collaboration of Marilyn McCully (New York: Random House, 1991), 222-24. Anne Baldassari discusses possible sources for the picture that would confirm either its connection with the Visitation or with sacred (and specifically Mariological) subject-matter generally. She notes the suggestion (which she attributes to both Pierre Daix and John Richardson) that *Two Sisters* is based on an El Greco *Visitation* (ca. 1613-14, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, Washington, DC) that Picasso could plausibly have seen. She also points out similarities to two paintings by Domenico Ghirlandaio that are in Picasso's collection of photographic reproductions: the *Birth of St. John the Baptist* in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, and Ghirlandaio's own *Visitation*. Baldassari claims that these pictures, and a less well known and widely reproduced work of which Picasso owned a photograph, El Greco's *Christ Bidding His Mother Farewell* (now in the Museo de Santa Cruz) that may also offer a direct source of the *Two Sisters*, are part of a diffuse network of pictorial sources that pop up in mixed parts throughout the works of the so-called Blue Period. The sources Baldassari discusses are sometimes provocative and sometimes compelling, and taken together and in combination with other writers' parallel claims leave little doubt that sacred subjects are intended resonances for Picasso's work of this period. See Anne Baldassari, "Picasso 1901-1906: Painting in the Mirror of the Photograph" in Dorothy Kosinski, *The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso* (ex. cat., Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas/Yale University Press, 1999), 297-99 and passim. Elizabeth Cowling offers a nice review of the parallels between Picasso's paintings of this period and religious works. She notes Picasso's proximity to a lively Catholic revival and represents his rejection of Catholicism as ambivalent (as does Apollinaire). See Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 98-99.

[24.] See Michael Leja, "'Le vieux marcheur' and 'les deux risques': Picasso, Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Maternity, 1899-1907," *Art History* 8, no. 1 (March 1985), 66-81.

[25.] I thank Harry Cooper for pointing out to me the similarity of the bowl and the eye socket.

[26.] Meyer Schapiro notes a similar parallel between the poses of two figures who perform very different activities. See his remarks on the drawing for *Woman with a Fan* (1905; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College) and its relation to *La Toilette* (1906; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y.) in his "Picasso's *Woman with a Fan*: On Transformation and Self-Transformation" in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: George Braziller, 1979), 115-16. Schapiro's point is that the gestures Picasso's figures perform, and the tensions they open up between touching and seeing, reveal them as "projection[s] of a duality in the artist's self" (116) that is repeatedly embodied in "a vigorous, urgent, unrelaxing, imaginative play of two great powers: seeing and manipulation, the strong forces of they eye and the hand, both demonically alert, the one to singularities and concurrences of form in the work of art, and the other to the potentialities of the instruments and the materials as thoroughly plastic and submissive—the grounds of a perpetual passage from the natural to the artistic and from the artistic to the natural" (117). He also sees this duality in terms that foreshadow my argument, if somewhat vaguely, when he contrasts the "self-binding posture" of Picasso in a Man Ray photograph of 1935 (which he compares to closed-up figures of the Blue Period) with the "penetrating eyes and with the strong hands of a preternatural power of manipulation" (118). I hesitate to follow Schapiro in seeing such figures as generally allegorizing the painter's work (116) or to accept at face value his characterization of the difference between poses of the "Blue" and "Rose" Periods (114).

[27.] Note that the pose of the boy repeats in some respects that of another painting, which may be earlier and may even have been included in the 1902 show Morice reviewed. See Pierre Daix and Georges Boudaille with Joan Rossalet, *Picasso: The*

Blue and Rose Periods, second ed., trans. Phoebe Pool (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1967), 206 and 212, cat. No. VII. 21.

[28.] Referring to the blind man's gesture, Brigitte Léal says: "This liturgical gesture comes close to the religious compositions of Spain's Golden Age in the seventeenth century, such as Velázquez's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*." (See Brigitte Léal, Christine Piot, Marie-Laure Bernadac, *The Ultimate Picasso*, pref. Jean Leymarie, trans. Molly Stevens and Marjolijn de Jager [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000], 60.) I think the boy's outstretched hand also bears a striking resemblance—both in its position and in its relation to the body of his adult companion—to Christ's hand in El Greco's *St. Joseph with the Christ Child* (ca. 1597-99; Capilla de San José, Toledo, Spain), which Ronald Johnson says Picasso knew, at least by 1906. (See Ron Johnson, "Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' and the Theatre of the Absurd," *Arts Magazine* 55.2 [October 1980], 107.)

[29.] In this, Picasso's work of this period bears a strong resemblance to Gauguin's, whom he admired and whose work he knew. On this topic, see Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000). As Silverman explains, building on brief remarks by Reinhold Heller, Gauguin used thin, matte paint surfaces to picture a spiritualized reality—"to weaken materiality of its hold on consciousness, to invert outer and inner reality, and to repudiate the penetrative, entangling encounter with the embedded stuffs of nature in favor of a transcendent, divinized abstraction" (112). See also Heller, "Concerning Symbolism and the Structure of Surface," *Art Journal* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1985), esp. 148-49.

[30.] Charles Morice, "Art moderne: Exposition d'oeuvres de MM. Trachsel, Gérardin, Picasso (Galeries Serrurier, 37, boulevard Haussmann)," in Pierre Daix, Georges Boudaille, *Picasso: 1900-1906*, 335; originally published in the *Mercure de France* (15 mars 1905). My translation.

[31.] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Picasso, peintre et dessinateur (Galeries Serrurier)," in Daix and Boudaille, 335; originally published in *La Revue immoraliste* (avril 1905). My translation.

[32.] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Picasso, Painter and Draftsman" in Apollinaire 1972, 13.

Charles Palermo's two current research projects are an account of the importance of authority in the work of Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire before cubism and inheritance as a metaphor for understanding in and around photography, from Peter Henry Emerson to Douglas Gordon. His *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miro in the 1920s* (2008) appeared in Penn State University Press' Refiguring Modernism series. He has spoken and published on Cézanne, cubism, Michel Leiris, Picasso, Apollinaire, Eugène Carrière, P.H. Emerson, Eugene and Aileen Smith, and James Agee's and Walker Evans's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

REVIEWS

MYSTERIOUS EXCHANGE: ON SUSAN SIDLAUSKAS'S *CÉZANNE'S OTHER: THE PORTRAITS OF HORTENSE*

TODD CRONAN

Paul Cézanne famously observed to Joachim Gasquet that "The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness." "Nature is on the inside," Cézanne further reflected. He clearly felt landscape painters before him were insufficiently responsive to—too detached from—the natural world and he hoped to break down the barriers that separated observer from the observed. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on and around Cézanne are perhaps the most well-known account of the artist's projection of "lived perspective" into his work. As Merleau-Ponty put it, "my body is a thing among other things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing….Things are an annex or prolongation of itself."[1] The painter's wife, Hortense Fiquet, suggestively spoke of the artist "germinating" with the landscape, thereby announcing a connection between painter and world closer than any previously conceived. The relatively mild language of germination emerges in Susan Sidlauskas's account as an intimacy more intense than any vegetal metaphor.

The register Sidlauskas prefers derives from family relations, or rather *blood ties*. "I can't tear my eyes away, they're so tightly glued to the point I am looking at that it seems to me they are going to bleed," she quotes Cézanne saying in the introduction (16). It stands as a crucial statement of his expressive concerns. Cézanne feels his world so passionately that blood is exchanged in the transaction.

In *Cézanne's Other: The Portraits of Hortense*, Sidlauskas takes the "fusion-model" of Cézanne, as I will call it, to its limit. Marshalling an astonishing array of nineteenth century "materialist" thinkers—including Hippolyte Taine, Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer, Wilhelm Wundt, Théodule Ribot, Paul Souriau, James Sully, Charles Darwin, Otto Weininger, and William James—in tandem with contemporary neuroscientists and affect theorists—including Robert Gordon, Nicholas Baume, Eve Sedgewick, Rei Terada, Joseph Le Doux, Dylan Evans, Antonio Damasio and Drew Leder—Sidlauskas builds a picture of the artist as reciprocally bound to and defined by the object of his regard, and that object, the one most affectively charged, was Hortense. While earlier studies have "emphasized the painter's isolation and his fear of, and estrangement from, his subjects"—which Sidlauskas collects under the banner of formalist abstraction—her alternative model "depends on recognizing the role of reciprocity…a sensuous and perceptual *engagement* in the presence of the other" (9). Nonetheless, as I will show, reciprocity—a concept that acknowledges and preserves the difference between self and other—sits uncomfortably alongside a language of merger, commingling, hallucination, melding, ingestion, blurring, dissolution, and fusion.[2] The title of the final chapter—"Toward an Ideal: Dissolving Difference"—aptly characterizes the author's claims.

Sidlauskas's account is historically grounded in the new psychological theories of the self that were being elaborated and developed throughout Cézanne's lifetime. According to Ribot, the human being is "*un tout de coalition*," the self a "complexus" so intricate that to analyze it was to "'disjoin groups of phenomena which are not juxtaposed but co-ordinated, their being that mutual dependence, not of simple simultaneousness'" (78). Sidlauskas observes the wide consensus at the time that "people *are* their sensations" (61), which rendered any notion of deep interiority obsolete. Cézanne was a sensusalist; he made no hard distinction between body and soul. "I like muscles, beautiful colors, blood. I am like Taine…I am a sensualist," he told Gasquet (82). It was this material self that further rendered obsolete positivist efforts to classify and disarticulate the variable life of emotions; rather than stable and fixed, emotions are equivocal, mobile, and continuous. Contemporary scientific and literary theorists join their nineteenth-century counterparts in affirming the "fluidity of subjecthood" (87). In Sidlauskas's account this fluidity is primarily constituted on the level of color (chapter 2) and touch (chapter 3), both of which function in Cézanne's work to disrupt mimetically enforced

categories of inside and outside, surface and depth, self and other, male and female (chapter 4).

Sidlauskas's appeal to historical and contemporary sciences to understand Cézanne's project is further combined with an analysis of the artist's relation to the Flemish and Venetian pictorial traditions he admired. Cézanne's "method," Sidlauskas writes, "depended in part on the conviction that an imagined, bodily fusion with those [color] effects [generated by the Venetian masters] would produce a more authentic, potent representation." Sidlauskas describes how Cézanne "felt the boundaries between self and other dissolve" before the Venetian masters; his "sense of fusion between himself and his *motif*" was so direct that it literally disturbed him, his sitters, and his critics (64).

Nonetheless, Cézanne's connection with the past might complicate the scientific analysis of the emotions. That is to say, the representation of the emotions might be conceived as a historically changing and normatively grounded phenomenon and therefore beyond the limits of trans-historical claims regarding the nature of the emotions. Sidlauskas observes this difference when she notes that "possessing a body is not enough: *representation* is the necessary precursor to emotions" (64). Indeed, Sidlauskas goes on to cite "Derrida" to the effect that "We are not ourselves without representations that mediate us, and it is through those representations that emotions get felt" (64). The reference is actually to Terada's rather peculiar gloss of Derrida. The phrasing of the quote suggests that Derrida intended to conflate representations *with* sensations. It would be more accurate to say that sensations only mean from within a representational context. Merleau-Ponty, for instance (one of Sidlauskas' key sources), made explicit this distinction between sensations and representations stressing and preserving the difference between affects and their (bodily) reflection: "the originator [emotions] is not primary in the empiricist sense and the originated [representation] is not simply derived from it, since it is through the originated that the originator is made manifest."[3] For Sidlauskas, on the other hand, everything is empirically constituted. Emotions are constituted *in* color and touch. Thus the title of chapter two, "The Color of Emotion," is to be taken literally. Emotions *are* colors and vice versa (this identity is what Cézanne discovers in the Flemish and Venetian masters). While Cézanne took little interest in the "complex narratives and allegories of his predecessors" and abandoned the pursuit of mimesis itself, "he did seek a way to capture the emotional grandeur and intensity of their color effects" (64). Cézanne's assault on mimetic forms of representation did not lead him to take up an alternative (such as abstraction), but rather to subsume representation altogether under an interest in eliciting affect. Representation *is* an affective property in Sidlauskas' account, what she describes as the "ascendency of color [and touch] as an agent of meaning" (100). Which is to say *representation itself is conceived as a material agent*, one that *produces* meaning,

rather than an expression of it. On this account Cézanne does not express his feelings about Hortense in paint, but rather Cézanne and Hortense are themselves constituted by color and touch. And when Sidlauskas writes of the "end of interiority in portraiture," that inner life resurfaces as the agency of the painter's materials (100).

If the agency of color replaces the agency of the artist or the sitter, then what the portraits of Hortense show is a liveliness more animate than any mimetic representation could produce. Indeed, Sidlauskas's account focuses in detail on Cézanne's "metaphors of ingestion," of his "physically absorbing" colors (64, 82), and of the total identification between the painter and his subjects. Above all, Gasquet provides a vitalist language that best captures Cézanne's affective forms:

> Gasquet recorded Cézanne's conception of the visceral and mental exchange that occurred between Henri and himself as he proceeded with the portrait. The bodies of the painter and his subject—along with their vital fluids, fleeting thoughts, experiences, states of mind, and abiding temperaments—seemed somehow absorbed and merged through a reciprocity in which the portrait subject commingled with the artist's persona, while being reprojected through paint. This heightened, almost hallucinatory, engagement is completely consistent with Cézanne's defiance of the subject-object divide in anything he painted—whether a sugar bowl, a mountain, or a peasant. However, the painter's sympathy with a known, living subject seemed to enhance considerably the sensation of *mutual* exchange. (83)

The merger ideal is further literalized as a mode of blood exchange:

> "I feel," Cézanne reportedly said to Henri's son, Joachim, as he was working on the father's portrait, that "with each brush stroke I gave it, there's a little of my blood mixed with a little of your father's blood, in the sun, in the light, in the color, and that there is a mysterious exchange, which he isn't aware of, which goes from his soul into my eye which recreates it and where he will recognize himself." (83)

Sidlauskas's own rich, even lavish descriptions–some of the best available–often turn on the identification of representation with transfusion. She observes "areas of blood-red pigment pool in the lower lip and the nostril's interior; in the fluted collar of the blouse; and along the edge of the neck (the same deep red that is dispersed around the Musée Granet portrait, to disturbing effect)" (90). While Sidlauskas clearly signals the impossibility of, or imaginative

nature of Cézanne's putative effort to dissolve difference–"the boundaries of gender…could not, finally, be eclipsed" (183)–it is a basic assumption of the text that dissolution was the painter's central ambition. While Cézanne's early palette-knife works might suggest such an intensive effort to dissolve difference, the very violence of that early imagery suggests its impossibility or even undesireability.

It is precisely the sense of the painter's desire to sustain or *acknowledge difference* that marks one of the central claims of the modernist tradition from Roger Fry, to Henri Matisse, to Fritz Novotny, to Kurt Badt, to Clement Greenberg. Consider, for instance, Samuel Beckett's remarks on Cézanne, which perhaps stand at the farthest remove from the "fusion-model" offered by Sidlauskas. "What I feel in Cézanne," he wrote, "is precisely the absence of a rapport that was all right for…Ruysdael for whom the animizing mode was valid, but would have been fake for him, because he had the sense of his incommensurability not only with life of such a different order as landscape, but even with life of his own order, even with the life…operative in himself."[4] While we might share Sidlauskas's dissatisfactions with the strongest claims of the "inhumanist" tradition, nonetheless these writers grasp something essential about the work: That to deny difference is to "fake" connection. One way to stay true to the modernist sense of the "abstract" qualities of the work is to say that any connection between painter and world is only really a connection if it acknowleges and ratifies difference (of the medium, of the other, of the world, even, as Beckett suggests, of oneself to oneself). If the artist did not preserve difference, preserve a sense of the limitations of being human, no meaningful connection with the world could ever occur.

NOTES

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 125. Cited in Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other*, 243.

2. It should be clear that Michael Fried's historical analysis of absorption and theatricality in the period between Chardin and Courbet has little place in Sidlauskas's account. That is, despite the recurrent references to Merleau-Ponty and to notions of absorption and merger, no reference is made to Fried's writings on this topic. This omission might nonetheless be justified as Sidlauskas and Fried are pursuing different understandings of the absorptive ideal. Fried's account of absorption is a historically and normatively framed problem; it is never available to literal or essential modes of analysis (no work is essentially absorptive or theatrical). Further still, as absorption has no essence, scientific or affective accounts cannot get any special purchase on it.

3. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 394. I owe this citation to Michael Schreyach. For an excellent discussion (or excavation) of the undervalued cognitive and representational aspects of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy see J. C. Berendzen, "Coping Without Foundations: On Dreyfus's Use of Merleau-Ponty," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 18:5 (2010): 629-49. See also, Todd Cronan, "Merleau-Ponty, Santayana, and the Paradoxes of Animal Faith," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18, No. 3 (2010): 487–506.

4. Samuel Beckett, quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove, 1996), 188.

Todd Cronan is Assistant Professor of art history at Emory University. He is the author of *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013); *Matisse* for Phaidon (2015); and articles on Brecht, Merleau-Ponty, Santayana, Simmel, Valéry and Richard Neutra. He is currently at work on two book projects. The first, *Seeing Photographically: Photographic Ontology and the Problem of Audience*, looks at photographic debates around the concept of "previsualization" from Alfred Stieglitz to Minor White including new considerations of the work of Weston, Adams, Callahan and Siskind. The second project, *Art at the End of History: Painting/Photography/Architecture/Theater/Film in the 1920s*, examines the claims and results of a vision of art after modernization had achieved its ends. At the center of the latter are the intense debates over which artistic medium was thought to best express the realities of a post-historical world.

nonsite.org is an online, open access, peer-reviewed quarterly journal of scholarship in the arts and humanities affiliated with Emory College of Arts and Sciences. ISSN 2164-1668.

NONSITE.ORG IS AN ONLINE, OPEN ACCESS, PEER-REVIEWED QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SCHOLARSHIP IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES
NONSITE.ORG IS AFFILIATED WITH EMORY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

ISSN 2164-1668