

**From Sight to Site:
Some Considerations Regarding Contemporary Theory in
Relation to Contemporary Art**

by

**Bruce W. Ferguson
Graduate Program in Communications
McGill University, Montreal
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(c.) Bruce W. Ferguson

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ABSTRACT:

The thesis is organized in two chapters which comprise major arguments concerning the relation between recent aesthetic theory and contemporary art. The third axis of argument is internal, and is to be found in a writing style which deliberately distinguishes itself from a normative academic procedure. This form is a dialectical method which owes much to the debate traced in the two chapters themselves and which attempts to preserve the forceful spirit of their content.

The first Chapter outlines some historical moments and some of the important effects of recent aesthetic theory, particularly the "language paradigm", as it has entered into both art historical discourse and the practice of art criticism in recent decades. It also investigates some traditions and consequences of modern art's reciprocal impact on theory.

Chapter Two offers a reading of *The Eiffel Tower*, an essay by Roland Barthes, which is taken to be symptomatic of the use of the language paradigm for aesthetics and contemporary art. Chapter Two is also informed by a consideration of Martin Jay's essay *In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in 20th Century Thought* which is being taken to be symptomatic of the kinds of claims made for contemporary theory in relation to art. The analysis will show that such claims are often overextended because they are still formulated within assumptions of radicality which are textually constrained, rather than from a criticality which is historically or materially situated.

RESUME

Cette these consiste en deux chapitres qui portent sur la relation entre les recentes theories esthetiques et l'art contemporain. Le troisieme axe de la problematique se trouve incarne dans le style meme de l'ecriture qui defit le genre d'ecriture dit academique. Cette forme est une methode dialectique qui s'inspire du debat meme retrace dans les deux chapitres et qui s'efforce d'en preserver toute sa force et sa viqueur.

Le premier chapitre decrit les moments charnieres des recentes decennies telle l'importance des recentes theories esthetiques,et en particulier l'insertion du paradigme linguistique dans le discours et la pratique de la critique de l'art. L'influence reciproque de l'art moderne sur les theories contemporaines y est aussi explore.

Le deuxieme chapitre presente une analyse d'un essai de Roland Barthes qui illustre bien l'usage du paradigme linguistique dans l'esthetique de l'art contemporain. L'analyse du deuxieme chapitre repose sur un essai de Martin Jay *"In the Empire of the Gaze,: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in 20th Century Thought"* qui est porteur des revendications de la theorie contemporaine sur l'expression artistique. Cette analyse demontre que de telles demandes sont souvent exessives parce qu'elles sont formulees avec des presuppositions non justifiees d'etres radicales plutot que de decouler d'une critique qui est situe historiquement et materialement.

PREFACE:

A few words of explanation are probably in order to orient the reader to some deviations from a traditional academic writing style. At the core of this thesis is a relation between art and theory; a relation which, I will argue, has continuing and reciprocal importance for each. But it is a relation which is always special or problematic in the modern period. Simply put, as words are not things and as things are not words, the relation is always one of gaps, differences, deviations, inconsistencies and dissonances, despite attempts to subsume them under homogenous categories. As both modern art (Cubism, Orphism, Simultanism, Vorticism, Futurism, Imagism, Synchronism, Amorphism, Unism, Dadaism, Surrealism, ad infinitum) and modern theory (New Criticism, Formalism, [post]Structuralism[s]) have been distinguished by self-reflexive considerations of form, the modern relation between the visual arts and the textual arts is continually reaffirmed as one which is ever more anxious. Art and theory do not serve each other easily. In theory per se, from the Saussurian liberation of the signified from the signifier which leads powerfully and circuitously to the Derridean grammatological *aporia*, this distress has increasingly become the troubled form as well as the troubled content of textual speculation. As questions of agency, authorship and history have all been put into question by deconstructing inquiries into writing and language, it seems desirable in this thesis to attend to their importance at more than a surface level. In order to take account of these compelling features of art, literature and theory I have written a text which attempts to internalize some of those effective methods while simultaneously writing about them.

The writing here intends to preserve the insecurity and unease for the dialectic that theory and art initiate, rather than trying to capture one by the other or by trying to achieve an unnecessary and questionable hierarchy. To this end I have written a text which is distinguished by the traditional modernist method of collage/montage in its use of quotes and typographical differences within the main corpus. I have also made extensive use of brackets to interrupt my (bourgeois) "chain of signifiers" (and the train of thought in a sentence or a paragraph) in order to immediately question the authoritative sense which subtends the printed word. This deliberately frustrating method is meant to remind a reader of the alternatives, variations and potentials for other readings at the time of reading, rather than deferring assessment until later.

The self-effacement or self-problematizing of the text, seems to me to be both stylistically coherent with the content of the thesis and, more importantly, reflective of the (qualified) conclusions towards which I am increasingly drawn in the thesis. The footnotes accompany the phrases to which they refer, usually on the same page. As they are sometimes extensive and as they sometimes tend to physically overwhelm the standard text itself, the reader will recognize them as a part of the same strategy of textual (and visual) disorientation. This method, which originates in both modern art (Picasso, for example) and modern literature (Lewis Carroll's cubist spaces in *Alice in the Looking-Glass*, for example), and is its distinguishing trope, is used similarly (but relatively conservatively) here to "defamiliarize" or "make strange" the thesis itself at the time of the act of reading it. The use of both tangential and quintessential quotes and footnotes as both graphic and textual interruptions are an attempt to establish a strong internal resonance

with the material under consideration in the content. This textual self-reflexivity is aimed at recovery of the tension between theory and art which informs the thesis.

The footnotes in Chapter Two are particularly elaborate and provide a kind of (occasionally) hyperbolized rhetoric unto themselves. This latter excess is intended to act provocatively to include examples from art and theory, especially Canadian, which are not normally considered within the canonical formations of either modern art or theory in a more emphasized manner than in the earlier parts of the text. (Although, this attack or insinuation from the margins is a feature of the whole work). If footnotes' relation to a text can be considered analogically in the way that the unconscious is structured in relation to the conscious, then these 'secondary' notes in this section particularly act as the return of the repressed. They play an important (dual) role as part of the generating impulse to retain a certain destabilizing format throughout the text by use of graphic mismatching and counterpoint as well as acting as the authority or "permissions" to the thesis.

Otherwise, the text proceeds in the following manner. An introduction to Chapter One outlines the various assumptions which guide the inquiry. As well, it introduces a cautionary note with regard to the project and to the problems associated with writing and language itself which compound the difficulty of the work.

In Chapter One the following claims are made in the following order:

1.1 That the "language paradigm" has infected, for example, the discipline of art history and, thus, has affected traditional methodologies.

1.2 That art history's subject itself has shifted and blurred as a result of this intrusion just as the subject of other disciplines is similarly in crisis.

1.3 That there are are situated institutional and social and political stakes involved in a paradigm shift of this nature.

2.1 That art-critical periodicals have also been infected by the "language paradigm" which affects critical methodologies.

2.2 That the objects of critical attention have also been shifted and blurred as a consequence of the introduction of cultural-linguistic studies.

2.3 That there are situated institutional and social and political stakes involved when this paradigm shift occurs.

3.1 That art is at the center of much critical writing as a priveleged subject throughout the modern and postmodern periods.

3.2 That the critical text is also blurred and made vulnerable by the de-centering of the art object itself; and that theory and art are less autonomous in their relation to one another also as a result of the practices of artists.

3.3 That theory is often also put forward by artists in both textual and other material forms and that these artistic practices have a dynamic which is directed both toward and away from professional theory per se but whose importance establishes a reciprocity between the two.

In Chapter Two a close reading of the text by Roland Barthes is written which attends to his own (and others) claims for his work by putting it in relation to other texts (including his own) which confound his text

considerably. As well, specific attention is paid to the a larger notion of "anti-
visuality" as propounded and elaborated by Martin Jay in order to both
question its assumptions and to draw it away from a purely Continental
discourse by inclusions of other applicable critical approaches. This aspect of
my work, as in the entire thesis, is informed by re-readings of Marshall
McLuhan and his influences to suggest a North American difference with
long-standing and significant importance to such a debate. The second chapter
is also an attempt to propose and, in many ways, realize a critical practice
which could take much from Continental theory at the level of **writing** per se
while simultaneously re-situating its aesthetic implications and objects in a
more effective and situated historical position.

CHAPTER ONE: THREE HISTORIES OF INFLUENCE

INTRODUCTION:

The introduction to follow is directly influenced by considerations of contemporary critical activity; in particular, the recent, but not exclusive, advent of structuralism(s) and post-structuralism(s) to the field of 'art' (and some occasions of the reverse). That is; the arrival and reception of one discourse into another¹, where discourse is taken to mean "the ways of speaking, the rules and procedures that govern the production of verbal and non-verbal signs around an object or event" (Foucault, 1971). I will trace some of the shadows (verbo-centric in most cases) of so-called theory (a loose geonoun for a wide variety of texts which form a kind of split discourse variously called French or Critical, or more popularly, Continental²) as it

¹ The collision of this theoretical field could be traced in other disciplines or sub-disciplines; "folk art" for instance ie. Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1968, in which "relational" aspects of architecture are grouped in a systematized cultural ethnography distanced from the (humanistic) "folk" of earlier studies, or in Michael Kerr's "Chronic Anxiety and Defining a Self", *The Atlantic Monthly*, Volume 262, No. 2, September, 1988, p.35-58 in which a "family systems therapy" is described in which treatment is applied to "each human being not as an autonomous psychological entity but as part of a larger web of relationships", for another use of the anti-individual and structural approach which has spread into many areas of inquiry with and without a relation to Continental Theory directly, but where triangulation is the key method of abstraction. A popular semiotic version is Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1983, 272 p. For the linguistic paradigm's use (structuralism) through psychoanalytic insight, for instance, a complex reading is Michael Pierssens', *The Power of Babel: A Study of Logophilia*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1980, in which Mallarme, de Sausurre, Roussel, Wolfson and Brisset are brought together as singular "breaks" from the universe of language. Not incidentally for me, Pierssens's book is a model of art and theory's equal relevance to one another under the larger rubric of "fiction". For a 'clean' transliteration of literary structuralism's methods to another object, see John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television*, Methuen, 1978

² I am using these terms rather loosely as my 'field' is not a frozen or specific one and the terms themselves are debateable (Bottomore, 1984, Geuss, 1981). (Foucault, for instance, protests his inclusion as a structuralist as does Merleau-Ponty, whereas other writers include both of them under that term, at great length of argument). What they can have in common, however, has been specified by Charles Levin, for instance, in "Baudrillard, Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 8, Nos. 1-2, Montreal, 1984, p.35-52 where he writes "What is interesting about critical theory and structuralism (at least in the medium of Baudrillard) is the dilation of their theories of the object" and he goes

seeps into an older discourse, that of art. At one point, I will also reverse the procedure and highlight the remnants of (modernist) art deeply invested in the work of critical (post) structuralism(s).

It is traditional to think of theory as a discourse but it is not quite so usual (yet) to think of art as a discourse except within the specialized area of the sociology of art. In inscribing art as a discourse or as one of Wittgenstein's "language games"¹, I am then also taking 'art' to be a changeable construction of networks of persons, institutions, ideas, values, texts (and other empirical objects) which constitute what is consensually referred to as a discourse (a tradition of articulated bodies of appearances - a [temporarily] coherent semiological field). The advantage of this, which I hope will become clear, is that theory can be seen to have some of the qualities which are normally

on to show how the abstracting tendencies of both are overcome by Baudrillard's "doubt". I will continue to use the terms loosely but in relation to specific sorts of objects (works of art) in order to reinvestigate their usefulness as critical tools. Anthony Giddens, in a critique of Raymond Williams, has mentioned two other philosophical traditions which also, but not equally, have relevance for critical approaches to the arts (cultural studies), and which have a common basis which they share with other critical theories in general; namely "hermeneutic phenomenology...and the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein. One of the most important developments marked by each of these forms of contemporary philosophy is that they insist that personal experience is known to the self as a 'self' only via the public categories of language." in "Literature and Society: Raymond Williams," in *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, p.140. And James Carey has described the term "critical" in relation to theory in North America as "not so much a position as a cover under which Marxism might hide during a hostile period in exile." in "A Cultural Approach to Communications", *Explorations in Communication II*, Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, Great Britain, 1975, p. 1-22

¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York, 1958. On page 42 he writes "The sentence has sense only as a member of a system of language; as one expression within a calculus. Now we are tempted to imagine this calculus, as it were, as a permanent background to every sentence we say, and to think that, although the sentence as written on a piece of paper or spoken stands isolated, in the mental act of thinking the calculus is there - all in a lump". The idea of *langue* as the rules and *parole* as the play in a game, specifically chess, is common to both de Saussure and Duchamp, a linguist and an artist. See Hubert Damisch, "The Duchamp Defense", *October 10*, Fall, 1979, MIT Press, Cambridge, p.5-28.

ascribed to art and that art can be seen to have a theoretical qualities. I will propose that the visitations of each to the other (clandestine or open) have had some mutually rewarding consequences.

Art, then, is being taken as something that exists by virtue of the various productive social investments in constantly shifting historical contestations for circulating particular meanings (power) in its name¹. In short, art is always a 're-presentation'; a representation made of other representations. French or Continental Theory is likewise a body made of parts which are moments within a complex of intellectual tangents and quests, a web or network of discursive communications. My initial assumption is that the two discourses have already met and become intimate and that we are in a period of (chic) pathology in which it is possible to trace the outlines of some of the fragments of that enduring encounter to emphasize some of the implications.

That art, like other discourses, has been invaded or trespassed by the "virus of language" (William Burroughs), plagued by the "linguistic paradigm" of structuralism and its variants seems obvious despite arguments over the paradigm's status and place. As John Fekete has written, "No matter how such an evaluation is settled, the new structural allegory can, on the

¹In its narrower sociological sense Howard Becker describes art this way. "...in principle any object or action can be legitimated as art, but that in practice every art world has procedures and rules governing legitimation which, while not clear-cut or foolproof, nevertheless make the success of some candidates for the status of art very unlikely. Those procedures and rules are contained in the conventions and patterns of cooperation by which art worlds carry on their routine activities." in *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, and that "As a result, the title "art" is a resource that is at once indispensable and unnecessary to the producers of the works in question." p. 163

positive side, be recognized as the first broad-gauged development in the humanities and the social sciences that is an analogue to the paradigm shifts of modern biology and quantum physics" and "The cumulative effect of these new organizing concepts has been to erode traditional disciplinary foundations further and to repattern the field of intellectual attention."¹ To appropriate McLuhan's imagery, art is one the "figures" on the "horizon" or "ground" which is the (rocky) structural field and we, the viewers, are the "vanishing point". The recognition² of the contemporary force of this structural model, in which configural relations are regulative and normative

¹ Fekete, John, "Descent into the New Malestrom: Introduction", *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984, p.xi-xxiv. His title deliberately invokes Marshall McLuhan's central use of Edgar Allan Poe's story "Descent into the Malestrom" as a precedent of "suspended" technique for the "study of configurations" as well as recognizing the famous communications aphorism "the medium is the message" as an important early understanding of the structural violation of the humanist tradition. That artists have also been affected is indisputable. As I write, an exhibition entitled *Art et Langage: Annees 80* is currently being exhibited at Centre d'Histoire de L'Art Contemporain, Rennes, France and another called *Modes of Address* is on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Federal Reserve Plaza, New York. See Roberta Smith, "Reading Messages in Conceptualism Exhibition", *New York Times*, Saturday, August, 1988. She says "Language has played an important role in much 20th-century art, but never more so than since the late 1960's. At that time, Conceptual art loosened a flood of words - used singly, in provocative phrases and long texts - into what has become, increasingly, the mainstream."

² Arthur Kroker has emphasized that the language paradigm has its corresponding structural resemblances in other disciplines. "And linguistic theory (which is only the most visible "sign" of a modern discourse that also involves molecular biology and cybernetics) displaces the "commodity conception" of power by emphasizing that power, understood as a specialized language, is a "medium" of exchange precisely in the sense that the grammar of power (the "code" of authority and its political significations) is the discursive form (the "silent" language)...", in "Paradigm Shift of Foucault and Parsons", *The Structural Allegory*, Op Cit., p.76. There is also an important and almost mystical assumption hidden in the inclusive desire of the 'linguistic turn'. For instance, Doblin says "We think we are speaking and we are spoken; we believe we are writing, yet we are written...", quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *Literature and Its Theorists: A Personal View of Twentieth-Century Criticism*, (trans. Catharine Porter), Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1987, p. 34. This conception of a *sub rosa* determination has its synonymy in an Eastern philosophy..."We cannot help breathing, and yet it seems that breath is under our control; we both breathe and are breathed", Alan Watts, *The Way of Liberation in Zen Buddhism*, The Society for Comparative Philosophy, Sausalito, 1955, p.13.

and the human subject is displaced, is, then, the first assumption of this introduction.

The second assumption is that this introduction of the 'medium's message' to art - of structuration (what Eco calls "secret codes") over and beyond the willed consciousness - and of art's snake-like, moibus rejoinder to such codified theory is complicated and has blurry and shifting effects. It is not simple nor clear what kind of an introduction it is nor how its effects will last. And its texts (con and pre) betray inconsistencies which are not easily assimilable. Thus, I am initially cautioned by Edward Said's attack on an exclusively *textual* attitude toward historical reconstruction and understanding, to the degree that...

"...it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books - texts - say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin".¹

The temptation to use textual explanation has, however, been suggested as a special condition of the power of (published) writing itself (a prevailing

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1979, p. 93. Said, following Althusser's notion of the *problematic* attempts to reinstate texts into their institutionally-motivated histories as a "projection" of "cultural territories", terms which echo the work of Innis on the relation between the power of writing and institutions. See particularly, Harold Innis "Industrialism and Cultural Values", *The Bias of Communication*, University of Toronto Press, 1951. In *Empire and Communications*, University of Toronto Press, 1972 (revised by Mary Q. Innis, Foreword by Marshall McLuhan). He writes, in reference to "the written tradition and Rome", that "The spread of writing contributed to the downfall of the Republic and the emergence of the Empire. With the growth of administration the power of the emperor was enhanced and in turn used to secure new support...the rise of absolutism in a bureaucratic state reflected the influence of writing and was supported by an increase in the production of papyrus." p.100-103.

academic economy, for instance, flagged by the deadly command 'publish or perish'). One of the (abused) licenses flaunted by textual exegesis is elaborated by Ong when he writes...

"There is no way to directly refute a text. After absolutely total and devastating refutation, it says exactly the same thing as before. This is one reason why 'the books says' is popularly tantamount to 'it is true'. It is also one of the reasons why books have been burnt. A text stating what the whole world knows is false will state falsehood forever, so long as the text exists. Texts are inherently contumacious."¹

To describe or accord anything to the occasion of art's invasion by the language paradigm and vice versa is to already be within Nietzsche's famous paradox of "the prison-house of language"; in the contradiction of measuring textuality through textuality, discourse through discourse, metatheory through metatheory - an infinite regression of successive *mise en abimes*. (The extended version of this relentless slide is to see the whole world as a coherent TEXT; a world to be read,... "Thoughts about thoughts, experiences of experience, words about words, texts about texts".²) Although this method

¹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Methuen, London and New York, 1982, p. 79, Ong's argument is an in-depth empirical research based initially on the teachings of McLuhan, whose student he was. (For Ong on McLuhan, see *McLuhan: Hot & Cool*, Signet Book, New American Library, New York, 1967, pp. 92-101). Ong's writing parallels the unravelling work on the notion of 'documentary' films and photography as well ie.. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1973, where Sontag writes that..."But despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth." p.6 A more general formulation of the "truth-function" of 'sign-languages' is to be found in Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1979 in which he says..."Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all. I think that the definition of a 'theory of the lie' should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for a general semiotics."p. 7

² See M.M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text", *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, (trans. Vern M. McGee) (ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist), University of Texas Press, Austin,

at least gives credence to bringing art within the constraints of the parameters of a discourse (art in language and language in art - the "infinite relation" described by Foucault), the use of a linear narrative could reproduce textual tendencies toward closure. To describe this two-backed beast more conventionally, then, might lose the romance of the episode, might risk becoming a slave to the epiphany of the "point of view" (uniformity). My second assumption is, therefore, the necessity of developing a style (a method) to hear the noise (the unwanted) of this material.

By this, I mean that I have tried to counter the (tempting) enduring principle of language toward its own authority through the printed word by stylistic (stereo-cinematic) delivery. Firstly, visually emphasizing (con)text, I have written a strange ethnography (hopefully) in Geertz's meaning that it is "like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of

1986, 177 p., Bakhtin does not include the whole world but extends the notion of text to include all "body-signs" (what Eco calls "sign functions" and Baudrillard calls "sign-objects") and sees their study as the basic distinction between the human sciences and the natural sciences. He writes, in note form... "The special feature of thinking in the human sciences, which involves two planes and two subjects. Textology as the theory and practice of the scientific reproduction of literary texts. The textological subject (textologist) and his particularities". p. 104. An extreme instance of textuality is Schoenberg's belief that his music didn't have to be played to be an effective instance of negation and Adorno's defense of Schoenberg's musical system as composition (as text) allowed him to later dismiss American jazz music on radio, without bothering to listen, as "substitution" where "its rebellious gestures are accompanied by the tendency to blind obedience, much like the sado-masochistic type described by analytic philosophy", in Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950.*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1973, p. 186. Adorno's dislike of jazz, it turns out, came from reading the word 'jazz' which he associated with the German word 'hatz' (a pack of hounds). Edward Said's definition is a critique. " 'Textuality' is the somewhat mystical and disinfected subject matter of literary theory", in "Secular Criticism", *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p.3

sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior."¹ It is, therefore, a thesis whose lack of success seems guaranteed; the foot in the door approach to avoid the door's slam guarantees further stumbles down the road (and pratfalls), further foot problems (in the mouth, loose, fetish, notes), problems of getting a footing or securely grounding the "reading". To strike this ridiculous pose is to foot the bill of what Foucault has encouraged...

**"But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting-point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task."
(Foucault, 1971)**

To (accomplish) this Sissyphean task, I have collided various fragments of discourse by writing graphically, not 'truthfully'. The collage of hetero/homologous texts tries to integrate a productive and appropriate modernist style. I mean to err on the side of excess/promiscuity (repetition), non-linear/non-chronological (impurity), irreverance/distortion (exaggeration), cross-indexes/tangents (disguises) in order to allow gaps, inconsistencies, intersices, to be awakened between the ready-made texts and

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books Inc., New York, 1973. To introduce Geertz is to be reminded that Levi-Struss' *Triste Tropiques*, (1955), introduced structuralism popularly through the window of *anthropolgy*, an important moment in the history of anti-ethnocentric positions which its influence has occasioned. Geertz's "thick description" can also be used as a reminder that not only academics do strange ethnographies I am thinking here of the multiple approaches taken by James Agee (with Walker Evans) in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston, (1941), a series of continuous "starts" at writing including the postmodern desire..."If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement". The inadequacy of writing because of its authority and the necessity for a multiple material approach are anticipated in Agee's cine-museological appetite for an art which is also (materially) research (or more fashionably, the 'genealogy' introduced by Nietzsche).

their inevitable returns to 'proper' disciplines.¹ This writing is the (conditional) offer of a discursive parole from the prison-house of langue, a momentary release ("art of interruption"), from the drab gray walls of academic (dis and dat) courses. A re-sentencing, a re-finishing of the "logic of disintegration".

Specifically, in the introduction I will smash the discourses three times to rattle out of their bones the dust of the momentos of that initial encounter. To do this I will firstly collide a certain kind of recent art history with theory. Then I will collide examples of contemporary art criticism against it and then I will reinvestigate the way in which art had already implanted itself within theory. This triple sounding is meant to jolt forth some intimations of their incestuous implications for one another, to re-call the turbulence of the events.

¹ This style is a direct response to Hayden White's persuasive questions raised in "The Burden of History", *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978, in which he argues "to recognize that there is no such thing as a single correct view of any object under study but that there are many correct views, each requiring its own style of (artistic) representation". p.47 Here, the typographical approach owes much to Benjamin/McLuhan's disruptive paginations; the liberating effects of quotes out of context, the density of aphorisms, the "essai concrete", or "couplage" as Donald Theall calls it, "McLuhan's Humanism", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. X, No. 1/2, Montreal, 1986, p.79-88.

THREE HISTORIES OF INFLUENCE:

1. WORDS INTO THINGS

1.1. Some recent studies, (Alpers, 1983, Baxandall, 1972, 1985, Bryson, 1985, Clark, 1973, 1985), loosely clustered under the rubric of "New Art History" (Rees & Borzello, 1986), are beginning to challenge the methodological traditions within the discipline of art history. New academic periodicals such as *Block* and *Representations* are indicative of recent and multiple strands of a discipline straining toward contemporary relevance. The "stagnant peace" at art history's center, as Bryson resentfully describes the mood of conventional working procedures, is due, in his opinion, to entrenched professionals whose work is "produced at an increasingly remote margin of the humanities, and almost in the leisure sector of intellectual life."¹ The dual assumptions which sustains the stasis in art history is that "the viewer is as changeless as the anatomy of vision...", thus, effectively dehistoricizing the "relation of the viewer to the painting". One result of this

¹Bryson, Norman, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1983, p.xii. Bryson's book is a didactic and deliberate reworking of E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1960, (The A.W.Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1956, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Bollingen Series XXXV.5), the canonical text which forms conclusions like..."The history of art, as we have interpreted it so far, may be described as the forging of master keys for opening the mysterious locks of our senses to which only nature herself originally held the key." p. 359. It is the "natural" equation which Bryson argues against and to which he assigns the name "perceptualism" - the idea that a painting is "a record of perception" - which, to Bryson, is a "fundamentally wrong" idea (p.xii). A pro-feminist interpretation could also point to the phallogocentrism in Gombrich's metaphorical equation of (forged)key into lock/'master' into her (feminine as mysterious nature). It seems clearly to be a narrative of technological domination of nature//theft of the secret (key) to the chastity belt; an unconscious but available trope dispersed throughout Gombrich's thesis. Bryson's semiotic interpretation is part of a larger impulse as Svetlana Alpers, one of the founding editors of *Representations* notes "Art historians, less certain that they can stipulate which images count as art, are willing to include more kinds of human artifacts and makings into their field of study". *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983, p. 124

stagnation is a curious castration of one of its terms (ART is minus a HISTORY), which Bryson, among others, sets out to regain. His solution, buoyed by a revised Saussurian structuralism, is to return the history bracketed out by both systems of Perceptualist art history (the conventional procedures founded in a now unsupportable "natural attitude") and the "formalist trap" of "flawed semiology" (which has no theory of "technique") in order to assert that "What we have to understand is that the act of recognition that painting galvanises is a production, rather than a perception of meaning" and that "Codes of recognition circulate throughout painting incessantly..."¹.

¹Op Cit. Bryson revises de Saussure for his purposes due to his belief that the structuralist system of "laws" is inadequate and that "painting has proved the least tractable" to them. He also discovers an unexpected affinity to "semiology's anti-materialist proclivities" in Perceptualism. He writes...."in this implied politics of an outer social pressure encroaching on symbolisation and inhibiting or impairing its functions, Saussure and Gombrich are curiously alike" p.82. Interestingly, in light of his espoused and fruitful appropriation of de Saussure, as the book unfolds, Bryson becomes unrelentingly bitter towards it. By Chapter Three he says such things as (re:Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault and Lacan)..."The misfortune of the French is not to have translated Wittgenstein; instead, they read Saussure" p.77 or "Saussure has no theory of practice." p 81 or, again linking Saussure with Gombrich, ..."and in that gaze of the innocent eye against which it so loudly protests, comes back to the consoling stabilities of the Universal Visual Experience - an experience hardly less mysterious than that of Saussure's speakers" p 79 As Bryson's analysis and contribution is important to the 'New Art History' and, as it is so obviously indebted to the structuralist project in general, the defensiveness, anger, and hostility seem unaccountable. That even his methods are contestable as well is evident from Margaret Iverson's "Saussure v. Peirce: Models for a Semiotics of Visual Art", in *New Art History*, pp.82-91 in which she argues that Peirce is the more valuable which she shows by relating his system of identifications to the work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. See also Phillip Fry for a much earlier decision and use of Peirce in an analysis of a Canadian artist, "Max Dean: Three Projects and the Theory of Open Art", in *Parachute 14*, Printemps, 1979, Montreal, pp. 16-23. Fry limits the Peircean model and augments it with notions from Eco (*L'oeuvre ouverte*, Paris: Seuil, 1965), and further develops distinctions between 'procedure', 'process' and 'program' within an artwork's creation - notions of interactibility between artists, artworks and audiences which perhaps owe more to Eastern European formalist distinctions ie. Bakhtin's "translinguistics". The classic text in this inquiry is Meyer Shapiro, *Approaches to Semiotics: Words and Pictures*, Mouton, the Hague, 1973, 108 p.

In opposing the (reworked) structuralist model against the perceptualist model, Bryson is making use of transliteration: shifting the premises of work done in one field, together with its vocabulary and methods to another. That he should invoke the 'linguistic turn' is not surprising. In discussing the linguistic model as introduced by de Saussure, Jameson has succinctly summed up its importance in saying..."the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign eliminates the myth of a natural language"¹. Such work in art history, in this case and many others, takes its obvious revisionist energy from (mainly) Continental theory which has, as well, regenerated anthropological, literary, sociological and historical studies in the past few decades; each in its turn modified by new methodologies which iterate neo-marxist critical interpretations, contemporary psychoanalytical concepts and research informed by feminist orientations. At the center of the complex and varying recent approaches to the 'new' art history is the question of visual representation itself, a reverberating echo of the so-called 'crisis of representation' which has so centrally occupied practices of art and aesthetic theory in this century.

In Bryson's "production..of meaning" by a viewer "embedded in social discourse", it is possible to hear the active and diverse echoes, for instance, of Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: a Treatise in the*

¹Frederick Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton University Press, 1972. For another historical account of the various introductions of systemic linguistic thought into contemporary intellectual accounts see Hawkes, Terence, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, University of California Press, Berkely and Los Angeles, 1977. McLuhan's profound understanding of the impact of de Saussure is embedded in an oxymoronic chapter punch-line..."By the meaningless sign linked to the meaningless sound we have built the shape and meaning of Western man." *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, University of Toronto Press, 1965, p.50

Sociology of Knowledge (1967) or Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* (1981), or Hebdige's *Subcultures: the Meaning of Style* (1979) etc.. These examples register, in kind, at a transdisciplinary level, the intellectual tradition begun by Vico in *The Second New Science* (1744) based on the principle of *verum ipsum factum*, elaborated by White as "The criterion of knowledge is the capacity of the knower to *produce* that of which he has knowledge"¹. Vico's anticipation of such "thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Freud and Levi-Strauss...will probably remain a subject of debate for some time to come", White adds, while being careful to formulate Vico's difference and distance from certain of those writers (Marx, for instance). But, while White concentrates on elaborating Vico's seminal "theory of linguistic transformation", importantly for this introduction, he also highlights one of Vico's legendary aphorisms..."The order of ideas must follow the order of institutions".

¹ Hayden White, Op Cit., See particularly "The Tropics of History: The Deep Structure of the *New Science* ". pp. 197 - 217. That the essay is seminal to White's rethinking the project of writing history is evident from the essay's title which is featured in the book's title. The essay involves his second concentration on Vico to tease out of a system of tropes in Vico's writing a projection of persistently recurring tropes derived from classical poetics - a system White then later finds in parallel discourses (ie. EP Thompson, Freud, Piaget). In the book, White attempts to develop a "tropological theory of discourse (which) could provide us with a way of classifying different kinds of discourses by reference to the linguistic modes that predominate in them rather than by reference to supposed "contents" which are always identified differently by different interpreters". p. 21. For my purposes, the distinctions he makes between Vico and later writers are not crucial, nor is Vico's civilizational hierarchy with Christianity as its apex. Rather it is the reminder of the origins of the concept that history is a lived experience and that all historiographies have been shown to have motivated narratives in a heritage which outdates structuralisms. Hawkes equally has rediscovered Vico in his history where he writes "Like the existentialists, Vico seems to argue that there is no pre-existent, 'given' human essence, no pre-determined 'human nature'. Like the Marxists, he seems to say that particular forms of humanity are determined by particular social relations and systems of human institutions." Op Cit. p.15

In this we can prehear the oft-quoted, academic Marxian battle cry..."Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."¹ And we rehear it again in Roland Barthes's aphorism "Literature is what gets taught". The 'new' art history is then linked vertically to antecedent cultural and social history thinkers beyond the immediate frame of reference - sharing a claim to a legitimate legacy of a history of a (phenomenological) social consciousness which is both ambitious and refined, already-expounded and already in contestation. If language (especially as *printed* words) is considered an institution, as Lacan will argue, echoing (indirectly) Innis and McLuhan, then the implications of the linguistic model as a horizontal transplant to other disciplines such as art history can be immediately seen when linked to those prior theories of human agency. The axes of intersection are the complementary ideas that no investigation is value-free; it is motivated and, it is also embedded in prior systems or biases which are structural.

¹Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, Progress Publishers edition, London, 1977, p. 10. This phrase is effectively paraphrased, beginning... "Women make their own history..." in one of the 'new' art historians' recent book; Lisa Ticker, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*, University of Chicago Press, 1988. In this wonderfully and thoroughly researched empirical argument, the ephemerality of a battle of representations is accurately reconstructed. Her arguments echo the same teleological energy. In her (non) distinction between art and propoganda, for instance, she says..."Art' and 'propoganda' may be distinguished at any given moment through their modes of address, their links with particular institutions and the different relations between visual practice and social and political interests which they effect; not by a crude division between the ideologically saturated and the ideologically pure." p. xi. Tickner's chapter titles, Production, Spectacle, Representation, suggest one set of stages in the dynamic contestation of meanings through collective human efforts toward image production. Another 'new' art historian, Michael Baxandall, titles a book *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, equally accentuating the *teleological* aspect within image production and a teleological interest in it.

1.2 The 'new' art history shares with other contemporary disciplines a borrowing and a blurring of methodological techniques which is a **modernist** orientation increasingly embraced by the conservative academy now that postmodernism appears to be here (in its debateable disguises). And importantly, the 'new' art history also shares with its immediate mentors, the 'weak' areas of cultural, film, and communication studies, a blurring of the subject of its study. As Ulmer has said of the same influences into criticism, "Criticism now is being transformed in the same way that literature and the arts were transformed by the avant-garde movements in the early decades of this century. The break with "mimesis", with the values and assumptions of "realism," which revolutionized the modernist arts, is now underway (belatedly) in criticism..."¹ The belatedness is equally an appropriate term for historical studies of the visual arts, but it does not undermine the vigorous aspect of its recent dimension.

However, there is also a (contradictory) return to discussions of the 'proper' object of study and in this appearance there is a movement back to a conventional base. Indeed, the very idea of propriety with regard to an object, unintentionally exposes a split or contradiction, a "damage control" mentality which sits at the core of many disciplines. Thus, the energetic call to less defined methods (inter-disciplinary crossings) is often met by the conflicting urge toward a traditionally stable and ordered object. While traditional methods might be undermined, the desirable object is apt to stay on its

¹Gregory L. Ulmer, "The object of Post-Criticism", in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (Hal Foster, ed.), Bay Press, Port Washington, 1983, pp.83-110

pedestal. As one of its shrewdest commentators has put it, projecting into the future an already-accepted 'new' art history...

"So, to take up a type of argument which new art historians have been right to make, but to go a little further: if a painting like Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) produces its meanings only in the way in which it constructs a relation with colonialized African cultures (in its use of masks); through a fear of prostitution and venereal disease as part of a dominant discourse on women (in its setting in a brothel); and the emergence of the provincial (Spanish) artist in Parisian cultural life, then, in which museum should it be put? Assuming an ideal world, in which such museums exist, should it be in the museum of colonial oppression and liberation, the museum of gender formation, or the museum of social-climbing? To re-posit the question in this way is perhaps banal, but at least it asks about the nature of the series-object" (Rifkin, 1986).¹

In other words, the question of what it is that is available for 'proper' consideration has already been loosened by a semiological urge in cultural and media studies, which precede the new art history and are "concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else".² But, as Rifkin points

¹ Adrian Rifkin, "The New Art History and Art Criticism", in *The New Art History*. Op Cit. pp.157-163. Rifkin writes specifically that..."The new art history can be defined as the academic enterprise which reinstates the elementary terms of the tradition from which it comes, turning political and social movements into specialisms and confounding interdisciplinarian investigations by turning them back on the series-object. Looking at any sample of new art histories will show that sometimes they will 'take on' the feminist argument: but taking on is, more often than not, an option. The masterpieces stay put".

² Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*. Op Cit., p.7. More specifically, Eco speaks of *sign-functions*, the giving rise to "a provisional result of coding rules which establish *transitory* correlations of elements, each of these elements being entitled to enter - under given coded circumstances - into another correlation and thus another sign". p.49. (Eco's formulation presages Baudrillard's "ecstasy of communication" in which there is a "pure economy of symbolic exchange". It is this very instability in the network of changing relationships in

out, there is a dangerous counter impulse available in the 'new' to readdress the 'old'; to reposition the object of consideration in relation to a convention of objects of consideration. This is what Rifkin calls a conventional "series-objects" canon; an accepted morphology of objects which is only "filled out a bit" by new methods. This normative impulse is similarly under attack by another commentator, Paul Overy, who, in addressing the work of T.J. Clark (the *pater familia* of the new art history), says ..."the judgements are curiously conventional and unchallenging. For example, in Clark's most recent book *The Painting of Modern Life* ¹, attention is devoted to exactly the same artists as in every other book about later nineteenth-century French painting: Manet, the Impressionists, Seurat, Degas - almost a Leavisite 'great tradition'. This tendency of a continentally - influenced revisionism to return to a series of canonized 'texts' has also been noted consistently in

language which provides many openings into materials which make use of a linguistic model. *Representations*, for example, is published to "encourage a new community of scholarship among all who explore the way artefacts, institutions, and modes of thought give a heightened account of the social, cultural and historical situations in which they arise" and *Block*, has published articles on Italian scooters and other design histories, artists' magazine projects, and, in general, directs its revisionist attention to "visual culture".

¹ Overy's skepticism and identification of an ambiguity, especially in attitudes to Modernism, enables him to reinvokethe work of the critic John Berger which he believes "kept alive through the fifties and early sixties" the "the memory and example of earlier, radical, social historians of art..." (Antal, Hauser and Klingender). He finds, for instance, *Art Language's* attack on John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (book and television films), "spiteful and inappropriate" toward "a brilliant piece of populist television which changed a whole generation's approach to art". *The New Art History*, Op Cit. p.136, especially in light of their own "genially debating" stance with Clement Greenberg in course material for the Open University, in interviews in *Art Monthly* in three separate issues and in the "General Panel Discussion" published in *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, (Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbault and David Solkin, eds.), Halifax, 1983. Overy makes a similar, but more muted, point with regard to T.J. Clark's relation to Greenberg and Griselda Pollock's (feminist?) acceptance of a canonized corpus of material.

critiques within the field of literary theory per se, from which much of the new art history's impetus has been derived.¹ As Edward Said has passionately argued,

"But we have reached the stage at which specialization and professionalization, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature the most focused and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture into another world altogether."

(Said, *The World, The Text and The Critic*, 1983)

Although he is referring only to literary theory, Said's argument seems to have found its parallel in the art history revival. Simply put, a radical or problematized methodology does not necessarily rock the disciplinary boat and may, in fact, be used to reaffirm its status by an additional sense of vigor which actually displaces the motives of the new practice. There is no

¹ For instance, Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1983. In fact, Eagleton's project regarding literary theory, as he unequivocally states is..."We must conclude, then, that this book is less an introduction than an obituary, and that we have ended by burying the object we sought to unearth." p. 204, and, further, "I have argued that the theoretically limitless extendibility of critical discourse, the fact that it is only arbitrarily confined to 'literature', is or should be a source of embarrassment to the custodians of the canon". p. 203. In this he, in turn, repeats the thesis of Juri Tynjanov that "literary fact" "...depends on function"..."What in one epoch would be a literary fact would in another be a common matter of social communication, and vice versa..." (1927), quoted in Tzvetan Todorov's *Literature and its Theorists*, Op Cit., p. 26. David Lodge in *Working with Structuralism: Essays and Reviews on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Literature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981, is more forgiving, stressing the uses of "formal analysis of narrative - especially of realistic fiction - an area in which structuralism has proved a particularly fertile influence". (p x). He shows the bounty of this approach in his inventive and convincing essay "Thomas Hardy as a Cinematic Novelist", p 95-105, in which a relation between such literary realism and film realism is consolidated; an interpretation which incidentally confirms the place of film theory in Britain, particularly as inscribed in *Screen*. and which has seeped into other disciplines, providing new tools of critical approach. Lodge's understanding of the constraints of such formal techniques of literary theory is undoubtedly aided by the fact that he writes as a journalist and novelist as well - practices which seem to mitigate against the purely hermetic activity which Eagleton and Said identify, and to which they might give their approval.

guarantee of change within the discipline from change of method alone. It is, therefore, necessary to be careful in distinguishing between the two, or one might say to distinguish, between "theoretical practice" and "practical theory".

The question of whether or not there can even be a "proper" object of study has been further problematized by the theorizations of Jacques Derrida. As Charles Levin has written in reference to the "overflow of "meaning" in any writing..."This is all the more true if we admit with Derrida that an *ethic* of writing would be a critique of what he calls the "proper": we cannot be the "proprietors" of the texts we are creating. To write is to disseminate, to bequeath without naming the beneficiaries, and this negates not only property in authorship, but the authority of proper meanings."¹ Thus, even the question of what is a "proper" object might not be a 'proper' one in itself by virtue of the insinuation of such Derridean-based theory to other disciplines

1.3 And it is not just the contentious object of a discipline that is embattled. An earlier historical moment within French intellectual history offers insights to another aspect of the conflictual structure at hand. Full-scale institutional resistance has often been directed at the theoretical 'heretics' of

¹ Levin, Charles, "Derrida and the Cupidity of the Text", *The Structural Allegory*, Op Cit., p. 202. The idea of 'correct' subjects and contradictory impulses is opened specifically in the work of one artist in Frederick Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndam Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, where the twin themes of opposing ideologies in the title are intertwined through a "psychic division of labor" resulting in a narrative property which "is as though the stable substances of Aristotelian science, with their fixed and describeable properties, were suddenly projected into the relational fields of post-Einsteinian physics, and, as in a Gestalt reversal, transformed into the termini or poles of a relationship which now defines and takes logical priority over them." p. 41. Todorov makes the point also that "each period canonizes texts that the previous period considered marginal". Op Cit., p.23

reformation, authors like Jacques Lacan himself. Long before his theory influenced other disciplines ("principally through his contributions to cultural theory - to theories of film, television, literature and art...¹" (Copjec, 1987) and developed its own associative life, Lacan's professional position within the International Psycho-Analytical Association had been denied to him and four other colleagues². Led by a repressive familial metaphor (introduced, ironically, by Freud's daughter Anna), the institution gracelessly de-accessioned him. In doing so, the association probably

¹ Joan Copjec, "Dossier on the Institutional Debate: An Introduction", *October* 40, MIT Press, Cambridge, Spring, 1987, p.51-55

² Academia and professional societies are as open to contestations of power as any other institutional base although there is often a quietude about them which marks their particular corporate-(a)political style. For instance, the thesis of Walter Benjamin which never gained academic acceptance was partly due to its "nihilistic response to academic politics". But, even its three-page synopsis was rejected as "unintelligible" by the young Max Horkheimer who was to become Benjamin's financial patron and head of the Institute of Social Research (and co-writer, with Adorno, of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (trans. John Cumming) Continuum, New York, 1969. As Irving Wohlfarth writes..."Such, then, are the surprises and convulsions, the secrecy and banality of resentment, its obscene, shifting interplay of private and public, psychological and institutional factors, most of them excusable peccadillos protected by extenuating circumstances, but cumulatively adding up to what Lindner rightly calls a "scandal". See "Resentment Begins at Home", from *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, (Gary Smith, ed.), The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1988. He is, in turn, referring to "Habilitationssakte Benjamin" by Burkhardt Linder in *Walter Benjamin im Kontext*, (B. Lindner, ed.), Königstein, Athenäum, 1986, p. 324-41. Another more recent example concerns the "scandal" surrounding Paul de Man as reported in length by Mark Edmundson in "A Will to Cultural Power: Deconstructing the de Man Scandal", in *Harper's*, New York, July, 1988, p. 67-71. We learn that..."Some of the deconstructors would not speak publicly on the subject, at least until they'd taken it up in academic conferences and come to some consensus. It was eventually revealed that, at a conference held in Alabama in October, Derrida and about twenty prominent deconstructors had reflected on the significance and potential repercussions of de Man's early articles without going public about their existence. In other words, a handful of distinguished scholars dedicated to promulgating "unsettling" and "subversive" truths had held on tightly to a rather important one; "damage control" was how one detractor characterized it". And..."The spectacle of persons who are put in a secure position in life so that they can speak their minds without fear of reprisal, who are supposed to keep the culture honest, going mute when they have what they presumably want most - the public's ear - is a dispiriting one". And a reminder of the limits of textual radicalism and the social effects of "undecidability". See also, James Atlas' "The Case of Paul de Man", *New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, August 28, 1988. For what deconstruction means within an academic/social setting, see Colin Campbell, "The Tyranny of the Yale Critics", *New York Times Magazine*, February 9, 1986

inadvertently embedded real (effective) social and academic power in Lacan's very project by, in effect, enforcing the importance of his rereading of Freud by occasioning a (perfect) example. Lacan's language-based analysis of the narrative of the analyst/analysand circle attempted to show that...

"All practices are always part of some institutional structure beyond which no practice, no critique, no speech is possible. Institutions, as *signifying practices*, are much more extensive structures than romantic notions allow and they thus implicate us in ways which narrower definitions cannot recognize; they also cast doubt on the notion of class essentialism which would seek in some "innocent" group of people and the naive notion of identification which imagines the possibility of emulating them."

(Copjec, 1987)

The very language of the association's dismissal of Lacan (and four others) through a familial metaphor has implications for a 'subconscious' desire within the institution for stability and order - against the untreatable results of the "divorce" which has occurred. As an example, it is a classic Freudian 'slip' within the Symbolic Order, a discursive attempt to repress the Other in the Name of the Father (literally) by a conservative closure disguised as an institutional authority.¹ It is an "extensive structure" embedded in a "normal" language of affiliations.

¹ Philippe Sollers has suggested that "he had run afoul of the matriarchy" in Stuart Schneiderman, *Jacques Lacan: Death of an Intellectual Hero*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983. Schneiderman has many more and subtle arguments for Lacan's dismissal ranging from his Catholic educational bias to his personal behaviour. But, as he points out... "Thus stigmatized, Lacan became a hero to many people whose political opinions placed them in opposition to everything American. Unwittingly the International had laid the groundwork for the fashioning of a legend." p.15. Interestingly, the linguistic implications of the "talking cure" were probably first articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin as early as the 1920s in a co-authored (?) text with Voloshinov where he writes "The motifs of the unconscious revealed during the psychoanalytic sessions by means of the method of "free association" are *verbal reactions* of the patient, as are all other habitual motifs of consciousness. They are different one from the other, so to speak, not by any generic distinction of their being, but only

It is possible to see then that what is at stake can shift in the movement from contestations over methods to those over the object of study to those of status and roles within a professional academic milieu itself. What is common to all these difficulties of accommodations within each level and kind of discourse is the problematizing of formerly "natural" languages. Each interruption is also an interrogation of the assumptions of belief which underlay and supported a set of characteristic concepts within a previous framework. In short, each introduces a level of self-referential questioning to some aspects of a discourse's foundation.

In its most benign form, this questioning is a matter of transliterating or transcoding theoretical ideas from one disciplinary structure to another (ie. literary theory to art history) which has produced more obviously socially-invested methods (at least, on the surface) and/or a wider field of objects for interpretation. In its more radical form it produces a questioning of the parameters of the very discourse being used (ie. Said and Eagleton when they question the very notion of literary theory while applying it to the (now) also-problematized notion of 'literature' itself). These sets of inquiries stem from and offer a variety of sources and intensities depending upon the recipient's

by their content, that is *ideologically*. In this sense, the unconscious according to Freud can be defined as "unauthorized consciousness" in distinction to the habitual "official" consciousness." quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, (trans. Wlad Godzich), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984, p. 31. Following the Nietzschean initiative of both the Russian Formalists and Lacan, Frederick Jameson has applied the same insight to a reformulation of the notion of history: "that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to use except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious." *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1981, p.35

intellectual training, historical moments and, even, nationality, but they share a common affiliation to an ongoing intellectual tradition of recognizably teleological studies within the 'human' sciences which can be seen now to be modernist in intention. The disruptive turn in modernist approaches is intensified by the theoretical linguistic turn which modernistically facilitates the professional discord and disharmony at every juncture.

2. WORDS INTO WORDS

2.1 A second example will show corresponding activity. A analogous shift in art-critical periodicals reflects a similar dislocation in terms of critical writing styles and the objects of concern. *October*, a magazine based in New York, although published through MIT in Boston, has been a deliberate conduit for the introduction of French continental theory and neo-marxist critical theory to art criticism in North America throughout the last decade (est. 1976), for instance. And, *Parachute*, a Montreal-based magazine has been the initial conduit for a wide variety of intellectual introductions including the 'structuralism' of Barthes and Foucault, writings on Conceptual and Contextual Art, new sociologies of art, the work of Noam Chomsky and other linguists, *Art and Language's* and Joseph Kosuth's written polemics and a host of other multi-faceted forms of art considerations. *Parachute* also sponsored events ie. *03.23.03* (1976) and *Performance Text e)s* (1981) which were artistic and critical interventions directly inaugurated into the city's cultural activities. As well, *Parachute* sponsored artists' productions within the magazine in the form of specially-produced page projects - an activity that has been a precedent for both critical and academic journals. These activities,

suggested particularly by the title of the second project; a performing 'text' or a text 'performing', established a basic disorientation from previous journalistic/critical activities in which the critical role was (ostensibly) 'objective' or, at least, outside of its object. Such work, as well, deliberately places Canadian artists, art and critics in a larger Western framework, an effort toward extra-national visibility which is highly motivated.¹

The larger impact of these quasi-academic, quasi-journalistic modes of criticism has been to decenter the monolithic nature of the formalist criticism which preceded it. The resulting multiplicity of methodologies have produced receptions which range from an idealism of equality to a resigned ennui in the face of a changed role for criticism. In the idealistic mode, the following quote exemplifies a positive attitude toward the new state of critical dispersion.

"It seems to a great many of us now that the one style, one critic, one wave formula that recently held sway has broken down, perhaps for good. We are greeted with the spectacle of many styles, many critics. My own feeling is that this is a healthy state of affairs. It may be confusing...but it reflects our society and the possibility of egalitarian pluralism."
(Perrault, 1980)

¹ In fact, and not surprisingly, one of the original co-editors of *Parachute*, France Morin, became the second *directrice* of the *49th Parallel*, a New-York based, Canadian-government-sponsored institution for the introduction of contemporary Canadian art into the American (commercial) sector. Each of these 'promotions' derive from a desire to make Canadian art discourse a 'regular' part of an 'international' art environment. I consider my own activities as an adjunct curator for the Winnipeg Art Gallery and even this thesis as part of a similar attempt to (unofficially) insinuate aspects of Canadian art discourse into environments insensitive to them.

A later, more morose version, influenced by Adorno's pessimism, is to be found in the words of one of *October's* frequent contributors and occasional guest-editor.

"It is now a generally accepted and approved fact that independent criticism can be locked into an academic ghetto and that the management of aesthetic consciousness need not be affected or troubled by the absence of this once-independent force...On the one hand, such artists have mostly abandoned the radical premises for which they once stood; on the other hand, the critic as fourth voice among author, market and institution has been silenced." (Buchloh, 1987)¹

Both cases refer to changing conditions in the practices of criticism; one from a journalistic and the other from an academically-informed position. But, both index the range of response to the introduction of new methodologies (euphoric and despondent) and the historical shifts of power occasioned by the new forces into critical writing. The depth and the degree

¹ John Perrault re-quoted in Sandy Nairne, *State of the Art: Ideas & Images in the 1980s*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1987 in Chapter Two entitled "Value, Commodity and Criticism", an investigation of the loci of power within the art network: "the private gallery, the private collection, the public museum, the art magazine and the public site". The second quote is from Benjamin Buchloh's reprinted text from a panel entitled "Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop", in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, (Hal Foster ed.), Bay Press, Seattle, 1987. In a remarkable self-analysis which includes a historical analysis of his own and the other panel member's critical contributions, Buchloh describes the "compulsive fear" which produced an avoidance of "mass-cultural and ideological phenomena" as responsible for "the defeat of the critic's function". He also records his own contribution to "canon-formation", a recognition that is reminiscent of the critiques of 'new' art history, remarking that it, for the most part, "reaffirms...white male supremacy in visual high culture, the critical canon to which we all adhere is hegemonic and monocentric." For a more moderate assessment of the changes see Hal Foster's "Against Pluralism", *Recordings*, Bay Press, Port Washington, 1985. Foster sees pluralism as a "new conformity" and even, fleetingly, mentions "a failure of criticism". Like Buchloh, however, he sees a narrow version of "an institutional theory of art" (Danto, Dickie, et al) as quite recent. Buchloh's self-critique offers, for instance, a version of his own earlier texts as "relatively depoliticized and apolitical". Both critics seem to want to suggest an earlier more innocent time when their activities and those of artists were outside of an institutional parameter, a time when criticism was "independent" or "alternative".

of understanding of the critical shifts is not a question here although these two polar differences suggest different sources and different degrees of comprehension as well as simply different emotional responses.

2.2 *Art Forum*, under new editorial direction in the nineteen-eighties established monthly columns on aspects of mass media ie. advertising, television, photojournalism as well as commissioning covers and pages by artists.¹ I would maintain that this indicated a response by writers, artists and editors to the powerful spread of cultural studies into America and the widespread use of semiotic methods transferred to other disciplines, particularly advertising and film criticism as espoused by feminist writers. But, one of the magazine's other goals was to de-nationalize its sources of writings, contents and advertising; goals that had both the liberating aim to undermine the perceived American hegemony of its contents while

¹In an interview, Ingrid Sischy, editor of *Artforum* for eight years, says of this decision "So I made up this other space - the columns on TV, advertising, design, music, fashion, photojournalism, et cetera, with the idea that those subjects will be changeable. There was a period when I first started these columns that the question of media was very, very important to many artists and writers. This last year I have felt that anthropological questions are very, very pivotal so that, say, as of this year, we have a column on American myths". *The Impossible Self*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, 1988, (interviewed by myself). Sischy's remarks and the magazine's shifts of interests can be seen as one index of the reception of the influence of (mainly) British cultural studies into American art journalism just as the introduction of footnotes into articles in *Art in America* or *Flash Art* or *Artscribe* might index the sporadic influence of academicism into that same field. Even an information-driven magazine like *Parallelogramme*, the publishing communication arm of the 'alternative' gallery system in Canada has taken to publishing articles which are footnoted and in which the litany of intellectual fashionables is supplied. These cross movements are by no means regular nor chronologically linear, but taken together within a field of discursive practices suggest something like a discernable force which has affected all affiliated practices. An extreme example of a new object under consideration is Phillip Fry's "Le potage outaouais", *Parachute* 6, Printemps 1977, Montreal, p.42-3. In it Fry offers a soup recipe as a concrete example of semiosis where a non-linguistic sign is governed by different rules and conditions and contexts in production, distribution and reception. Such evident (Canadian) satire offers an example of creative "theoretical" critical intervention.

simultaneously endorsing and extending its own (New York-based) influence through a wider subscription and advertising base. This contradiction appeared at the same time that a number of European galleries merged with American (New York) ones and European artists began to show in American galleries and vice versa. The consequent expansion of the centralized art 'world' is, then, an action which is both a recognition of a pluralist impulse in production and a concentration of power in mediaized art distribution simultaneously. Such a state of contradiction would seem to parallel one strand of the 'new' art history dilemma outlined above; that is: a renewed or vigorous input on one hand and a re-affirmation of the status quo on the other.

Many other examples of critical interventions in the form of publications could be cited (ie. *Afterimage*) and added to this extremely abbreviated list. What can be shown easily, however, is that, like its academic cousin art history, art criticism as practiced in specialist journals has been loosened in its object of consideration and multiplied in its stylistic approaches.¹ As well, it seems to have conflictual agendas toward

¹ It should be noted that the first influential introduction in North America to structuralist procedures within contemporary art was Jack Burnham's *The Structure of Art*, George Brazillier, New York, 1971. The book's first chapter systematically investigates the thought of Levi-Strauss, de Saussure, Barthes, Chomsky and Piaget before making an attempt to address their work to a "mythic structure" underlying all art expression using Levi-Strauss's idea that a myth resolves a real contradiction in the imaginary mode. Like Thomas S. Kuhn's seminal *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, (1962), Burnham announced a "paradigm shift" in both art and critical approaches to it as he had earlier, but less formally, in *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century*, George Brazillier, New York, 1968, a book influenced by both new forms of art and information theory. And McLuhan reminds us of its earlier Soviet origins... "Structuralism in art and criticism stemmed, like non-Euclidian geometrics, from Russia. Structuralism as a term does not much convey its idea of inclusive synesthesia, an interplay of many levels and facets in a two-dimensional mosaic." Op Cit. 1962, p. 230 He is inferring that in the dramatic change to industrial methods from agrarian ones, Russians were best able to register the shift from orality to print in this century. Interestingly for the way structuralism and marxism have combined

decentralization and centralization simultaneously, impulses which are constructed by forces outside of the textual domain.

2.3 Concurrently, the idea of a teleological, or motivated, editorial practice is recognized and the magazines are seen by their managers to be ideologically constructed and part of a contestation for the meanings of art itself. There are professional stakes as well. For instance, the tenth anniversary issue of *October* contains a heated editorial directed toward *Artforum* and its editorial policy. The editors (Krauss and Michelson) write, horrified, that they "hear proclamations of renewed faith in the permanence and transcendent powers of the aesthetic impulse. The credo of the faithful echoes throughout the pages of *Artforum*, the very journal in which the radical events of the sixties and early seventies were chronicled". These "attempts to reestablish continuity in a field...are, in fact, symptomatic of a desire to reverse history, to return to a less complex state of affairs in which art is understood as the expression of wholly personal concerns".¹ The fact that the same or similar

academic forces in the West today, McLuhan was always aware of its different political implications in the East..."In our time, study has finally turned to the medium of language itself as shaping the arrangements of daily life, so that society begins to look like a linguistic echo or repeat of language norms, a fact that has greatly disturbed the Russian Communist Party very deeply. Wedded as they are to nineteenth-century industrial technology as the basis of class liberation, nothing could be more subversive of the Marxian dialectic than the idea that linguistic media shape social developments, as much as do the means of production." Op Cit. 1965, p.49. For a quick account of cultural studies impact in the academic arena in North America see Martin Allor, "Projective Readings: Cultural Studies From Here", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Volume XI, Nos.1-2, Montreal, 1987, p.134-137

¹ Editorial, *October* 10, MIT Press, Cambridge, p.3. The main initiative for this attack is provided, not surprisingly, by a French writer, Jean-Francois Lyotard, whose contribution in the same issue stresses an art practice which precedes theory and criticism and which disperses them because they are "unable to survive (if it ever existed) the dissolution by contemporary artistic practice of the principle of the proper point of view." p. 59. For a longer version of the rupture between the two magazines and the personalities involved see Janet Malcom's two-part profile, "Ingrid Sischy", *New Yorker*, Oct. 20/27, 1986. *October* 16 later provided a similar full-issue invective entitled *Art World Follies: A Special Issue*, Spring, 1981. Interestingly and

impulses (the structuralist/post-structuralist implants) can vary in their arrivals of interpretation is perhaps an attribute of their internal direction toward multiplicity, of their textual tendency to increase the gap between a text and its meaning . But, there are also external factors or extra-textual factors involved in the adaptation of one body of work into another body, a transubstantiation of ideas into new practices. These are what might be called intellectual histories of reception. (And here no distinction is being made between deep and profound receptions or superficial ones). Such histories are elaborated and partially accounted for by what Edward Said has termed "travelling theory". He explains it in these terms.

"It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at point of origin. This complicates any account of the transplantation, transference, circulation, and commerce of theories and ideas".

(Said,1983)¹

perhaps not so tangentially to my concern here, Lyotard's "The Unconscious as Mise-en-scene", written in 1976, appearing in *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, Coda Press Inc., Madison, 1977 concentrates on the *La Region Centrale*, a film by Michael Snow whose mechanical apparatus for controlling the camera uses a labyrinth as its central performative metaphor and that "What is at stake is not to exhibit truth within the closure of representation but to set up perspectives within the return of the will." p. 95. In the *October 10* issue, in an interview, Richard Serra repeatedly states the importance of Snow's cinematic procedures, at Michelson's insistence, for his own films and sculpture of the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies. Serra particularly cites *Wavelength* as influential and describes Snow as "a complex and interesting artist with a high ability to entertain contradiction within a very limited strategy". p. 73. It might be noted that just as in the 'new' art history, "series-objects" and "series-artists" (a canon) for criticism tend to become reinforced through repetition and institutional links as well.

¹ Said's important point would seem to be that in "travelling", theory has unintended results - or one might say that the "resistances" and "transformations" it endures in its movement from one place to another offer an undermining of traditional stabilities. In his discussion of contemporary criticism, Said says "It (contemporary criticism) has no faith in traditional continuities(nation, family, biography, period);rather it improvises in acts of an often inspired *bricolage*, order out of extreme discontinuity. Its culture is a negative one of absence, anti-representation, and (as Blackmure used to put it repeatedly) ignorance". In "Roads Taken and Not Taken", *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p.146. In so saying, he reinforces Lyotard's "death of the grand *recits*" and "incredulity

The recognition of the choices of influences and textual (political) decisions is available through a scanning of the titles, writers, objects and a reading of editorials themselves. Any institutionalization of discourses is fragmentary, anti-chronological and intersubjective to a degree which begins to account for their split and partial receptions. Editors, like the psychoanalysts described earlier, represent an institutional approach in which professional drives and rewards are equally a matter of inclusions and exclusions and debates about the propriety of methods and objects. As Becker explains it,

"In complex and highly developed art worlds, specialized professionals - critics and philosophers - create logically organized and philosophically defensible aesthetic systems, and the creation of aesthetic systems can become a major industry in its own right."¹

Jameson explains the transference of one discourse into another in terms of 'models' with their specific introductions and effectivities, offering one cogent (and particularly appropriate for this text) example to show how reception is influenced by historical conditions:

"Thus, while both the American and Russian critical movements are contemporaneous with a great

toward *metanarratives*", which Lyotard equates with the term *postmodern* in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984. Lyotard says that "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation". p.37 and that "A recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games is a first step in that direction". p. 66. Other examples of theories 'travelling' unevenly can be found in Raymond Williams, "Introduction", *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, or Jacqueline Rose, "Femininity and Its Discontents", *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso, New York, 1986, for the relation between psychoanalysis(s) and Marxism(s) within a (British) intellectual history.

¹Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Op Cit., p.132

modernistic literature, although both arise in part as an attempt to do theoretical justice to that literature, the Formalists found themselves to be contemporaries with Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, revolutionaries both in art and in politics, whereas the most influential literary contemporaries of the American New Critics were called T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. This is to say that the familiar split between avant-garde art and left-wing politics was not a universal but merely a local, Anglo-American phenomenon."

(Jameson, *The Prison House of Language*, 1972)¹

Given that receptions to theory are complicated and that professional activities are both motivated and constrained, it is easy to see why the stakes are more than simply intellectual and abstract. It is possible to see that they have secular implications as well - that there are willed relations to ideas with economic and social rewards and punishments as their consequences (as well as historical visibility or invisibility). As Becker writes, "When values are stable, and can be depended on to be stable, other things stabilize as well - the monetary value of works and thus the business arrangements on which the art world runs, the reputations of artists and collectors, and the worth of institutional and personal collections."² And there is an awareness of these

¹ Nowhere has Jameson more clearly demonstrated the degrees of acceptance and hostility towards a "travelling theory" than in his tracing of "dialectical literature" through its national receptions and rejections in his *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1971. His conception of the Anglo-American intellectual tradition as basically impoverished by a rejection of "Germanic" thought is the motivation for the book's explanatory force. Another, simpler reason, to be added to those for varied receptions is the time when something is introduced, the "when" of the moment of reception. For instance, the introduction to English speakers of a book written in 1902 only occurred in 1986 - an instance of translation or culture gap of enormous proportions. See Andrei Biely, *The Dramatic Symphony: a novel, with an essay: The Forms of Art*, (trans. Roger and Angela Keys, John Elsworth), Grove Press, New York, 1986. Biely's impact on Victor Shklovsky the theoretician of the modernist dogma of "making strange" is seminal, yet his work remains virtually unknown to Anglo-American audiences.

² Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, Op Cit., p. 134

issues at an articulated level within critical discourse outside of sociology today. Douglas Crimp, an associate editor at *October*, in noting the movement of a theory from one continent to another continent, has explicitly articulated the professionals' dilemma. In a recent public discussion he said, "It seems to me that the stakes of deconstruction have largely been lost in its transportation to the United States. That's why I wanted to be concrete - to talk about a specific show, "Homo Video" at the New Museum, and a specific audience, the gay community. It was an attempt to make concrete and specific one possible political stake - that keeps getting lost. What are the real political stakes of people in the art world right now?".¹ Another writer has more cynically answered in another context by suggesting that the stakes are very low indeed and that they represent a kind of cycled re-fashioned avant-garde securely fixed in academia..."And were it not for the earnest collegiate theorists who instinctively resuscitate the avant-garde within their students, as if flirting with reform were as satisfying as making it, the supply of spare parts for this lumbering cultural pageant would have certainly run low long ago." The latter statement is from an issue of *artscribe* with commissioned articles occasioned by the twentieth anniversary of the May '68 confrontations by students in Paris. At the same time, (May-June 1988), another magazine's feature article claims that "the de-ideologization of the eighties implies the avant-garde's shift from simple resistance toward a

¹ Douglas Crimp, "Legacies of Critical Practices in the 1980s", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Op Cit., p. 113 in a debate about "subject positions" including the one of the critic. On page 107 Dan Graham, an artist/critic, parenthetically mentions "an article "New Wave/Feminism," commissioned by *Screen* but rejected for his "misuse" of Kristeva's 'semiotic chora' ", an example of the real stakes; professional censure, notions of propriety, differences of interpretation etc. that exist at the empirical level and which affect the status and transmission of ideas, careers, etc.

dialectical contribution".¹ In each case, however, in the name of ideas or an understanding of them, each writer promotes an exhibition, a set of works by artists, or the artists themselves, as well as a theoretical method or style of evaluation. In each case, a local and motivated argument is further augmented and invisibly elaborated by the institutional voice from which each writes (or speaks). Each wishes to persuade, to identify and to correct past failures or mistakes. Each of these inscriptions is moved by interests that are extra-textual.

3. THINGS INTO WORDS

3.1 It is possible to establish that the relationship between theory and art has always been special (problematic) throughout the period we have come to know as modernism. In a long-established and accepted dependency, theoreticians have turned to the arts (literary for the most part) for their inspiration and examples (Kostelanetz, 1978, Lunn, 1982, Carroll, 1987). The concomittant parallelism of theory and art is a chicken and egg variety epistemology and any attempt to trace causes to effects would produce an infinite historical regression (a patriarchal descent with the biblical *begat* as its repetitious verb). But, it is not clear just how art precedes theory (the language paradigm itself forces us to rethink how any phenomenological experience precedes thought in any meaningful way at both a personal and a

¹ The first quote is from Ronald Jones, "Hover Culture", *artscribe*, London, Summer, 1988, p. 48, in which Jones cites his version of the canon of texts which inscribe modernism's "*denouement*" within a derade of art journalism. The second is from Achille Bonita Oliva, "Neo-Europe (East)", *Flash Art*, Milan, May/June, 1988, p. 61, whose earlier book, *The International Trans-avantgarde*, Giancarlo Politi Editore, Milan, 1982, promoted a "polycentric" version of painting which has formed one of the touchstones of the debate on pluralistic criticism ever since.

cultural level). And it is not clear to what extent claims for theory can be made which would give assurance that it has clarified and articulated in textual form the implications of other kinds of empirical (art) work. In fact, the relativisation of 'aligned' or 'motivated' writing forces us to see critical writing as another competing form of the production of meanings, like art itself. In other words, it is difficult to determine in what ways art and theory are so mutually exclusive as to warrant separate categories (except for their media of transmission). (And this is the focus or result of much of the 'urge' from recent literary and semiological writings)¹. But, many examples from the past guarantee, at least, that this relationship between writing and art is reciprocal, if not equal and the same, and thus, it approaches a state of non-hierarchy.

Without wading through the thousands of examples of literary theories' relations to literature (in which, effectively, 'genres' of canons, as well as canons of genres, can be said to exist in structuralist, feminist, marxist, new criticism, and deconstructivist camps), it is possible to mention other kinds of theorists' immediate relations to other art(s)². Baudelaire's enthusiastic defenses of Delacroix, Daumier, Guys and Poe, or later, Courbet and Manet; Nietzsche's philosophical formulations (initially) through the musical-operatic projects of Wagner; Apollinaire's virtual construction of the (visual) Cubist movement; Breton's and Aragon's heralding of (all)

¹ And of some practices ie. Umberto Eco's move from academic tome to journalistic feuilleton to novelistic practice to author (rewritten) of a 'Hollywood' film. For a particularly focused argument concerning the ideological in "fiction", which might be a metacategory for both, see Lennard J. Davis, *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction*, Methuen, New York, 1987

² For a very interesting and readable 'history' or apprenticeship by a creative and engaging literary scholar see Tzvetan Todorov, *Literature and its Theorists*, Op Cit.

Surrealisms; Kristeva's recent reconsiderations of colour through the paintings of Bellini and Giotto; all attest to the close attention that theory has paid to art(s) (often modernist). Others: Sartre's and Genet's writings on Giacometti's sculptures and paintings, Malraux's 'saturnical' essay on Goya, Adorno (ambivalently) on Schoenberg and (hostily) on Stravinsky, and Lukacs' attacks on Brecht, with Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire's journalism (to complete a circle?), to mention only a (famous) (canonical) few, which form a thorough and unmistakeable legacy in which art (poetry, music, plastic arts, theatre, etc.) is the privileged subject of and the unmistakeable force behind theoretical musings from the philosophical to the social to the aesthetic¹.

If it were possible to show at the beginning of this introduction that language had invaded art, that words had impressed themselves on things, then it is equally possible now to say that things (things we call art[s]) have insinuated themselves complexly and thoroughly into the fibre of that particular language called critical writing or theory. Critical language is inundated with objects (which are then quixotically and temporarily rendered textual) and, particularly, the object-world of art. (Here we encounter Samuel

¹ See Jo-Anna Isaak, *The Ruin of Representation in Modernist Art and Texts*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1986. Originally her PhD thesis at the University of Toronto, Isaak's book is a first foray into what has been described as the "shared artistic strategies of key figures in early modernism, especially the vorticist mix of writer (T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound) and writer-artists (Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Wyndam Lewis), and the collaborative word/image experimentation in Russian formalism (Kruchenykh and Malevich at work on *Victory Over the Sun*). In two chapters of particular brilliance she analyses Joyce's exposure to cubism and dada, and Gertrude Stein's creation of a literary form governed, as she said, by 'the composition of cubism' ", in a review of the book by Norman Bryson, "The Ruin of Representation", *Vanguard*, Summer, 1988, Vancouver, p.42. For an earlier typical "zeitgeist" approach to synchronicity in representations see, Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts*, Princeton University Press, 1967

Beckett's "thingless words and wordless things" - the oxymoronic attempt to survive or recover in that gap discovered originally by de Saussure). It might now be possible to say that the language paradigm is not enough; that it does not entertain or circumscribe all the possibilities of meaning and returns to it. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham has most persuasively argued (a book whose main contention this is)...

"...as heretical as this sounds, language, too, is inhabited, structured, determined by the nonlinguistic in the form of referents or understanding; the idea of language is incoherent without the concept of the resistant nonlinguistic".
*(The Aescetic Imperative, 1987)*¹

Martin Jay has pointed to a quickening of this permeation in a specific literary preoccupation with one medium. He points to a body of writing in which "...one of the most striking aspects of twentieth-century French thought is the almost obligatory consideration of painting on the part of a wide variety of thinkers, such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Derrida, Lyotard, Kofman, Lefort, Marin, Deleuze, Starobinski, and, of course, Foucault himself". And he quotes Adelaide M. Russo's assertion that "a list of poet-art critics of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries would be almost identical to a list of great poets of the era: Baudelaire, Valery, Apollinaire, Reverdy, all the Surrealists, Ponge and Bonnefoy."²

¹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Aescetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, p. 269. This was stated earlier as more of a tragic dilemma by Theodor Adorno when he wrote "Even the implacable rigour with which criticism speaks the truth of an untrue consciousness remains imprisoned within the orbit of that against which it struggles, fixated on its surface manifestations." *Prisms*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1981, (trans. Weber, Samuel and Shierry), p.20

² Martin Jay, "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought", *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy, Basil

It is also possible to think of many omissions like the ones previously mentioned above or Michel Serres' writings on J.W. Turner's paintings or John Berger on Picasso's (conversely, a French writer on an English painter and an English writer on a 'French' painter). And, as Jay himself reminds us in a footnote which puts his own argument into question, there is also the German philosopher Heidegger's seminal work on Van Gogh's famous 'shoes', an acknowledged break with Jay's less-determined corollary proposition that "German thought" is characterized by the attribute that "music rather than painting has been the primary aesthetic model for many German philosophers".¹ What Jay thinks is a national intellectual trait may, in fact, have more to do with modernism's historical origins in France primarily through painting (and, poetry). Other emphases on other objects for aesthetic focus in other locales might be accounted for more particularly in their historical circumstances by tracing the identifiable characteristics of "travelling theory", as elaborated previously². Nevertheless, the "almost-

Blackwell, London, 1986, p. 175-204. He is quoting further from Adelaide M. Russo, "From the visual to the verbal in Jean Tardieu's *Les Portes de Toile*", *Substance*, Vol. 14, (1985), p. 76.

¹ Jay's national description has been already criticized by John Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing", *October* 44, Spring 1988, MIT Press, Boston, p. 89-117. Rajchman thinks that Jay's national designation of an interest in things visual is a coy surrogate. He writes "If one replaces 'the visual' with 'the rational' in this formulation, one finds a familiar pattern of disqualification of contemporary French thought, expounded in a more shrill manner by Apel than by Habermas." p. 90

² Jay's 'national' contention seems polemical in the extreme in its avoidance of, say, the relation of "Russian" thought to both painting and other art ie. see Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art: 1863-1922*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1962, 296 p., or "Swiss thought", ie. Hans Richter, *Dada art and anti-art*, McGraw-Hill, Toronto, 1977, 246 p., or "Italian thought", ie. Joshua C. Taylor, *Futurism*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1961, 154 p, for popular accounts of seminal relations between thinkers and artists outside France. Jay's argument has more force as an emphasis on painting (which he then conflates and equates to "vision" and, thus, the humanist subject) as a privileged object for French writers, recently reinforced by the publication of Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, 386 p., (trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod), and Jean-Francois Lyotard's, *Que*

obligatory" relation between critical practices and art practices can be established beyond doubt. It is a reciprocity or a continuing dialogue with each having equal or, at least, special purchase for the other.

Clearly, art enters writings in the form of example, inspiration, object of consideration, empirical proof, sociological and physical fact; as practice is to theory, as materializations and symbolizations are to abstractions. And it is equally clear that it not only affects the critical writings as a parallel activity (a paraxis) but that art's stylistic manifestations become embedded within the writing itself. For instance, Adorno's "negative dialectic", as a form of writing resistant to premature closure, takes its force from Schoenberg's objective "negation" of bourgeois values through polytonality, and Benjamin's juxtapositions of quotations to "explode" through history is suggested in the "shock" values entertained by both Symbolist and Surrealist collisions of imagery, and (pre-1975) Barthe's use of "doubling" of voices, is a direct tribute to Brecht's "epic" contention of 'montage' with narrator and chorus as the two soundings. Barthes concedes this in a specific compliment

Peindre?, Editions de la Difference, Paris, 1987. It might not be French thought but *painting thought*. As a counterexample in Canada, it is often and persuasively claimed that the technological arts (ie. film, video, electronic music, radio, etc.) are the privileged object for thinkers and theoreticians. See Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant*, New World Perspectives, Montreal, 1984, 144 p. Kroker himself is surprisingly often ambivalent about distinguishing differences of media, using Alex Colville's, Eric Fischl's or Rene Magritte's paintings as examples of "postmodern" approaches ("perfect texts"). But he is most emphatically in tune with a Canadian history of installations, video, etc., when he speaks of other uses of artistic media. In writing on the kinetic installations of Tony Brown, for instance, he intuitively responds against a (painterly) prejudice, "Indeed, Brown's simulational art has done just that which the French theorist, Jean-Francois Lyotard, writing in *Driftworks* said would be most difficult for critical art today: deciphering not only the explicit contents of the mediascape, but actually foregrounding the ideological effects of the mediascape which are hidden in the very form of the technological media of communication". "Synapse Lapse", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Volume XI, Nos. 1-2, Montreal, 1987, p.25-37. Originally published in *Tony Brown: Day Dreams*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1986 (catalogue).

when he writes, "I would be so happy if these words of Brecht could be applied to me: 'He thought in the head of others; and in his own, others than he were thinking.' That is true thought" (*The Grain of the Voice*, p. 195)¹. And Benjamin's blast through history, his famed 'storm blowing from Paradise' was based on a Paul Klee painting (*Angelus Novus*, 1920/32) which he owned and used as an object of transference for writing (socio-aesthetic) philosophy². In fact, as we have seen, it is precisely a kind of conundrum caused by conflicts around theory that has produced the wide range of interpretations of the very same art objects. Dialectical examples, of the immediate and documented variety, like the Brechtian 'optimism' faced with the Benjaminian 'pessimism', immediately involve an inter-embeddedness and inter-indebtedness in which the difficulty of sorting out the impact of art on theory and vice versa becomes (futile) apparent.

Ulmer's contention, noted before, as is Lyotard's, is that criticism is (belatedly) underway which changes the relation of the "critical text to its object" in the way that modernist (cubist, futurist, productivist, vorticist etc) visual art had earlier. He has written a paper in which he ...

¹ It is interesting, in light of "travelling theory" and Jay's "national" convictions, how Brecht as a theorist/artist transcends or eludes many narrow boundaries. He is important and contentious to Lukacs, Benjamin and Adorno (Lunn, 1982) and he is the "discovery" of Raymond Williams in Great Britain, (Giddens, 1982, p. 139) and the "discovery" of Roland Barthes in France (Sontag, 1983, p. 441). And, as the artist Dan Graham has pointed out, Jean-Luc Godard's film *Contempt*, starring Brigitte Bardot (a famous BB) is an homage to the other BB (Bertolt Brecht).

² Gershom Scholem, "Walter Benjamin and His Angel", *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, Op Cit., p.51 -89. It might be interesting at a later time to investigate the relation between Lacan's theory of the Symbolic in the theme of castration to the painting by Courbet, *Le Origin du Monde*, a female nude with an explicit depiction of genitalia which is in the collection of Lacan's family.

"will argue, following (Hayden) White's lead, that "post-criticism" (-modernist, -structuralist) is constituted precisely by the application of the devices of modernist art to critical representations; furthermore, that the principal device taken over by the critics and theorists is the compositional pair collage/montage". (Ulmer, 1983, p.83)

Ulmer makes a strong case, particularly for Derrida's (textual) grafting and a (new form of textual) mimicry in terms of visual objects and of John Cage's (influenced directly by McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1965) aleatory procedures toward "lecture-events" as "the montage-allegory principle in a way that illuminates the allegorical power of the host-parasite theme" (p. 103). Lyotard, too, looks to the arts and, in particular, the "avant-garde"¹ as a barometer of changes and shifts which are (reflectively) profound on the social level as well as to re-readings of historical texts...

**"If we are attentive to what is going on now,
notably in the most audacious inquiries in the**

¹ For a thorough construct of the term "avant-garde" see Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (trans. Gerald Fitzgerald) Icon Editions, Harper & Row, New York, 1971, where the basic contention of an avant-garde artist (male) is that..."We must never forget that, in fact, his social protest shows itself principally on the level of form, and thus alienation from society also becomes *alienation from tradition*." p. 127. Another traditional version of this theory is Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art*, Random House, New York, 1974. To be read against these (romantic) positions see, Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987. Crane's approach is strictly empirical-sociological (replete with economic charts and educational statistics), as she outlines shifts through seven major recent art movements to the rupture of "postmodernism". For the theoretical lament on the "death" of the historical avant-garde through a return to figuration see, Benjamin Buchloh's, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting", *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1983, p. 81-119. Buchloh's harangue against neo-expressionism does not take account of the origins of expressionism also as a reaction against the "cult of language". See Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster, 1973. For a dissection into three kinds of avant-garde; 'liberal avant-garde', conservative avant-garde' and 'permanent avant-garde', see William Gass, "Vicissitudes of the Avant-Garde", *Harper's Magazine*, October, 1988, p.64

- **most recent arts, and if we bring their lessons back to Freud's discourse, not only will it seem necessary to diminish the import of his discourse but we will better understand what are the stakes of "post-modernism" as a whole." (Lyotard, 1977, p.95)**

He is discussing *La Region Centrale*, a film by Michael Snow, whose poetic logic he describes through a reference to Borges' own controlling metaphor, writing of the film that "the center of the region is a labyrinth". McLuhan, using Poe's sailor as a similar privileged position "as a spectator of his own situation that gave him the thread which led him out of the Labyrinth", has always likewise valorized the artist's modernist techniques in a more speculative and interdisciplinary manner...

**"The artist is the man in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness."
(McLuhan, 1965, p. 65)¹**

¹ McLuhan is (with attribution) rewriting Wyndham Lewis's aphorism "The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present", a synopsis of avant-garde modernist idealism. McLuhan's acceptance of this premise is influenced by his (almost) sycophantic relation to Lewis and Pound. See *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, (selected and edited by Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan, William Toye), Oxford University Press, 1987. The basis for McLuhan's obvious male chauvinism, as evidenced above, is perhaps attributable to his zealous conversion to Catholicism; see particularly his letter to the Toronto Star re: abortion. See my own "Marshall McLuhan: Values at the Speed of Light", *Border Crossings*, Winnipeg, Fall, Volume 7, Number 4, 1988. p.48 for a review of this book. One of the differences for artists under the rubric of "postmodernism" might be the rupture of artistic ties to other disciplines as Diana Crane has noted..."While the early twentieth-century aesthetic innovators had maintained fruitful ties with scientists who had related interests, there seemed to be less evidence of this kind of communication in the post-war (second) period". And, in speaking of these newer artists, she writes ..."These artists saw themselves as entertainers, using visual imagery to amuse and provoke the public, rather than as aesthetic innovators contributing to an artistic tradition or as social rebels using visual imagery to attack a political elite". Op Cit. p. 141

As mentioned earlier, the cause and effect relation between art and theory is difficult to sort out (the host-parasite metaphor of Michel Serres is a reworked Nietzschean master-slave metaphor which still induces a traditional hierarchy, for instance). Just as Ullmer and Lyotard (whose emphasis is neo-Kantian one - in that it echoes Kant's definition of art as "purposiveness without purpose") might argue art preceding theory, or art producing theory (or paraliterature), McLuhan himself has argued that both, as it were, are (constructed) subject to exterior technological forms or "causes". *"The advent of electric media released art from this (print) straitjacket at once, creating the world of Paul Klee, Braque, Eisenstein, the Marx Brothers, and James Joyce"*. (1965, p. 54). In other words, a third force or 'superstructure' circumscribes the intimate dialectic. But such debateable issues concerning paternity (or can it be called incest) or metastructural discourses in no way diminish the obvious force, the insemination and dissemination that (modern) art has had into the language

3.2 Similarly, if it was possible to show how a semiological urge in methods and a relativised practice "blurred" the subject of art history and of quasi and fully journalistic art practices, it is equally possible to see how the status of the

¹ Charles Levin, in an excellent attempt to integrate "objects-relation theory" to symbolic "paradigm formation", captures the paradoxical nature of art when he writes "Artworks are indeed impossible objects: if aesthetic praxis were really transformative, then artworks would be "true", that is, art objects would be worldly objects, not purposeless but purposeful; if, on the other hand, they were mere objects or artifacts, they would be just things, or meaningless but purposeful", in "Aesthetic Alienation", *Life After Postmodernism*, (John Fekete, ed.), St. Martin's Press, New York, 1987, p. 111. Similarly, Harpham uses Grunewald's Isenheim Altar to produce an equally troubled position, writing, "Art is distinguished among cultural forms in that it invokes ancient fusions and primitive drives, "memories" of man's indistinctness as a species. But all symbolic, cultural, and linguistic phenomena retain vestiges of the horror of undifferentiation which has been vanquished or surpassed in the repression that produces them". Op Cit., p.192

critical text is no longer stable (objective) either. Speaking of 'literary production' (writing) Raymond Williams has suggested this kind of reformulation...

"The sharpest realization of this active history, a realization which brings with it at once the inevitabilities and the necessities of social and political action, must include the realization of the *variable* (my emphasis) realities of this practice, which are so often put under pressure or, from deformed or false theory relegated to the secondary or the marginal, displaced as the superstructural, distrusted as apparently independent production, even controlled or silenced by injunctions. To see the full social dimension of this kind of production is to take it more seriously, and seriously *as itself*, than has been possible in more specialized political or aesthetic perspectives. Every mode in its range, from reproduction and illustration through embodiment and performance to new articulation and formation, is a crucial element of practical consciousness".

(Williams, 1977)¹

"Practical consciousness" as an explanatory and expansionist term has much in common with "chains of meaning" (Eco), "intertextuality" or "writerly readers" (Barthes), "translinguistics" (Bakhtin), or "expanded field"

¹ A similar demand for 'variation' is to be found in M.M. Bakhtin who writes "*Various approaches are justified and are even quite necessary as long as they are serious and reveal something new in the literary phenomenon being studied, as long as they promote a deeper understanding of it*". *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, p. 3. Donald Kuspit similarly writes that Erich Fromm had defined the term "revolutionary" in the following terms. "The revolutionary...is the man who has emancipated himself from the ties of blood and soil, from his mother and father, from special loyalties to State, class, race, party or religion". Transposing this to art, Kuspit says that "the revolutionary critic has no special loyalty to-dependence on-any art. At the same time, there is no art that is alien to him". He goes on to say "This is a kind of restless virtuoso attitude, not unrelated to the best artists working today, which makes no binding commitments yet which is willing to bring to bear a great variety of analytic and evaluative methods on the art that catches its fancy." Kuspit is at his fullest explanation of his critical approach in "The Necessary Dialectical Critic", *Art Criticism*, Art Department, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Spring, 1979, p.13-31.

(Krauss), etc. It suggests an extended field of meaning(s), a 'play' of signification, an anti-modernist expansion of the category of (formerly literary) objects to include vernacular texts and a concomitant extension of the role and status of the reader (interpreter). Among the consequences for an acceptance of these revalued terms is that the notion of TEXT comes to replace the imperically valued one of 'literature' (high culture), just as the art object was dislodged (made variable) in a parallel intellectual rhythm of material production.

That the two consequences are parallel is given force, again, not just in the vernacular objects included within the discourse of aesthetics as mentioned earlier. The art object itself is (already) de-centered. It is noted, for instance, when Krauss explains aspects of the "theatricality" of some recent art in contradistinction to a formalist argument of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried whose art criticism runs alongside (although later) the "long critical tradition stretching back to the nineteenth century, beginning with Mathew Arnold and extending through T.S. Eliot, a tradition that sees art essentially as a form of moral statement and assumes a clear-cut separation between the arts".¹ She writes of some of the new art...

"The ambition of minimalism was, then, to relocate the origins of a sculpture's meanings to the outside, no longer modelling its structure on the privacy of psychological space but on the public, conventional

¹ Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, The Viking Press, New York, p. 203. For a good view of Greenberg's position in a series of influential essays, see, Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961, 278 p. The fairest and most thorough analysis of Greenberg's contribution to contemporary art criticism is still Donald Kuspit, *Clement Greenberg: Art Critic*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1979, 215 p.

nature of what might be called cultural space".¹

Similarly, then, the absolutist and idealist role and 'nature' of art criticism is replaced by a kind of transfigured writing as well as a transfigured role for the reader (viewer) (loosely known as "reception theory"). In one argument for a irreducible plurality of meanings through reading, Barthes, for instance, takes the hedonist highroad, writing...

"Imagine an aesthetic (if the word has not become too depreciated) based entirely (completely, radically, in every sense of the word) on the *pleasure of the consumer*, whomever he may be, to whatever class whatever group he may belong, without respect to cultures of languages: the consequences would be huge, perhaps even harrowing (Brecht has sketched out such an aesthetic of pleasure; of all his proposals this is the one most frequently forgotten)".

(The Pleasure of the Text, 1971).

Barthes' hyperbolized intent as a writer-critic was (even) to have criticism aspire to the condition of "fiction" as he wrote "Let the essay avow itself *almost* a novel: a novel without proper names" (*Roland Barthes, 1971*).

¹ Krauss, *Op Cit.*, p. 270. In a discussion which does not name structuralism or the language paradigms, Krauss nevertheless refers to them when she writes..."With this work Serra seems to be declaring that we ourselves are like the *Prop*. We are not a set of private meanings that we can choose or not choose to make public to others. We are the sum of our visible gestures. We are as available to others as we are to ourselves. Our gestures are themselves formed by the public world, by its conventions, its language, the repertory of its emotions, from which we learn our own. It is no accident that the work of Morris and Serra was being made at the time when novelists in France were declaring, "I do not write. I am written". " p.270. In this paragraph it is possible to hear the echo of Bakhtin's "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of speaker's intentions; it is populated-overpopulated-with the intentions of others", *Dialogic Imagination*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 294. It is possible to infer a reference to Robbe-Grillet from Krauss's declaration although even earlier Henri Michaux, the poet/painter had written, "One does not dream. One is dreamed", echoing a much earlier writing of Baudelaire who wrote, "...all those things think through me, or I through them (for in the vastness of reverie, the *I* quickly loses itself)", in Roger Shattuck's "The Art of Stillness", *The Banquet Years*, Vintage Books, Random House, (revised), 1968, p. 350. The aphoristic version is Rimbaud's "*Je est un autre*".

But, without embracing fiction per se, (which Barthes never actually did, resisting the impulse to which Eco and Lodge have 'succumbed'), there are other indications that the text of the critic is in crisis; is under attack; is vulnerable to emerging demands; is being revised. In a foray which attempts to make visible the "affiliations" between criticism and social politics, Edward Said, like Williams (1977), Eagleton (1983), Davis (1987), Snitow, Stansell, Thompson (1983), addresses the moral and social consequences of critical writing..."There is always an Other; and this Other willy-nilly turns interpretation into a social activity, albeit with unforeseen consequences, audiences, constituencies and so on". Instead of fiction Said proposes (echoing Benjamin's "art of interruption") a critical writing in which "there must be *interference* , crossing of borders and obstacles, a determined attempt to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible to make" and that the recognition of a "secular realm I have presupposed requires a more open sense of community as something to be won and of audiences as human beings to be addressed"¹. Said's cause is for a use of

¹ Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constitutencies", in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1983, (ed. Hal Foster). Said originally gave this paper at a conference entitled "The Politics of Interpretation", University of Chicago, 1981 which I attended. After his argument against professional hermeticism he was personally attacked for his overt political position on the Palestinian Liberation Organization, on whose national council he serves as advisor. Said's argument echoes White's call for a historical explanation "which can be judged solely in terms of the richness of the metaphors which govern its sequence of articulation. Thus envisaged, the governing metaphor of an historical account could be treated as a *heuristic rule which self-consciously eliminates certain kinds of data from consideration as evidence*.", *Op Cit.*, p. 46. Interestingly, White's call for a stylistic (aesthetic) takes its force from Gombrich's art historical examples of Constable and Cezanne's "systems of notations" for landscape and consequently is a call to interdisciplinarity which would "allow us to entertain seriously those creative distortions offered by minds capable of looking at the past with the same seriousness as ourselves but with different affective and intellectual orientations." *Op Cit.*, p.47 In many ways, Said's *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, Random House, 1979, is a partial rejoinder to White's plea for a "history" whose texts are not strictly canonically 'literature' or 'history', although Said's style is still a conservatively narrative for the most part.

literary critical tools in an application to government documents, journalism and the like.

This interrelation between professional criticism and "secular" texts has the same plea for relevance as those we saw for an opening of the field of objects to be addressed in the 'new' art history.

Another example serves to show how prescriptions (propositions, antidotes,) for a less regulated critical writing can be seen in the continuing reformulations of its role by Lyotard, who, again speaking of Michael Snow's *La Region Central* writes..."With such a logic, the function of language is no longer to signify a given object, and the function of the image is not longer to deceive by means of false recognition"¹ He continues, ..."By the same token, works must not be taken as symptoms symbolically expressing a concealed discourse, but as attempts to state perspectives of reality. Interpretation must in turn give way to descriptions of devices. As for these descriptions, they are no less prescriptive in nature than works; they continue and eventually reroute the perspective-creating potentialities these works contain. Inversely, the time has come to consider the would-be symptoms as artistic creations."² This neo-Kantian call is an echo of Susan Sontag's original polemic framed

¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Unconscious as Mise-en-scene", *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, (Michel Benamou/Charles Caramello, ed.), Coda Press, Madison, 1977 p. 96. Lyotard's most sustained neo-Kantian position can be found in "Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime", in *Artforum*, April, 1982, New York, p. 64-69

² Ibid. In another place, Lyotard has written even more radically "I believe that what is revolutionary is precisely to hope for nothing. Critique's extraordinary force in the work of art, (my emphasis) inasmuch as one is dealing with presences - plastic or musical - springs from the fact that one is always in the order of the here-now; it is here and now that the critical reversal operates." in "Notes on the Critical Function of Works of Art", *Driftworks*, (ed. Roger McKeon), Semiotext(e), New York, 1984, p.78 leading him to the conclusion that "There is more revolution, even if it is not much, in American Pop art than in the discourse of the Communist Party". p.83

under the terms "Against Interpretation" where she bemoaned the language function's insertion into art, writing..."None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew (or thought one knew) what it did. *From now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art.*"¹ (emphasis mine). Neither is (exactly) a search for origins (although Sontag's stridency has a moral tone which suggests a kind of "primitive" space before language and participates in a similar nostalgia to Levi-Struass's construction of a pure civilization before the fall into language), but both are a call to understanding of art in its own terms (phenomenologically, emotionally, rather than linguistically or analytically). In another place, Lyotard has furthered this call to the sublime by questioning the very cognitive assumption which underlay (in his opinion) traditional critical writing...

"Finally, what is threatening in the work of thinking (or writing) is not that it remains episodic, but that it pretends to be complete. The idea that thinking is able to build a system of total knowledge about clouds of thought by passing from one site to another and accumulating the views it produces at each site - such

¹ Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation", *A Susan Sontag Reader*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1982, p. 96. Sontag's position is a harange really and contains such provocative lines as "In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone", p. 99 and she uses visceral imagery to make her argument reek with distaste for hermeneutics in general... "Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities.", p. 98. In a less emotional tone, Anthony Giddens has, in an echo of the Canadian discourse, written about the same difference..."In those societies which possess no writing, where there exists no physical 'imprint' of past time, the past is contained in the deep impress which tradition holds over the routinisation of daily experiences. But the symbolic mark, writing, is incomparably the most potent means of extending experience in time-space; by the same token, the advent of writing concretises certain basic dilemmas of hermeneutics alien to purely oral cultures.", in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: Vol. 1, Power, Property and the State*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981, p.39

an idea constitutes *par excellence* the sin, the arrogance of the mind. It implies that thinking has the capacity to be identified with the object to which it refers, as if the gap between thinking and the object could ever be bridged."

(*Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*, 1988)

One of the implications of this recursive stranglehold of one to the other (art and language) might be simply to consider art as theory and theory as art, both with special but not exclusive functions (both as "practical consciousness", as discursive functions, as inter-texts, as meaning productions - as discourses etc). To conflate them, not once, but twice - to fold them into one another not to produce a homogenous or elite gell but to problematize them both simultaneously. That is, to consider that an art work (visual, sculptural, theatrical, literary, filmic etc) is a kind of theory in that the work encompasses or engenders more than "aesthetic" considerations of form and has functional effects and social motivations. As the idea of the "aesthetic" is a fairly recent convention within artefactual history tied to formalist critical procedures, and as there is a strong argument for artistic works retaining other values (from the magically ritual to the semantically meaningful), such an approach might serve to also undermine the authority which is given or assumed to theory.¹ As has been shown, both theory and

¹ General histories of art tend to associate the "aesthetic" approach to art with the end of the eighteenth century and a Romantic tendency in the arts to resist implications of the Industrial Revolution through isolation or demarcation of its 'proper' boundaries, a process common to all discourses of the time. Foucault's periodization of the *age classique*, for instance, was characterized in general grammar, natural history and the analysis of wealth by "a search for the genetic origin of its peculiar object of study: language, life and wealth, respectively", (White, 1978, p. 242). Earlier, McLuhan had elaborated the same insight through a tendency towards the fixity of languages (spelling and grammar) according to the interpenetration of print into oral cultures, "What we feel as 'classical' in the Augustans and the eighteenth century, that is to say, has to do with the large stratum of Latin neologism which was imported into English by the translators of the first age of print". (McLuhan, 1962, p. 274). Agreement as to the relative date of this paradigm shift, if not the factors, is common. See for instance Adorno and Horkheimer (1969), Williams (1977), Bakhtin (1986), etc. That this moment is a wide dispersal of a "scientific" metaphor for consciousness is also consensual ie. "The

art distress each other in ways that do not allow for a full integration of one by the other.

And, as theory is written (and published as the bibliography and these incessant footnotes show), its textual manifestations certainly allow it to be considered under the rubrics of style, form, historical precedent, tropologies, symbolism, reception context, narratology, and so on as a form of literature. In other words, the two can be blurred by applying their own terms to one another - by not allowing art to be assumed by a separate (and higher) category called theory and by allowing theory to be seen as an art, as a socially embedded (writing) production with aesthetic implications and qualities. Part of this blurring, of course, has already occurred. Brecht's writings on theatre (or film or radio) are deliberately a part of theory and are accepted as such, even in academic circles. And Benjamin's ruminations, on book collecting, for instance, are certainly literary, and therefore subject to analysis of formal devices of writing; of 'literary' considerations.

How else can we explain that in the first sustained study in English of Benjamin's writings, we can read that the "triumph of (Benjamin's) text, by contrast lies in its subtle imbrication of form and motif. In the jaded, secularized world of *Trauerspiel*, rife as it is with sluggish melancholy and pure intrigue, the leakage of meaning from objects, the unhinging of signifiers from signifieds, is at once a matter of *enonce* and *enonciation*, as

contention here is that the long process of cultural integration through which science passed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had created by the second half of the eighteenth century a new type of European. His signal characteristic was access to, and understanding of, the mechanical aspects of the new scientific learning.", in Margaret C. Jacob, *The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1988

the features of an already petrified, primordial landscape undergo a kind of secondary reification at the hands of the 'fixing' hieroglyph" and "Signifieds metonymically displace themselves onto their signifiers, so that jealousy becomes as sharp and functional as the dagger with which it is associated."¹ Such vivid, almost purple, description comes from a writer who himself has written elsewhere, "What counts as a 'literary' text is a matter of ideological definition; it is perfectly possible for a piece of writing to move from a 'literary' to a non-literary' register and back in the course of its historical career. Some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and others have literariness thrust upon them."²

Thus, I am not trying to insinuate or "thrust" Benjamin or any other theorist into a canon called art (writing) rather than theory for its own sake (or for the sake of an institutional possession through artificial boundaries) then, but rather to set it on an equal footing (to ground it) at the level of art - to deflate its meta (over) quality and to balance it (ex-centric). Or contrastingly, to give art the status of theory, of a metadiscourse involving discursive material practices which produce effects and conscious knowledge. While this argument almost duplicates the art-language relation that was touched upon earlier, it differs in that theory is usually considered to be a special kind of language, an elite and particular use value of language which is highly motivated and stringently monitored. It is assumed to be a *critical* language; language which has the purpose of correction, analysis, even the

¹ Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, Verso, London, 1981, p. 10

² Ibid. p. 123.

moral or political purpose to uncover "false consciousness" or ideological construction; in short a language which *exceeds* its object. To deflate its claims or to inflate those of art is to attempt to correct a hierarchial fiction which is an unnecessary imbalance that obstructs the purposes and effectivity of either (and, possibly both).

3.3 Another more practical reason, raised earlier in the name of Brecht, can be issued to justify the attempt to blur the categories of theory/art or theorist/artist. This reason is purely historical and empirically substantial. Simply put, it is that artists themselves (those who choose to call themselves by this name and those who are designated by institutions under this name) have written theory. Just as it was possible to see that critical writing is grasped within the shifting borders of that which is 'literary', because of their employ of 'artistic' means, and just as it is certain that theorists have even made art *per se* (Wittgenstein's architecture, Greenberg's watercolours, Adorno's musical compositions), it is also true that artists have written (whether we call it theory or literature). The simplicity of this fact does not hide the importance and complexity of its significance. It means, among other things, that not only does language invade art and that art inhabits itself in the regions of critical theory (as privileged referent), but, too, that artists themselves utilize language as one material of production. Artists spill over into language in attempts to give other form to ideas, to act in different arenas of attention and possible results and (stubbornly) to wrest from theory and the status and power of the printed word some of the status and power that theory appropriates from art.

The examples here are again legion and growing. Schoenberg, the composer and painter (and musical theorist) wrote "On the Relation to the Text" in the 1912 catalogue of the *Blaue Reiter* exhibition. Other expressionists like Klee were prolific writers of theories of line, form, color etc. and Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art* is the firm textual basis of a whole modernist lineage of abstraction which is non-geometrical, for instance¹. Many Bauhaus artists and architects were intimately and coherently involved in writing theories of aesthetics and education which have had major impact on art schools throughout North America and (Eastern) Europe. Naum Gabo, for instance, wrote extensive books on his version of Constructivism in North America to introduce the ideas of art, design and technology to a wider student population and a more general public and Moholy-Nagy's *Vision in Motion* (1947) was a seminal text in the contemporary understanding of new reproductive arts and kinetic sculpture and their (possible) place in a technologized culture.

In more contemporary terms, sculptor William Tucker has written histories and theories of sculpture, John Cage's book *Silence* is still influential with regard to New Music and avant-garde aesthetics in general, and Laura Mulvey, who wrote the extremely influential "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"² is the co-director and writer of equally provocative films.

¹ Klee, Kandinsky and Magritte are the artists chosen by Michel Foucault in a chapter devoted to them in *This is Not a Pipe*. It is impossible not to wonder if it wasn't their eminently literary relation which led him to single them out. More about this in Chapter Two.

² Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* 16, No. 3, (Autumn 1975), p. 6-18, "Women and Representation: A Discussion with Laura Mulvey", *Wedge*, London, Spring, 1979, p.49-, "Riddles of the Sphinx: a film by Laura Mulvey and Peter Woollen-Script", *Screen*, 18, No. 2, Summer, 1977, p. 62-

As well, Victor Burgin and Mary Kelly have both produced works of art and have written extensively in journals and books of theory. In Canada, where alternative spaces and alternative publication and distribution systems have government support, for instance, writings by artists are virtually obligatory. *Performance by Artists* and *Video by Artists*¹, as titles, emphasize the role and status given to the artist within the realm of publishing (and theory), allowing artists to occupy (textual-institutional) space usually and unduly crowded by the exclusive articulations of curators, critics, theorists and art historians. The examples are virtually endless and new journals which are devoted to artists' writings appear with the regularity of changing fashions. Discursive formations in language by artists, especially today, are often put on a par with theory as another type of critical practice.

One reason for this transposition or democratizing is certainly the assumption that artists understand what they are doing in more ways than one. Another is that they are not, of course, out of touch with contemporary theory. As Kostelanetz puts it, "Concomittantly, artists and even critics inevitably adopt an approach whose initial scope is much narrower than Langer's, say, or Dewey's; they do not feel the academic obligation to

¹ AA Bronson and Peggy Gale, ed., *Performance by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1979, 320 p., Peggy Gale, ed., *Video by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 224 p., Elke Town, ed., *Video by Artists 2*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1986, 151 p. The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press, until recently, only published the writings and written 'works' of artists ie. Donald Judd, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula etc. And the recent DIA Art Foundation sponsored *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Op Cit. have as many artists-writers as academics-critics represented in the delivery of papers and discussions. (Some of this, of course, has to do with the academy in the first place and its production of graduate 'art' students whose education is both in theory, history and practice - see Diana Crane, Op Cit.). The case of Wyndam Lewis, theorist, novelist, painter, offers an interesting historical moment in which his activities were so diverse in terms of disciplines as to scatter his reputation into too many fields making of him a pauper and a resentful man who wasn't accepted easily into any discourse (to this day).

acknowledge previous alternative theories before presenting their own" and (they) "tend to be more intimately familiar with the extreme artistic endeavors that pose the most radical challenges to a de facto philosophy of art. These up-to-date, inductive estheticians, at their best, forge generalizations relevant not just to one art but contemporary arts as a whole..."¹. In this case he is using the writings of John Cage and those of Allan Kaprow as artistic extensions of John Dewey's *Art As Experience* (1934) or Susanne K. Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, writing that "Cage's idea of art as anything that generates esthetic experience curiously carries John Dewey's thinking to a logical extreme, as do Cage's notions of art as revealing experiential reality and of the beholder as necessarily creating his own experience".²

The idea of a theory/practice dialectic as a representation of coherency or 'correspondence' (Beaudelaire's term) has been often explored previously (Althusser's "theory is practice"). Paul Theberge, for instance, has written on the close relation between the music theory of Glenn Gould and the media work of Marshall McLuhan, re-writing the "labyrinth figure" of both under the sub-category "The Splendid Splice". On Gould's post-production process, he writes,

¹ Richard Kostelanetz, ed., "Contemporary American Esthetics", *Esthetics Contemporary*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 1978, p. 24

² Ibid, p. 29. Kostelanetz gives McLuhan the credit for the theoretical break from formalist art criticism, writing "The first real contribution after Greenberg's formulation came from Marshall McLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride*, written during the war but not published until 1951." p. 34. McLuhan's irreverent predelection for moving the "high" arts into the "low" arts is (now) a virtual Canadian tradition. For instance, Adam Gopnik compares the late paintings of Phillip Guston to the cartoons of Robert Crumb in "The Art World: Cyclops", *The New Yorker*, October 3, 1988, p. 95-101

"The fugal subject-countersubject form of organization, the texture in which simultaneous voices make use of devices such as imitations, reverse imitation and inversion, all bear resemblance to McLuhan's description of the multiple perspectives embodied in the Thomistic article. Gould's recordings reveal the fugal labyrinth through his own unique style of playing the piano and through his use of the microphone as an aid in "dissection". Furthermore, his creative use of the editing process, the "post-taping afterthought", might be compared to what McLuhan described as the poetic process itself: 'one of discovering by retracing'."¹

And Edward Said, in a seminal piece which argues against self-sufficient texts which create "only a hermetic textual cosmos", also exemplifies the practices of Glenn Gould (post 1964) to establish the "worldliness" of texts against Ricoeur's demarcation between text and speech. Writing of one of Gould's extended record discs (which includes a performance, an interview and a transcript), Said writes (ironically)...

" Indeed Gould's strategy is something of a parody of all the directions we might take in trying to get at what occurs between the world and the aesthetic or textual object. Here was a pianist who had once represented the ascetic performer in the service of

¹ Paul Theberge, "Gould/McLuhan", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Thought*, Montreal, Volume X, No. 1-2, 1986, p. 116. Theberge joins their work on the basis of a corresponding "model of human cognition" and as a dual recognition of "the themes of isolation and technology (which) are intimately linked for Canadians precisely because it was, in part, an attempt to overcome the problem of geographical isolation that made Canada so dependent on communications technologies." p. 125. Theberge mentions that Gould downplays (or ignores) his relation to McLuhan but in *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, Op Cit., there are two letters to Gould (p. 301 and 316) and mention of a CBC radio programme on which they both participated; as well, Gould published part of that script in McLuhan's magazine *Explorations*. *Re-tracing* is a modernist method par excellence: one thinks of Gertrude Stein's writings for instance as an immediate example or of Samuel Beckett, and of Walter Benjamin's desire to write a text entirely composed of quotations.

**music, transformed now into unashamed virtuosos,
whose principal aesthetic proposition is supposed
to be little better than that of a musical whore."**¹

Using Gould's *multiple* addresses as an historical empirical entry, Said is able to dislodge the text from its protective "history" ("a euphemism in such cases for the impossibly vague notion that all things take place in time") in order to "provide an instance of a quasi-textual object whose ways of engaging the world are both numerous and complicated..."(p.35). In short, Said relies on the practices, which are also theories, of an artist in an attempt to develop a theory, which is also a practice, of critical intervention. He also, interestingly, uses the intervention in the form of a Canadian artist to introduce a discourse of medieval Arabic linguistic speculation. Using an "other " to pry open the space in a dominant discourse is an aesthetic technique the equivalent of "making strange", of dislodging expectations to shock something new out of the (now) benign discourse (African sculptural motifs introduced into the Western statuary tradition by the Cubists comes to mind). The notion of a universal dialectic between "inward-looking exegesis" and "contextual" readings ("anchored to particular usage, circumstance, historical and religious situation") (p.36) in contemporary criticism is sustained by Said and then amplified by its Oriental medieval precedent. But Said twists this dialectic to emphasize his own concept of a "network of colliding forces" (which he finds "brutally explicit" in Gould's later practice) which results in this conclusion,... "Too many exceptions, too

¹ Edward W. Said, "The World, the Text and the Critic", *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983. Said's description of the "quasi-textual object" is "(Gould's voice, the peacock style of the Liszt transcription, the brash informativity of an interview packed along with a disembodied performance) beneath a dumb, anonymous, and disposable disc of black plastic". p. 32. Both James Agee and Clifford Geertz come to mind again. See the Preface.

many historical, ideological, and formal circumstances, implicate the text in actuality, even if a text may also be considered a silent printed object with its own unheard melodies. The concert of forces by which a text is engendered and maintained as a fact not of mute ideality but of *production* dispels the symmetry of even rhetorical oppositions." (p.50)

Said's use of musical metaphors (an obvious Gouldian invasion of his text) repositions the nature of 'works' (itself a repositioning which equates texts to art under this larger umbrella) in order to come down on the "contextual" side of critical interpretation which would register the implicated texts into a larger social field which he describes elsewhere as "the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live"¹, leading to a prescription for critic's attitudes to be "frankly inventive, in the traditional rhetorical sense of *inventio* so fruitfully employed by Vico, which means finding and exposing things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine".² Of course, Said's hope or desire for inventiveness is modelled on and already embedded in this singular Canadian artists's activities. It is already available, for instance, in Gould's *faux naive* response to the immediate reception of his most challenging precept...

"In an unguarded moment some months ago, I predicted that the public concert as we know it today would no longer exist a century hence, that its functions would have been entirely taken over by electronic media. It had not occurred to me that

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Op Cit., p. 93

² Edward W. Said, "The World, the Text, and the Critic", Op Cit., p. 53

this statement represented a particularly radical pronouncement. Indeed, I regarded it almost as self-evident truth...".¹

Gould's tongue can be found somewhere in his cheek. What could be more inventive than to deny invention entirely?

Gould's move toward the construction (production) of a different kind of listener-composer-performer through technological means available to recording (re-tracing, re-producing, re-presenting) is a parallel theory-practice to the practice-theory of a new model of criticism which embraces the teleological interaction between production and reception. The artist, then, can be seen to also "write" theory, leaving graphic traces which are not desirably reducible to "artistic", "poetic" or "aesthetic" modes or anterior secondary positions as they re-implicate criticism into a dialogue with ever new objects of social discourse through "practical consciousness".²

In one of the most sustained descriptions and analysis of the relation between artists' writings (in both figurative and literal ways that I am using it here), Craig Owens, on the occasion of the publication of a book of writings by the artist Robert Smithson, makes the further argument that...

¹ Glenn Gould, "The Prospects of Recording", *High Fidelity*, 16, April, 1966, p. 47, quoted in Theberge, *Op Cit.*, p.112

² Gould's jettisoning of concert performances comes shortly before the attempt by visual artists to jettison the "object". As Ursula Meyers wrote, "The shift from object to concept denotes disdain for the notion of commodities - the sacred cow of this culture", in *Conceptual Art*, E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1972. The failure of this idealism in the visual arts was recorded early in, Roy Bongartz, "Question: How do you buy a work of art like this?", *New York Times*, Sunday, August 11, 1974, Section 2, p. 1, in which Chris Burden's performance of having himself shot in the arm is discussed in terms of the market for the "authentication" (documents) of the event.

"However, the linguistic origin of the principle which made distinctions between the arts, and thus modernism, possible, *had* to remain unconscious;"..."Thus repressed, language became an invisible reserve which constituted, in the visual arts at least, modernism's unconscious. And the eruption of language into the aesthetic field in the 1960s would occur with all the force of the return of the repressed."¹

Owens rhetorically suggests that Smithson's "geophotographic fictions", "the language of the half-tone screen", "blocks of text", and "heaps of language" reveal not only "the reciprocity of his visual and verbal practices", but also signal a specific historical moment (which he identifies as the indexing of the "emergence of the postmodern"). His claim is that the

¹ Craig Owens, "Earthwords", *October* 10, MIT Press, Cambridge, Fall, 1979, p. 120-130. Owens' desire to maintain this moment as an historical "eruption" forbids him to allow earlier "writings" of modernists, as I have, making the distinction that they are secondary and simply indexes of a "mounting sense of loss as painting became more 'primary', the desire for a supplement increased." p.127. He marks this difference by using a Barthesian distinction between "statements" (early modernists) and "texts" (postmodernists) which are "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash". p. 127. It is not important here but I would argue that Barthes' notion is originally dependent upon examples of "texts" in modernism from Mallarmé through the surrealists, Brecht etc. and that Owens' appropriation of the terms delimits the "eruption" of other earlier writings (especially as he has just told us that they are present-and therefore available for "eruption") It is possible, for instance, to look at Man Ray's dependence upon poetry and Apollinaire's "calligrams" as early language usages which were not *secondary*. Also, of course, the fissure called 'postmodernism' is much debated chronologically (epistemologically and ontologically, as well). In its most exaggerated instance, Arthur Kroker and David Cook, for instance, write, "It is our general thesis that the postmodern scene, in fact, begins in the fourth century with the Augustinian subversion of embodied power, and that everything since the Augustinian refusal has been nothing but a fantastic and grisly implosion of experience as Western culture itself runs under the signs of passive and suicidal nihilism", *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986, p.8. Geoffrey Galt Harpham accords it the same centrality but gives it another reading, "...but all of Barthes's insights are anticipated and vividly *experienced* by Augustine. Following Barthes's, "advanced" contemporary criticism is in the position of heralding a conversion that has already occurred." *Op Cit.* p. 133. This is also Lyotard's notion, which avoids periodization of art by looking at moments of modernism or postmodernism wherever they can be found "sensitive to issues of representability", which would mean, contrary to Owens, the language "eruptions" are not periodizing but periodic. Harpham calls this feature "the Antiquity of modernism".

"fissures in Smithson's 'earthwords' disclose the disjunctive, atomizing principle which, according to Walter Benjamin, defines allegory. In allegory, language is broken up, dispersed, in order to acquire a new and intensified meaning in its fragmentation."¹ Owens has gone on to develop this "allegorical impulse" particularly in Laurie Anderson's techno-performances, a famous one of which is keyed by a quotation from William Burroughs which simply reads "Language is a virus (from Outer Space)" which forms the basis of a (tropic) song she wrote and sings in the performance *Americans on the Move* ². Smithson is recognized by Owens and given the status as artist-theorist for his artistic moves through **textual visualization** which Owens equates "with the techniques of poststructuralist theory - Derrida's deconstructivist reading, for example, or Foucault's archeology" and, further asserts that "the success of his (Smithson's) enterprise may be measured by the critical rigor with which his relation to inherited concepts is thought in

¹ Craig Owens, *Ibid.* In a blurring of distinctions which is credited to Smithson, Owens writes that "...In demonstrating that Andre deploys linguistic signifiers as he would the cinderblocks, logs or metal plates of his sculpture, writing and work are made to confront each other like parallel mirrors mounted in series, opening onto an infinite play of reflections in which the distinctions between writing and sculpture are, in effect, dissolved." p.125. He is referring to Smithson's descriptions of Andre's drawings made of words.

² Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism", Part One, *October* 12, and Part Two, *October* 13, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1979. Interestingly enough, in an unexpected cross-current, William Burroughs has been having exhibitions of his *paintings*. See Dennis Cooper, "The Paintings of William Burroughs", *artscribe*, London, Summer, 1988, p. 70-71, for a critical appraisal of these "paintings" (acrylic, ink, photographs and shot gun holes on plywood). The "virus" as a major metaphor figures prominently in the medically informed language of McLuhan and Foucault also and is now being used extensively in the popular media as the central trope for discussing computer problems, projecting a post-modern "techno-body" (without organs?) back to center stage. See Fred Cohen, "Terminal Viruses: The Difficulty of Defending Computers Against Electronic Pests", *The Sciences*, Nov./Dec., 1988, p. 24-30

these texts".¹ And, it is clear in reading concurrent (to Smithson) texts of "conceptual" artists, that the function of critic was meant to be usurped or, at least, equalized completely by the artist. As Joseph Kosuth wrote, countering formalist criticisms, and appropriating language for art...

"In other words, the propositions of art are not factual, but linguistic in *character* - that is, they do not describe the behavior of physical or even mental objects; they express definitions of art."²

Others (ie. Lyotard, Harpham, Foucault, etc.) might, then, claim that language was not repressed until a moment called postmodern but was always already-there, was always (re)present in art from the beginning (Derrida's *écriture*, the already-written, the plentitude of linguistic presence) and is noticeable every time "naturalness" is questioned. Early Cubist collages with bits of newspaper embedded into "images" might provide an earlier example of an (unconsciously admitted) incomplete separation of the arts or Mallarme's pages to be "seen" rather than "read", and Foucault's work on Magritte in *This is Not a Pipe* (1982) assumes an exemplary (modern) moment where the "divorce" between the two is simply considered impossible and becomes the (literal) content of the paintings (like

¹ Craig Owens, *Op Cit.*, p. 130. In a significant and brilliant rethinking of the two earlier essays, Owens identifies as well the turn to postmodernism with a feminist emergence which it (postmodernism), has, in turn, neglected or repressed. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1983, p. 57-82

² Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy", *Conceptual Art*, *Op Cit.*, p.165. He further writes..."What is the function of art or the nature of art? If we continue our analogy of the forms art takes as being art's *language* one can realize then that a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as a comment on art. We can then go further and analyze the types of "propositions". p. 163. Kosuth creatively re-wrote A.J. Ayer for a whole generation of visual artists.

seventeenth-century emblems). But, for some writers still, contrary to Said's cautions which informed this thesis from the beginning, the world is seen as seeming to aspire only to the condition of a book, of a readable object. Barthes, for instance, wrote, "We never have signifying systems of objects in the pure state; language always intervenes, as a relay, notably in image systems, as titles, as captions, articles, which is why it is not fair to say that we live exclusively in a civilization of the image."¹

Regardless of the degree of belief in the art/language wedding(s), (which is master or slave?, missionary or convert?, dominant or submissive?, or are they or can they be equal?), it is obvious that its convergences are of consequence for both, and, perhaps, especially, in recent decades. By clashing motivated theory (and theorists) into art and motivated art (and artists) into theory, this introduction attempts to show the blurring of disciplines, some of the stakes involved and some of the ways and some of the significances of these transgressions' occurrences. As both art and theory are always representational (a "worlding" in Heidegger's terms), it is the contention of this introduction that they are *only* destabilized (open to interpretation) or converted through this process of inter-(dis)course. Until they are intimate, they are autonomous and sterile, containable and restrained. When they become at least a two-backed beast, a metaphoric symbiosis, they are potent (if not always productive). This introduction has now returned to its own

¹ Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1988, (trans. Richard Howard), p. 180. The language paradigm which seems consensually to be at the core of debates regarding the modernist/postmodernist shift is described elsewhere as "a major shift in contemporary thought from epistemology to hermeneutics". p.304 in Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1987. In Barthes's case it is also a shift from hermeneutics to "reading", not "understanding" in the Gadamarian sense but "play" in the sense of language games. More about Barthes's desire for the world as text in Chapter Two.

preface via a circuitous route which has tried to problematize the arrival and reception of these specific discourses into one another; has tried to maintain difference, difficulty and a measure of heterogeneity within a discernible (historical) slide which has disrupted the purity and autonomy of each. It is meant as a re-tracing which is slightly and symptomatically schizoid, incomplete and pleated, replete with flippant pages which are footnote-full and fancy-free; a fragile language which always threatens its own collapse.

CHAPTER TWO: READING FOR RADICALITY (the gap between words and things)

"Moreover, the photograph has reversed the purpose of travel, which until now had been to encounter the strange and the unfamiliar".

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

"The viewer of Renaissance art is systematically placed outside the frame of experience. A piazza for everything and everything in its piazza."

Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*

The persuasive arguments of Innis, McLuhan, Havelock, and Ong, among others, have warranted re-consideration of how technologies of vision (including, specifically, the printed word which Levis-Strauss called the "tragic fatality") effectively screen out (repress) other senses and consequent knowledges to produce diminished, hermetic discourses. Canadian theorist Harold Innis has proposed that it is in "printed" legal contracts which formed the basis of property relations in the Roman Empire that the visual gained priority over the oral (and other sensory knowledges), thus, not incidentally, establishing a consistent relation between vision and possession throughout the rest of Western history¹. Like Benjamin (who

¹Anthony Giddens has made a similar point in his discussions of *storage capacity* and *surveillance* activities of the state, when he writes..."Writing seems to have originated in most cases as a direct mode of information storage: as a means of recording and analysing information involved with the administration of societies of increasing scale.", *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*., Op Cit., p.5 As Harold Innis wrote "The paper and printing industries supported the development of monopolies of space in nationalism and the state. Printing emphasized vernaculars, reduced the speed of movement of ideas, and divided the European mind", "The Problem of Space", *The Bias of Communication*, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1951, p.129 and "in Florence the new conception of space was translated into artistic terms as a counterpart of the modern notion of individualism". p. 128

privileged speech - of a storyteller), Adorno (who privileged hearing - of the individual 'voices' of instruments) and Dewey (who privileged conversation - ideally, of two persons) before them, such writers, with varying degrees of emphasis and using different examples of active practices of communication, are arguing that the extreme form of the 'visual' as a method for knowledge is a repression of the interdependency of the senses. They argue that visual determination manifests an unhealthy individual bias which then becomes the structural basis for achieving equally constrained cultural and social institutional formations. They each argue, privileging different aesthetic forms like theatre, music and public debate, for instance, for a rebalancing of sense information to qualify the power and effects of visual representations (including, often, it must be repeated, the primary cultural forms of reproduced language). Dewey's summation was that "Vision is a spectator: hearing is a participator"¹.

The equally persuasive arguments of Eagleton, Said, Huyssen, and, particularly, Bakhtin, also make it possible to see the historical and critical

¹ quoted in James Carey, "The Mass Media and Critical Theory: an American View", *Communications Yearbook 6*, (ed. Michael Burgoon), Sage, 1982, p. 26. This "conversational" or speech motif is taken up by Jean-Francois Lyotard as a resistance to "bureaucratic paralysis" when he writes, "In the ordinary use of discourse-for example, in a discussion between two friends-the interlocutors use any available ammunition, changing games from one utterance to the next: questions, requests, assertions, and narratives are launched pell-mell into battle. The war is not without rules, but the rules allow and encourage the greatest possible flexibility of utterance." *The Postmodern Condition*, Op Cit., p. 17. The idea of vision or visibility as a dangerous form of both social and subjective passivity is deeply embedded in discussions of television and mass media far more than in the fine arts critical discourse. McLuhan, of course, would argue quite separately (and thus, optimistically) that TV was not primarily visual but tactile. "The nonvisual mosaic structures of modern art, like those of modern physics and electric-information patterns, permit little detachment. The mosaic form of the TV images demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being, so does the sense of touch. Literacy, in contrast, had, by extending the visual power to the uniform organization of time and space, psychically and socially, conferred the power of detachment and noninvolvement." in *Understanding Media*, McGraw Hill Book Company, New York, 1964, p. 334

limits of reductive 'textualisms' (autonomous, formalist methods like structuralism, semiotics and reception theory) which are based (mostly) in diligent academic annulments of "texts" from socio-historical contexts. (Eagleton has nominated purist literary theories' complicity with liberal humanism as nothing more than a "suburban moral ideology" which equally has "dwindled to the impotent conscience of bourgeoisie society, gentle, sensitive, and ineffectual"). And Said has convincingly asserted that textual distribution of representations map a cultural territory from outside, in an (uneven) analogous elaboration to the drive (will) to conquer which underlies political imperialism¹.

And, concurrently, both Frampton (through architecture) and Kuspit (through ceramics and certain recent 'neo-expressionistic' paintings) have argued that a "tactile" space is a contradistinction to the visual in affirming both regional and critical practices. Like Bryson and Alpers, within the 'new' art historical realm, they see 'vision' as an overdetermined "naturalization", like language itself and, thus, in need of analytic splitting (distancing). Frampton, for instance, in an attempt to create "an alternative theoretical base", offers this hopeful personal dictum..."For me, the mediation of the

¹ Edward Said stresses that the relation to the political is complex and not "reflective", but that there "is no getting away from the fact that literary studies in general, and American Marxist theorists in particular, have avoided the effort of seriously bridging the gap between the superstructural and the base levels in textual, historical scholarship..."*Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1979, p.13. In specific relation to poststructuralism and postmodernism as translated into America, Andreas Huyssens writes..."The insight that the subject is constituted in language and the notion that there is nothing outside the text have led to the privileging of the aesthetic and the linguistic which aestheticism has always promoted to justify its imperial claims. The list of 'no longer possibles' (realism, representation, subjectivity, history, etc., etc.) is as long in postructuralism as it used to be in modernism, and it is very similar indeed.", "Mapping the Postmodern", *New German Critique*. No. 33, Fall, 1984, p.38

visual by the tactile, the prospects for an anti-phallogentric, anti-Eurocentric reflexive culture, the possibility for an architecture of place creation versus space endlessness - these all point to an affirmative critical culture."¹ And, both Frampton and Kuspit have pointed also to the regional bias which operates at a material level in both fields. And, Charles Levin has observed, in passing, that it is also the material parameters (or a desire for "properly directed perception") which still constitute the limits of any "institutional" or "sociological" theory of art.²

And, following Mulvey, Mitchell, Kristeva, Schor and Rose, among others, it is also possible to realize the cultural depths at which gender-based biases are located and hidden to perform inequities of perception by privileging vision at the expense of other sense(s) information. This latter prejudicial preoccupation is situated in a secular epistemology (vision as

¹ Kenneth Frampton, "Some Reflections on Postmodernism and Architecture", *Postmodernism: ICA Documents 4*, Institute for Contemporary Arts, London, 1986, p.28. and Donald Kuspit, "Elemental Realities", *Art in America*, New York, January, 1981, p. 79-87, in which he writes "Ceramics certainly seem to contradict the Puritanism implicit in the notion of tactile castration, as well as the presumed pristineness of "high art" in general. It is perhaps because ceramics gives equal billing to touch and sight that modernist esthetics, with its emphasis on vision, treats it as inferior." Also see John Perrault's "Fear of Clay", *Artforum*, April, 1982 New York, p. 70-71 which he ends with "A pot can be art and craft; sculpture and painting; masculine and feminine". See also my own *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture*, Norman McKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, 1983 (catalogue), for a concentrated analysis of a regional tactile image production deliberately opposed to the "private language" culture of visualisation in 'Greenbergian' Saskatchewan.

² In a brilliant article, Levin locates the limits (for aesthetic value) of institutional theory and sociological terms "dominated by philosophies of consciousness and linguistic theories of meaning". For institutional theory specifically he finds that it "is doubly restrictive. It not only requires that works of art be authorized, but that their boundaries be fixed as parameters for our controlled consumption". in "Art and the Sociological Ego: Value from a Psychoanalytical Point of View", *Life After Postmodernism*, Op Cit., p.53. Levin's essay opens out to the "emergent" "run on symbolization" which is an on-going process of the (infantile) body. In doing so, he advances a concept of a tension in art which is continuous but non-reductive (or the aesthetic as always-contingent).

truth, knowledge, light etc), in a pervasive environmental field of visual signs (the surface level of culture ie. advertising, photography, etc), as well as in the silent architecture of phenomenology (the gaze of audience members to theatre and movie presentations, the gaze of the individual reading books and magazines, etc.)¹. The result is a continuous history of dedicated exchanges in which women are (fantastically) 'imaged' through reifying conventions or (spectacularly) made to disappear in a political economy of (sexualized) representations. As Jacqueline Rose succinctly describes this

¹ For a particular discussion of the relation between privacy, property and the reader, see Lennard J. Davis, *Resisting Novels*, Methuen, New York, 1987. Davis argues that the novel serves a "social defense" in that "Modern patriotism is therefore a producer of language and information dispersed in rather a different way than earlier types of patriotism linked to a land bounded by directly perceivable horizons. The novel's imbuing of space with ideological significance seems to be part of a larger project of the modern state which attributes meanings to locations at home and abroad." p. 64 and, in speaking of novel's locations, writes "These places, that pretend to be open spaces of the real, are actually claustrophobic encampments of the ideological". p. 101. The same relation was posited by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*, BBC and Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1972, especially chapter 5 where he writes (speaks on film), "We are arguing that if one studies the culture of the European oil painting as a whole, and if one leaves aside its own claims for itself, its model is not so much a framed window open on to the world as a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited." p. 109. Like Walter Benjamin, Berger privileges the "storyteller" as a resistance to this perceived hegemony. As both Davis and Berger are discussing work within a tradition of "realisms", it is valuable to compare their positions with work which deliberately refutes the naturalistic assumption of reality in a countercultural narrative thrust, ie. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, New Accents Series, Methuen, London, 1981. For instance, she writes, "In fantastic art, objects are not readily appropriated through the look: things slide away from the powerful eye/I which seeks to possess them, thus becoming distorted, disintegrated, partial and lapsing into invisibility." p. 46 and "The fantastic exists as the inside, or underside, of realism, opposing the novel's closed, monological forms with open dialogical structures, as if the novel had given rise to its own opposite, its unrecognizable reflection". p.25. The Canadian representation most vividly referenced would be the films of David Cronenberg. See Piers Handling (ed.), *The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg*, General Publishing Co., Toronto, 1983. And, another empirical and theoretical work which opposes or problematizes the more universalized conception of Italian perspective as the singular model for Western understanding of visual representations within narrative imageparameters is Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983. For instance, she writes, "The informative views taken from Dutch towers contrast with the authority accruing to such views in English life and verse. Though mapping can serve to mark ownership, it does not, by its nature, display pictorial marks of authority. What maps present is not land possessed but land known in certain respects." p.149.

gendered limitation, "More simply, we know that women are meant to *look* perfect, presenting a seamless image to the world so that the man, in that confrontation with difference, can avoid any apprehension of lack."¹ Other sexual differences and questions of identity seem to hover near the projection of a stable heterosexuality. Its construction (the eye/I, the ego/subject) is equally under attack (made vulnerable) from other quarters than the feminist and psychoanalytic positions, as well. For instance, Jonathan Dollimore also writes..."identity involves a process of exclusion, negation and repression...which, even if successful, results in an identity intrinsically unstable. This is bad news for masculinity one of whose self-conceptions is stability, and whose function is to maintain it socially and physically."² And Foucault's famous "wager that man would be erased, like a

¹ Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality in the Field of Vision", *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso, London, 1986, p.232. Rose is particularly interested in establishing, through a psychoanalytic bearing, that images and imagery in general, "can always be seen to contain its moments of unease" against a "monolithic view of history" or "petrified block of a singular visual space". p. 233. Italicizing *look*, for Rose, is a typographic flagging of the difference between the active and passive potentials, as she proposes a "demand...of the image that it renounce all pretensions to a narcissistic perfection of form." p. 232. In doing so she is extending and refining earlier work such as E. Ann Kaplan's, who, following Mulvey, had suggested that, in dominant cinematic apparatus, "...Women as women are absent from the screen *and* from the audience" and that "to own and activate the *gaze*, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position.", "Is the Gaze Male?", in *The Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1983, p.312 and 319. Rose persuasively argues that "it is in the normal image of the man that our certainties are invested and, by implication, in that of the woman that they constantly threaten collapse." p. 232. Susan Sontag has also suggested another uncertainty under the name of "camp" where she writes "What is most beautiful in virile men in something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine...Allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn't: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms.", in "Notes on Camp", *A Susan Sontag Reader*, Vintage Books, New York, 1983, p. 108

² from Jonathan Dollimore, "Homophobia and Sexual Difference", *Oxford Literary Review*, Oxford, vol. 8, nos. 1-2, p.7, quoted in Shirley Madill, "Identity/identities". *Identity/identities: An exploration of the concept of Female Identity in Contemporary Society*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, 1988, p.5

face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" is the imagistic form of these progressively convincing deconstructions in parahistory.¹

"The major form of work in the electronic age has become "keeping an eye on other people", whether audience research or public relations or simply espionage. It is sometimes called "data processing".

(Marshall McLuhan, *Letters*, 1987)

These four intersecting axis of cultural conventions (the spectacular spread of technologies of vision, the critical limits of textualism, visual spaces authorized at the expense of tactile places, and the difficulties for representation of discourses hidden within [heterosexual male] gender hegemonies) constitute a series of formidable oppositions to which much contemporary art deliberately counters through critical material practices. Much contemporary art is directed against, or attempts to make *problematic* (in Althusser's sense of the term) - to disrupt, to weaken - to (in utopian dreams) fully undermine or to transform the foundations of such systems of visualization and their accompanying technical apparrati - to offer

¹ For a discussion of what happens to women when "man" is erased, see N.P. Ricci, "The End/S of Women", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Montreal, Volume XI, No. 3, 1987, p. 11 - 27. Foucault's image of the faceless man may come from his consideration of Rene Magritte's male figures whose backs are always turned away from the viewer, a figure Foucault calls the "famous fellow" in *This is Not a Pipe*, (trans. and ed. James Harkness), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982. Breton's "crisis of consciousness" or the "crisis of the object", both of which are at the center of the Surrealist project and Magritte's "language pictures" and his "criminological viewer" struck a chord with Foucault. And Foucault's notion of the "author-function" is presaged by Magritte's own de-emphasis on the role of the artist's subjectivity. As Magritte wrote "The description of an idea that resembles the world tolerates neither fantasy nor originality. The precision and the charm of a likeness will be lost if the painter develops that mediocre skill of pairing with 'originality' ". *Rene Magritte*, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover, 1969 (catalogue).

alternatives to the ineffectual textual academicisms and to delegitimize the larger effects of social privileges resident in gender-based practices.

Because meanings (textual or imagistic) are not guaranteed but are always willing (fated) to slide on promiscuously (Barthes' 'floating chain' of signifieds [or] *Vive la difference* as Derrida might say of the endlessly deferred referreds), contemporary art, like any other (unstable) system of sign-functions, is a major site for a contestation of representations; contemporary art is a ground for the struggle of the rights (the scene) of appearances. The polysemic (denotative and connotative) aspect of both images and words which have the dual functions of *anchorage* and *relay* to one another, if we accept Barthe's vocabulary (an extension of Saussure's *langue* and *parole* provided to accomodate the cross-indexing function of the interrelation) allow for and (perhaps) demand reinvestigation and constant reassessment. (Following the example of other modernist writers, McLuhan also suggested that popular jokes, slang, puns, oxymorons, and other destabilizing vernacular linguistic operations [including 'Freudian slips'], which 'misuse' denotation, should be attended to as major indexes of cultural shifts as much as any fine or high art practices)¹.

¹ The legacy of a popular and high art mix which informs much of postmodern practice follows Brecht's (or was it Karl Krauss's) aphoristic insight that "the mansion of culture is built of dogshit"; an image conflation of two images which is more 'shocking' than Lautreamont's (surrealist) "chance meeting upon a dissecting table of a sewing-machine with an umbrella", and is best summed up as a perceived dialectic by Martin Jay who writes "So-called high culture has been and will continue to be renewed from below, just as popular or even mass culture derives much of its energies from above", in "Hierarchy and the Humanities: The Radical Implications of a Conservative Idea", *Telos*, Number 62, Winter 1984-85, New York, p. 144. McLuhan, who did not hold to even the remnants of hierarchial notions of culture, writes more positively from the other (philistine?) side..."Hollywood bankers, that is, are smarter than literary historians, for the latter despise popular taste except when it has been filtered down from lecture course to literary handbook". in *Understanding Media*, Op Cit., p. 54

Martin Jay has also made an argument recently that "French" thought has been specifically preoccupied with an "anti-visual" methodology throughout the modern period¹. It is his contention that this obsession of these writers is with the "dark side of the primacy of sight" and with Foucault, in particular, with the "sinister implications of ocularcentrism". His argument is clearly loose and provocative and clearly debateable. National designations or notions of state-zeitgeist thinking is rightly under suspicion today as an ethnocentric proscription which is (was) always reductive, but especially so in an age widely and consensually designated as postnational. The writers he lists concern themselves complicitly with literature [almost exclusively] or painting, and, only occasionally with photography/film, or, in other words, they write (often, surprisingly, unproblematically in relation to their own medium) about and from within the very technologies of vision which are undergoing under more subtle questioning by contemporary art activities. The list is strangely exclusive (in

¹Martin Jay, "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in 20th Century Thought", *Postmodern Documents 4*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1985. Republished with full footnotes in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, (ed. David Couzens Hoy), Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 175 - 204. Jay extended this essay in a public address this year at the DIA Foundation in New York (*Vision and Visuality*) where he differentiated moments within the histories of "scopic regimes" and focused less on the 'French' tradition. A much easier argument to make, of course, is that there is anti-ocularity within works of art in modernist history. The cutting of the eye which signals an "anti-vision" in *Le Chien d'Andalou*, a film by Dali and Bunuel comes to mind or Man Ray's *Object to be Destroyed* (1932) with its photograph of one of Lee Miller's eyes attached to the pendulum of a metronome. Interestingly, neither piece is a painting nor a text. The fact that both eyes are of women would seem to be the next suggestive phase for analysis of the tendency in art works. Dead women and aggressive violence towards them is discussed as a major literary trope at both the beginnings of modernism and within post-modernism in literature in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gabar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth-Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988.

terms of philosophical thought) and might [as Rajchman suggests¹] have been set up as a straw man to be knocked over by a Jay's prejudice toward 'German' rationalism. The list is canonically patriarchal, although a nod towards women writers is included in a couple of offhand footnotes. And notably, almost all other modernist aesthetic theories originating outside France also have identifiable examples located in suggestions of "resistance" to conventional visual precepts (some of which I have outlined above) and so on.

But Jay does importantly identify a presupposition associated with 'French' theory that has often been transliterated into the North American art world as a kind of unproblematic force. In identifying the "interrogation of sight" as a "paradigm shift in twentieth-century French

¹ John Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing", *Op Cit.*, p. 89-117. Rajchman is at some pain to show that Foucault is "an exceedingly *visual* historian", although he also claims to be in agreement with Deleuze who has nominated Foucault as an "audiovisual" thinker who was "singularly close to contemporary film". Only by eliding and collapsing film into the "visual" (sans audio) can Rajchman begin to make his traditional modernist metaphorical claim for Foucault as desiring of an "aesthetics of existence"; a kind of laudelarian *flâneur* voyeuristically walking his fingers through the texts of history. This is an impulse not unlike that of Roland Barthes's interest in Eisenstein's silent film taken to the extreme of an interest in *stills*, which is a way of turning film (active) into text (passive), in fact. Rajchman also (necessarily) claims, in a footnote, to not be convinced by Jay's claims for the anti-visual in Foucault but he, himself, does not make a very convincing argument against it in his use of Foucault's "vision" as a metaphor for a method of historiography. For what Rajchman might identify as the German 'rational', which he thinks Jay is coyly defending, see Jürgen Habermas, "Neoconservative Cultural Criticism", *Habermas and Modernity*, (ed. Richard Bernstein), the MIT Press, Cambridge, 1985. For a more complex view of the 'rational' and its relation to Habermas' aesthetics, see Martin Jay, "Habermas and Modernism", *Ibid.* Jay's view of the 'rational' seems more ambiguous than Rajchman allows when Jay writes, in conclusion, "In short, although I would not want to ally myself with those deconstructionists who reach for their gun every time they hear the word *reason*, I do think Habermas owes us a much more explicit explanation of the nature of the aesthetic-practical rationality he wants to defend in modernism." p. 139. For a view which describes Foucault's historiography as "strategies without projects" and which denies the "aesthetics of existence" desire, see Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, (ed. David Couzens Hoy), Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 69-102

thought" (by which he means only French *writers*), in which "the denigration of vision supplanted its previous celebration", he is projecting this notion as the structural basis of a 'critical' text, a text which would work to undermine the humanist subject (the Eye/I) by inscribing its weaknesses and limits. There is no question that the "interrogation of sight" could easily be linked to formalist art criticism from Roger Fry to Clement Greenberg where vision and its 'purity', or its essentialist 'language' are central to an understanding of its successive reductions¹. But it remains to be seen whether or how such a modernist impulse necessarily supports other types of (art) work. North American art world criticism has often equally assumed that such work (writing) is necessarily "critical" or, more radically, "subversive" and, in a continuation of the romantic avant-garde tradition, such writing has been used extensively to textually buoy up descriptions, analysis, and evaluations of art work which are equally assumed to have the same intentions. The assumption is simply that (visual) art which aligns itself intentionally to such writing is, like the writing, loosely "deconstructive" in purpose, whether structuralist or poststructuralist, deconstructivist, or reception-theory oriented as opposed to Habermas' "free construction". Or the assumption is that art which can be cathected through a text/image presentation to such writing (*anchoring* the two and *relaying* the aura of the image tied to the aura of the author's name) is somehow 'critical'.

¹ The impulse in modernist writing to reveal its own conditions of production (Barthes's "decentration of language") can be seen to be at the heart of romantic art criticism as well. As Kuspit writes of Greenberg's central thematic, "The quality of modern art is dependent upon its ability to communicate the 'literal essence' of its medium. This is the source at once of art's transcendence and its immediacy, art's individuality and its power to remind us, at every step in its perception, of general art values", in *Clement Greenberg: Art Critic*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1979, p. 121. For a thorough investigation of the early 'classical' relation between literature and art, see Jo-Anna Isaak, *Op Cit*.

But, initially and already, such yoking of a text (or name) and image for reasons of authority and status also inadvertently mimics advertising which, in turn, first learned, then captured its "decentering" methods from modernist inquiries into image/graphics (the proto-logo design work of Constructivist, DeStijl, and Suprematist movements) to complete a (vicious) recursive circle. The productivist impulse was swallowed whole by the emblematic understanding and use of it in promotional culture and it is now more closely identified with advertising as a stylistic treatment than with radical art practices per se¹. And, the assumption in art writing that the text's usage (quotation, seminal argument, synopsis, interjection, projection, superimposition) in relation to 'visual' works will necessarily exhibit or reflect the "emancipatory" qualities which are already attributed to such critical modernist texts is often unrealistic or, at least, premature. (A canonical list of such French writers unquestioningly used in this way begins with Beaudelaire and Mallarme, and now includes Baudrillard, Barthes, Bataille, Blanchot, Breton, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Lyotard, etc.). And each of them, as writers, in turn, are advocates for what

¹ A classification of techniques from surrealist and dadaist work - collage, frottage, grattage, fumage, decalcomanie, couplage, ready-made etc - and methods -metamorphosis, combination, vexation, anagram, shock montage etc - is also the modernist lexicon of the advertising world's techniques in its many media manifestations. The relationship is that in both modernist art and advertising culture, the signs that circulate are signs of signs, signs that also refer to themselves. There are counter-exceptions to this appropriation of art and language by commercial methods, of course, and the recent work of Joseph Kosuth with Freud's language, for instance, might provide one. Another is found in the work (poem and logo paintings) of Vancouver's Ken Lum which seem to be generated from a impulse not unlike the 'novelistic' idea of Barthes when he postulated that "If I had to imagine a new Robinson Crusoe, I would not place him on a desert island but in a city of twelve million people where he could decipher neither speech nor writing: that, I think, would be the modern form of Defoe's tale", *The Grain of the Voice*, Hill and Wang, 1985 (trans. Linda Coverdale), p. 122. Lum's work proceeds to reclaim certain aspects of promotional culture back to art through 'misuses' of language presentation, mimicking advertising's appropriation of art.

Huyssen has called other "classical modernists". It is possible to (or impossible not to) find a privileged example for each of them in yet another artist (writer). As he writes,

"Flaubert, Proust and Bataille in Barthes; Nietzsche, Magritte and Bataille, in Foucault; Mallarme and Lautreamont, Joyce and Artaud in Kristeva; Freud in Lacan; Brecht in Althusser and Macherey, and so on, *ad infinitum*.¹

The recurrence of such emblematic modernism found within others' theoretical writings has, of course, all the signs of an art-for-art's sake project, an aestheticism rather than a politics. In other words, the retreat from history to language in French litcrit is like traditional art history's "debt instinct", an endless series of retroactive "debts" of contemporary work's linkages to historical works in a recursive linear reduction in which previous art is more important to contemporary production than its own historical conditions² of

¹ Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern", *Op Cit.*, p.39. This essay owes much to Huyssens' mapping. His conception is that poststructuralist thought is a "theory of modernism at the stage of exhaustion", for as he writes, "In an age of commodity aesthetics, aestheticism itself has become questionable as an adversary or a hibernating strategy. To insist on the adversary function of *écriture* and of breaking linguistic codes when every ad bristles with domesticated avantgardist and modernist strategies strikes me as caught precisely in that very overestimation of art's transformative *function* for society which is the signature of an earlier, modernist, age". p.41

² I owe the pun (truly Freudian in the fullest sense) "debt instinct" to Montreal poet Robert McGee who used it first in relation to the Brazilian economy. For an elucidation of painting's "death instinct", see Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: the Task of Mourning", *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1986, (catalogue). Bois follows the impact of industrialization to create the (necessary?) apocalyptic narrative of the death of painting as the central myth of modernism, reaffirmed (resurrected?) continually by "manic mourners" with each work as a kind of *petii mort* or nail on the coffin lid. The concept of death which is at the center of all poststructuralist debate (of god, of man, of the social, of the author, of the subject, of the grand recits, of the modern, of authenticity, of Paris, etc) was put into play first in *film* by Christian Metz in "The Imaginary Signifier", *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 2, Summer, 1975, pp. 14-76 where each reworking of filmic codes puts to "death" previous movies. The idea is most fully elaborated in Derrida who "describes mourning as a process through which the ego takes into itself or introjects a lost object or

production. But, if it is possible to take seriously some contemporary art's proclaimed subversive intentions (the avant-garde agenda), or even just to more superficially take the art-market's desire for change (the fashion agenda of news of the new which affects all commodities - the "constant" "nascent state" of modernism, according to Lyotard¹), it is still obvious how lengthy empirical lists could be produced of the sorts of networks and people and kinds of production which are hidden and deliberately excluded from contemporary histories of art and such critical writing or the writing based on its assumptions and standards. Which is to simply wonder if the examples used by such writers (and their acolytes) are so exclusive as to not be anything more than a hermeneutic circle of interests with little critical power to fuel contemporary art. If Jay is right in identifying (however loosely and

"corpse", which it preserves in a fantasmatic crypt, a hermetically sealed psychic space". in Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Aesthetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, Op Cit., p. 192

¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Op Cit., p. 79. Lyotard makes a distinction finally between modern aesthetics as an aesthetics of the sublime in a nostalgic mode and those of postmodern in a future-oriented mode where "rules and categories are what the work of art is looking for", p. 81. Lyotard's neo-Kantian call to the "unpresentable" in either case is welded to Kant's use of the Biblical injunction "Thou shalt not make graven images", which Lyotard identifies as "the most sublime passage in the Bible in that it forbids all presentation of the Absolute.", p.78. He furthers this analogy when he writes "In Hebraic ethics, representation is forbidden, the eye closes, the ear opens in order to hear the father's word", in "Jewish Oedipus", *Driftworks*, Foreign Agents Series, Semiotext(e), New York, 1984. Only by restricting representation to the *visual* can such a clear distinction be made. Further distinctions are made between the Protestant "primacy of the Word" and the Catholic "pictorial tongue" in Ernest B. Gilman, "Word and Image in Quarles' *Emblemes*", *The Language of Images*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980, where he writes that "Indeed, the technical language of biblical exegesis (*typos*, *schema*, *figura*, *paradeigma*) is insistently visual". p. 63. Stephen Kern has also pointed to this religious inflection in relation to Proust, Freud and Bergson's work on time, writing that "This shared feature of their work parallels the experience of the Jews, who did not have a space of their own except in the cramped enclaves of the ghettos. Their spatial existence was always a tenuous and painful reminder of their isolation from the surrounding world and was far less important to them than their existence in time. Thus the Wandering Jew is at home only in time. The Jewish religion also eschewed all spatial representations of the deity whose reality and goodness became known through his action in history". *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880 - 1918*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p. 51

art. If Jay is right in identifying (however loosely and debateably) an "anti-ocular" tendency in the writing, and if the writing has some direct meaning to the works of art which other writers' usages would suggest that it has for contemporary art, would it not be reasonable to expect to find examples of works of art which engage that alternative force in and of themselves? Would there not be some correspondence (to raise the ghost of Baudelaire) between the examples employed and the claims for and by the theory? Or just what kind of representational relation between the two is there?

To counter repressive canons based on the epistemology, ontology and phenomenology of the gaze, in philosophical terms; or to counter it in [pre] productive, dissemination, and reception phases in social terms, for instance, any attempts at critical inclusiveness, I am suggesting, would have to be alive to 'hybrid' works of installation, video/film, performance, certain photographic practices of self-reflexive distribution, montaged textual and oral performativity in public formats, and even, painting (occasionally) which were somehow 'anti-visual' in their aesthetic implications, and effectively social in their mode of distribution. This, as the evidence painfully shows, contemporary theory, or its influence of uses, seldom is.

This is the point that Huyssens is making when he writes..."But even in the more politically conscious and self-conscious theoretical writing in France, the tradition of modernist aestheticism - mediated through an extremely selective reading of Nietzsche - is so powerful a presence that the notion of a radical rupture between the modern and the postmodern cannot possibly make much sense. It is furthermore striking that despite the considerable differences between the various poststructuralist projects, none

of them seems informed in any substantial way by postmodernist works. Rarely, if ever, do they even address postmodernist works. In itself, this does not vitiate the power of theory. But it does make for a kind of dubbing where the poststructuralist language is not in sync with the lips and movements of the postmodern body"¹ (my emphasis). This language, he suggests, is not being heard properly or it is being mimicked incorrectly; a travesty of some

¹ Andreas Huyssens, *Op Cit.* p.39. For a difference between "travesty" as a parody and "versioning" as a creative act, compare Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp", *A Susan Sontag Reader*, Vintage Books, 1983, with Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'N' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, Methuen & Co., London, 1987. The reference to the mouth out of sync immediately is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's play *Not I* in which "The live mouth, miniscule and helplessly dangling against the blackness of the stage, is a metonymic icon for the otherwise invisible speaker, the 'tiny little thing' emitted into the world, and for the failure of the verbal act itself". Linda Ben-Zvi, "Not I Through a Tube Starkly", in *Samuel Beckett: Teleplays*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, 1988 (catalogue from a show curated by Stan Douglas). Ben-Zvi concentrates on the arguments of Kristeva and Gidal in determining the gender of the mouth and thus the authority of the language use; as well, she introduces a discussion of the difference between the staged version and the television production and the language shifts that result due to technological mediation. Also, Man Ray's floating (surrealistic) mouth which is used as the cover illustration of the "French Fantasies" issue of the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Montreal, Volume XI: Number 3, 1987, is surely the iconographic inspiration for Beckett. The image originates from a c1925 photographic close-up of the lips of his model Kiki, and was then also painted by Man Ray as a floating object above a landscape in *Observatory Time - The Lovers*, 1930-32. Man Ray, himself has described it bi-sexually as "Your mouth becomes two bodies...like earth and sky, you and me". Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist*, Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York, 1988, p. 174. Jane Weinstock has also made the interesting claim that the large red frame characteristic of Barbara Kruger's work in some cases is "not unlike an oversized woman's mouth" as part of a strategy of her own "oral logic" in *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture: Barbara Kruger*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1983, p. 14. (catalogue). The lack or the deflation of a political agenda in the "travelling theory" (to use Edward Said's term) of the linguistic analogies for consciousness found in French writing are widespread. A good synoptic (and symptomatic) reading is Marc Angenot, "Structuralism as Syncretism: Institutional Distortions of Saussure", *The Structural Allegory*, *Op Cit.*, where he accurately notes that "Such an inflation of literary studies seems inversely related to the decrease in influence of literature in high culture". p. 163. *The Structural Allegory* anthology itself is a full series of speculations given over to this question of the practical limitations of "deep structure" metaphors in contemporary French litcrit. For a very good review of this anthology see Michael Dorland, "Back to the Future: Reconstructive Tensions in Contemporary Post-Critical Metamodernity", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. X: No. 1-2, Montreal, 1986, p. 35-52. For another, thorough and critical, but less theoretical history of North American reception, see Art Berman, *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1988. Berman suggests that Barthes's work is "easily appropriated (or misappropriated)" because "His writings emphasize the creative role of the reader and critic, not incompatible with existential selfhood." p. 147

he suggests, is not being heard properly or it is being mimicked incorrectly; a travesty of some sort is being enacted; this body is camouflaged or effaced or parodied by the inauthentic or faulty translation. There is, in other words, another project afoot; not the rupture which is often attributed to such writing but instead a backward looking tendency, an ahistorical (and morose) move toward already-known, already-cherished, already-canonized, (mostly) literature, which both in its form and its content is purely and nostalgically (utopian) modernist.

"The spectacle inherits all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of seeing; furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a *speculative universe*."

(Guy deBord, *Society of the Spectacle*)

Such lament is part and parcel of critical theory (in whatever national guise's appearance). And it synthesizes the discourse to which much contemporary art pits (arms) itself against. In it, we hear the echoes of the various losses which critical theory would attempt to redeem ("false" consciousness, the hidden "political unconscious", the "forgotten" Other, etc.); the "illusions" or blindnesses to which critical theory might give voice. Without suggesting here the type of critical practice which might ally its voice more closely to its own cultural body, I propose to simply read, by reintroducing one text in the tradition discussed above; a text by one French proponent to investigate the status of the "visual" or "ocular" within it. The apparent status of the visual within it might make Jay's argument more

specific and simultaneously might suggest some of limitations to a 'clean' transliteration to material art practices. Such a choice is not an attempt to elide all the authors Jay suggests (Foucault is not Derrida, Lyotard is not Baudrillard, early Barthes is not even late Barthes, etc.) nor to gloss over the criticisms of the text and its author that have already been rendered elsewhere. It is just a simple attempt to evacuate some of the already-suggested difficulties in projecting the assumptions of criticality from texts onto art.

It is obviously my contention that such an artworld project of direct and unchallenged transliteration actually (unconsciously) reproduces the 'natural' relation between words and things which critical theory and much critical art has been at pains to undo, demystify, or even, destroy. In the parlance of structuralism, it is as though the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified which has been relentlessly deconstructed in linguistic modernism is reconstructed by transliteration, with French texts as signifiers and modern (North American) artworks as signifieds. A kind of meta-naturalization now takes place in the new unproblematized conjunctions. The issues surrounding the complexities of representationality which are the center of the twentieth century "crisis" of belief structures in art and language are then once again normalized or by twining French theory to North American art works in a kind of mimicking of the promotional culture which so much art claims to want to "deconstruct". (Heidegger's "representational thinking" is returned in a doubled form which is again untroubled and remakes the magical relationship of sign to signifier). With such a rescuing of the normalacy of the commensurate relationship which had been lost in critical self-reflection, gives a winning kind of consolation to

many curators, critics and collectors alike because it is possible to know that business can go on as usual but that it can also have the additional aura of "criticality" through this presumptive collage¹. But, such a conjunction merely reproduces the conditions by which "all things are doomed to appearances" in Baudrillard's terms, in which "both syntax and semantics have disappeared"; "neither metaphor nor metonymy, but a successive immanence beneath the police agency of the look². For Baudrillard the condition of simulation to which all things (images and texts included) now ironically aspire to is that condition of random associations and plays of meanings unleashed by the "structural allegory" and prominent in both

¹ If there is an "infinite relation" between text and image, as Foucault calls it, within what Nietzsche calls the "prison-house of language" where text and image are constantly "invaginated" according to Lacan, and as medieval studies consistently suggest as a core thematic for Western thought, then its relation must be *destabilized* or "un-anchored" in order to reproduce the tension that exists between these two modes of representation. Otherwise all is parody, or advertising. In Beckett's *Molloy* (1959), he writes "There could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names", reinvoking the *conflict* between the two states of representation. For an argument that Post-Romantic Fantasy *precedes* these modernist avant-garde concerns, see Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Op Cit.

² Jean Baudrillard, "Structural Law of Value", *The Structural Allegory*, Ibid. p. 71. Baudrillard's consistent strategy is to reverse all reductive structuralisms or "analogons" because they inevitably repress ("real") social processes. In a talk given at Columbia University last year, he said simply "art is over", due to its complicity with the aestheticization of culture previously only associated with the culture industries. But, he too "plays" (undetermines signifiers) when given the chance. Witness his "Untitled", *Barbara Kruger*, Mary Boone Gallery, 1987, where, in 'honoring' her, he rebuffs her "defensive statement" by proposing instead the weakness of the masculine and the weakness of power itself and offers to change Kruger's statements to "offensive" ones to "illustrate the ironic and triumphant revenge of the object rather than the unfortunate revolt of the subject". And he 'playfully' returns her art to a shamanistic magic role with "exorcism" as its goal. Baudrillard develops a less playful attitude in his contrast of 'power' ("never there...like the institution of spatial perspective") and 'seduction' ("a reversible and mortal process") in *Forget Baudrillard*, Foreign Agents Series, Semiotext(e), New York, 1987. For a more positive analysis of Kruger's work in relation to the myth of Medusa, see the full account by Craig Owens, "The Medusa Effect or, The Spectacular Ruse", ICA catalogue, Op Cit.

promotional culture and, now, art¹. This unfortunate recent 'correspondence' (the ghost of a now-naturalized Baudelaire again makes an appearance) which is often alluded to (as though works of art illustrate theory and vice versa) might then have more limitations than are sometimes admitted to in highly motivated transliterations.

To explore that reprised relation between art and text I have chosen to begin by reinvestigating a single text by a single writer within that tradition of modernism (an elegant literary (sybaritic) version, perhaps). But it is not a completely casual or arbitrary choice. The feuilleton, "*The Eiffel Tower*", has been described as "surely one of the most beautiful texts about modern life ever written", and its essayist (Roland Barthes) has been (further) prescribed as "a greater writer than even his more fervent admirers now claim²". That

¹ The term 'promotional culture' is introduced and elaborated by Andrew Wernick in "Promotional Culture", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Montreal, Vol. 12, Nos. 1-2, 1988, p. 180-201. He uses it in contradistinction to 'publicity' or 'advertising' because "modern usage has stretched "promotion" to cover not just ads as such but the whole field of public relations, including religious and political propaganda, as well as the more informal kinds of boosterism practiced in everyday life...The enlarged referential meaning of "promotional" corresponds, in short, to the phenomenon's real expansion in the world, which in turn corresponds to "the penetrative powers of the price-system" (Harold Innis's term). p. 182. In Wernick's formulation the term does not have the gloomy aspect of the "culture industry" put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer as "the rise of a promotionally dominated culture has not been exactly conflict-free. As the "ideological" revolt of the sixties attests, the structural shift in the relation of culture to economy with which the rise of promotion has been associated has brought new tensions and, indeed, new opportunities for the formation of an emancipatory will". p.181. The article reflects Wernick's earlier critique of Baudrillard's "conceptual reduction" where (Baudrillard) "conflated two quite different aspects of the process: the transformation of signs into commodities, ultimately represented by the rise of the culture industry, and the transformation *via* mass marketing, fashion and status competition, of commodities into signs...his attention is directed away from any direct consideration of the cultural dynamics associated with the broader and always ongoing process of commodification itself." in "Sign and Commodity", *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Thought*, Montreal, Hiver/Printemps, Vol. III, Nos. 1-2, 1984, p.20

² Susan Sontag, "Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes", *A Susan Sontag Reader*, Op Cit., Sontag's francophilia reaches heights of excess in this essay because (her) Barthes's *jouissance* is precisely the *epicurean* defense of her neo-Kantian project found most vividly first in "Against Interpretation"(1964) and again later in "The Aesthetics of Silence" (1967). In the first she

the essay is considered prominent is emphasized by its reclamation as the title of an anthology of writings, *"The Eiffel Tower and other Mythologies "* (1979, trans. Richard Howard), whereas formerly it had been called only *Mythologies* (1973, trans. Annette Lavers). That its object of consideration is "a symbol of Paris as famous as the Seine itself. The Eiffel Tower in its truculent stance is the first monument of modernism¹", seems indisputable (or, at least, not very contentious if the empirical evidence supplied by advertising, film and French modernist painting are cataloged). That its author (the author of "The death of the author"²) is a cult authorial figure within North American art criticism is often confirmed by numerous citings of his work in academic and journalistic circles, full translation into English and publication of most of his life's work (books and essays from 1953-1980), and is even more fully legitimized by the affirmative eulogies provided in a prestigious art journal (*October* 12), where claims for his "politics" are

says that "interpretation is the revenge of the intellect against art" and in the second she writes that "Silence and allied ideas (like emptiness, reduction, the 'zero degree') are boundary notions with a very complex set of uses, leading terms of a particular spiritual and cultural rhetoric". p. 98 and 187. Barthes's own view of criticism is somewhat more shifting and, at least, in motivation, is more politically inclined. As well, it has little relation to the (visual) arts environment that Sontag is so familiar with in America, but it is interesting to note how his vocabulary of 1953 is insinuated into hers, with "zero degree" which he borrowed from Mallarme. Interestingly, for Canadians, Barthes had apparently asked McLuhan to collaborate on a book with him. See *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, (ed. Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan, William Toye), Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1988, p. 539

¹ Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, Vintage Books, New York, 1968, p. 18

² Roland Barthes, "The death of the author", *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, p. 208-213. Of course, Barthes's author does not die so much as he is exploded, fragmented, split into a series of "writerly" intertexts, the four "regimes". See *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes*, (trans. Richard Howard), Hill and Wang, New York, 1977. Barthes's perennial closeness to such a project is clear when he says "There's a kind of eros of language in me, an impulse of desire regarding language, which has made me into a being of language", in *The Grain of the Voice*, p.203

or to writing (literature), *per se*. His well-established status as academician-critic is now, of course, only exceeded by his status as an 'artist'. Todorov, for instance, designates him as an artist because "he brackets the truth value of criticism, and because he insists, on the contrary, on its fictional or poetic aspect [language ceases to be an instrument and becomes a problem]"¹ and the ever-faithful Sontag writes that "Though he never wrote on poetry, his standards for literature approached those of the poet: language that has undergone an upheaval, has been displaced, liberated from ungrateful

the sexes must not be a law of Nature; therefore, the confrontations and paradigms must be dissolved, both the meanings and the sexes be pluralized: meaning will tend back toward multiplication, its dispersion (in the Theory of the Text) and sex will be taken into no typology (there will be, for example, only *homosexualities*, whose plural will baffle any constituted, centered discourse, to the point where it seems to him virtually pointless to talk about it". in *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes*, p. 69, quoted in John O'Neill, "Breaking the Signs: Roland Barthes and the Literary Body", *The Structural Allegory*, Op Cit., p.183-200. O'Neill, however, argues that although Barthes "employed literary criticism to disperse a work, to multiply its meanings through hundreds of fragmentary comments, each indulging its own purpose, and altogether excessive, like the countless stars of the night sky"..and "from the very beginning, Barthes struggled to break the signs, to proliferate meanings, to exceed structure, classification and stereotypes", but, that "Barthes's literary deconstruction, like much else in the counterculture, ironically remains locked within the establishment of knowledge and culture" and "it is hopelessly ill-conceived to imagine that there is any *direct* social nexus between polymorphous perversity and socioeconomic expansion." p.198. I am reiterating O'Neill's conclusion here again by emphasizing the textuality rather than the intellectuality of the critical project. See also John O'Neill, "Homotextuality: Barthes on Barthes, Fragments (RB), with a Footnote", *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, (eds. Gary Shaprio and Alan Sica), University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1984

¹Todorov, Op Cit., p. 65

assumed and by Susan Sontag's equally positive homage, where claims for his literary powers are elaborated.

Although Barthes's work has been previously criticized (Eagelton's claim that it is born "of a specific political defeat and disillusion" and even Todorov's cautious evaluation¹), my attempt here is not to undermine Barthes's many (variant? polysemic? plural?²) contributions to literary theory

¹ Terry Eagelton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Basil Blackwell, London, p. 143. Eagelton's polemic is even stronger than Huyssen's which called Barthes's writing "writerly connoisseurism and textual gentrification". Of Barthes, Eagelton writes that, "Writing, or reading-as-writing, is the last uncolonized enclave in which the intellectual can play, savouring the sumptuousness of the signifier in heady disregard of whatever might be going on in the Elysee palace or the Renault factories", and Eagelton further sees post-structuralist thought itself as a "product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe that was 1968". p.141/42. But even old Barthian friend Tzvetan Todorov can write..."Finally, though Barthes is rarely concerned with more general principles; it comes as no surprise to find him defending not only relativism but individualism, and his defense is explicit, however questionable it may be in historical terms.", *Literature and its Theorists: A Personal View of Twentieth-Century Criticism*, (trans. Catharine Porter), Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1984, p.64. And Barthes himself has "admitted" as much saying, "My profound interest in the attachment of the political is equalled only by my intolerance of political discourse. Which doesn't make my situation very easy. My position is somewhat divided, and often guilt-ridden. But I think I'm not the only one, and that at present most people, at least most intellectuals, have a guilty relation to politics. One of the essential duties of today's avant-garde would be to address this problem of the intellectual's guilt in regard to politics.", *The Grain of the Voice*, p. 218. For Sontag, of course, this recuperation of individualism and authorship is Barthes' "real" value..."it is only another variation on the project of self-examination: the noblest project of French literature...the self as vocation, life as a reading of the self". *Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes*, Op Cit., p. 444

² For a sustained argument against the pluralistic environment of contemporary art and criticism, see Hal Foster, "Against Pluralism", *Recordings*, Bay Press, Port Washington, 1985. Foster's contention is that the deaths of "ideology" and "dialectic" produce an unhealthy "pluralism" severed from both history and from the present which he blames on the "promiscuity" of artists. In a short aside, he says that the resulting pluralism "... also implies a failure of criticism". p. 16. The question remains: what it is within criticism or its practices as *writing* which are so (to use his inflection) ineffective? I am suggesting here that it is precisely the deliberate and successful semiotic (and political) urge towards plurality (relativism) in recent criticism, à la Barthes and other (post)structuralist(s), for example, which have undermined traditional roles of closure for criticism and, further, created an environment of acceptance for plural forms. To me, this is healthy for art although it does mean a reduced power for criticism, a delegitimization, which forces criticism to be less systematic and as problematized as art itself. It must be remembered that Barthes's use of the (textual) plural is an attempt at a subtle and complicated defense of otherness in general. "Who knows if this insistence of the plural is not a way of denying sexual duality? The opposition of

contexts; that, so to speak lives on its own " ¹ . And his own later much-recorded desire to write fiction (the "novelistic rather than the novel"), to produce what Baudrillard would later call a "neonovel" - like Eco's project in *The Name of the Rose* ? - was only (presumably) curtailed by his (ontological) death (or *The Revenge of the Signified*?). My project is not intended as a re-evaluation, then. It is, rather, to turn into this text, rather than against it, to recover its own special moments of optical resistance (if any) which are transported along with its greater writerly insights when 'he' (the discourse called Barthes - early, late, critical, fictional, etc.) writes about a work of art. If not a work of art, at least the Eiffel Tower represents an object (aesthetic) which he then inscribed by a text, and as such, it might offer some of these occasions for consideration of the "anti-ocular".

¹ Sontag, *Op Cit.*, p. 434. Sontag goes on to appreciate him in the following stylistic analysis. "Typically, his sentences are complex, colon-ridden and colon-prone, packed with densely worded entailments of ideas deployed as if these were the materials of a supple prose", and she also admires his production "which can deliver more ideas per page while retaining the *brio* of that style, its acuteness of timbre. His vocabulary is large, fastidious, fearlessly mandarin." p. 426. In so saying, she simply reproduces his own motivations as well as some of his vocabulary. "Mandarin praxis" is his own description of his own work in *The Pleasures of the Text*, Wang and Hill, New York, 1975, p. 22. But such uncritical appreciations are common. In her eulogy which centers "theater" as the core of Barthes' thought, repeating his own already-published acceptance of spectacle and of his debt to Baudelaire, Michelson writes of "his implacable critique of bourgeoisie culture", in *October* 12, MIT Press, Cambridge, Spring, 1980, p.127. Barthes himself had outlined his project as "We are trying to create, with bourgeoisie language-its rehetorical figures, its syntax, its word values-a new typology of language: a new space where the subject of writing and the subject of reading do not have exactly the same place. This is what modernity is working on.", *The Grain of the Voice*, p. 162. The "readerly" text where each reader becomes a writer in Barthes' utopian dream is foreshadowed by art works with deliberate ambiguity where life and art are blurred in favor of audience interpretation. Man Ray's desire for every spectator of his films to become "a leading actor and solve his own dramatic problems...of becoming a poet, an artist himself, instead of being merely a spectator" predates Barthes desire by thirty some years, for instance. *Man Ray: American Artist*, *Op Cit.*, p. 136.

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Barthe's essay on the Eiffel tower is a pre-eminent example of his power as a language facilitator, as a seducer of/to language, as an one-hundred meter aesthete, as a virtuoso of the virtual. But, I will try here to show that it is primarily just a *literary* contention that he makes, although his subject is more than and different from a strictly literary object (a text). In this essay, Barthes makes several heady claims for the Tower.² He classifies

¹ IDEOGRAM by Appolinaire

² All quotes from Barthes's text are from "The Eiffel Tower", *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, (trans. Richard Howard), Hill and Wang, New York, 1979, unless otherwise noted. The tendency to classification or "taxonomies" which I am ferreting out of the text seems to be left-over from the early Barthes of semiological urges, ie. *The Semiotic Challenge*, (trans. Richard Howard), Hill and Wang, New York, 1988 where he writes ..."I was dazzled by this hope: to give denunciation of the self-proclaimed petit-bourgeois myths the means of

it as "friendly", "an infinite cipher", "a pure signifier" "a baroque dream", "a concrete abstraction", "a universal symbol", "an observatory", "a complete verb", "a total monument", "a zero-degree of a monument", "an empty monument", "the first obligatory monument", "a paradoxical monument", "not a sacred monument", "the witness", "the gaze which discreetly fixes", "the only blind point of a total optical system", "an initiatory edifice", and "a

developing scientifically (emphasis mine); this means was semiology or the close analysis of the processes of meaning by which the bourgeoisie converts its historical class-culture into universal nature; semiology appeared to me, then, in its program and its tasks, as the fundamental method of an ideological critique". p.5 He later gave up this "myth of science". But, as Sontag has noted, this continuing and frequent propensity for scientific tabulation is present in later works as well, writing "Less elegant, indeed making a point of dogged explicitness, and far more powerful as an instrument for giving himself something to say, are the classifications that Barthes lays out in order to topple himself into a piece of argument-dividing into two, three, even four parts the matter to be considered. Arguments are launched by announcing that there are two main classes and two subclasses of narrative units, two ways in which myth lends itself to history, two facets of Racinean eros, two musics, two ways to read La Rochefoucauld, two kinds of writers, two forms of his own interest in photographs. That there are three kinds of corrections a writer makes, three Mediterraneans and three tragic sites in Racine, three levels on which to read the plates of the *Encyclopedia*, three areas of spectacle and three types of gesture in Japanese puppet theater, three attitudes toward speech and writing, equivalent to three vocations, writer, intellectual, and teacher...a rhetorical tactics that the French call, not quite accurately, Cartesian". *Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes*, p. 429. Anthony Giddens has noticed a similar category in the writings of Jurgen Habermas, writing "Habermas is fond of talking in threes; the tables and classifications with which the book abounds are often based on threefold distinctions", in "Reason Without Revolution? Habermas' *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*", *Habermas and Modernity*, Op Cit. p. 97. It is Arthur Kroker, in his analysis of St. Augustine's confessions, who has identified the number three specifically as the secular continuation of an almost subliminal numerical discourse, "The trinity provides an abstract unity for Western experience, a simulated coherency which is carried forward, on the side of sacrificial power, by the referents of beauty, truth and goodness. This is also Nietzsche's combination of the will to virtue, the will to truth and the will to judgement as the abstract coherency of the will to power" and "Augustine's 'trinity' fuses the abstract referents of knowing/willing/knowledge as co-relational predicates of one another...This is the metaphysical genesis of the simulacrum because the three *relations* in the trinity are *abstractions* from embodied experience.", in Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986, p. 306 and 305. It is not lost to Kroker elsewhere that the absence which is presence in (post)structuralism(s) finds itself in pairs with their implied third, ie. signifier/signified, langue/parole, synchronic/diachronic, Symbolic/Imaginary, etc., or *savoir-dire* and *savoir-entendre* = *savoir-faire*. Further, there may just be something duplicit about "description" in general. As Harpham writes, "Description is the most effective, because most covert, form of analysis. Never neutral, description tends nevertheless to conceal its interest by adhering to certain ascetic imperatives, countering the worldliness of color, form, and representation through discursive abstractions." Op Cit., p. 142

comfortable object". Each adjectival nomination of description slowly loosens the Tower from any practical function to embed it in a imaginative fantasy, in an "oneiric function" which is a "great ascensional dream".

Indeed Barthes claims that the tower's value is precisely that it is "nothing" and that "this pure-virtually empty-sign-is eluctible, because it means everything", and, further, that "The first condition of this victorious flight is that the Tower be an utterly useless monument". The "victorious flight" is to convert the Tower to "inutility", "a great imaginary function", "a dream of which it is", "a bird's eye view", "an object which sees", which..."gives us the world to read", from which we "transcend sensation", through the "panoramic vision". The result, and this is ultimately important to Barthes's project is that "it adds to the frequently grim urban myth a romantic dimension, a harmony, a mitigation". This triumphant bliss, this self-possessed tranquility is available only through a visual position which makes Paris precisely into a painting ("Paris, in its duration, under the Tower's gaze, composes itself like an abstract canvas in which the dark oblongs [derived from a very old past] are contiguous with the white rectangles of modern architecture"). The reader can share his (passive) voyeur's delight and still "have the illusion of raising the enormous lid which covers the private life of millions of human beings" and "fixes with its slender signal, the whole structure-geographical, historical and social-of Paris space". (In this extended metaphor Barthes initially sees something like a painting by Mathieu or Bissier and 'opens' it to discover something like a Breughel, before he puts the lid back on¹). Or in short, and surprisingly given

¹For an analysis based originally in a Brueghel painting which "dislodges" a passive reading of sight by 'reading' sound, see Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, (trans.

the claims made by Barthes and for him, this surrogate author (the tower) provides closure. It simply secures a primary position of observation which is emotionally uninvolved and plainly superior ("every visitor to the Tower makes structuralism without knowing it"). Obviously, many of these nominations are visual in kind and provide, in fact, a spiralling upwards (almost veriginous) of descriptions of sight which progressively leave the ground and take a reader to the metaphorical heights, to the ethereal skies above Paris ("a kind of superlative capital"), a "Paris laid out before his eyes by an individual and deliberate act of contemplation", (still) "something of the Paris confronted, defiled, possessed by Rastignac¹".

Each description, then, turns the site into a sight, which is to say that each turn of phrase turns a place of history and technological invention into a

Brian Massumi), Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985. For an attempt to tie the practices of contemporary Canadian installation artists to the "aural object" which "denies progress and does not privilege individual perception...engages processes over products, experiences over texts, and heterogeneous responses over unity", see my *Northern Noises*, 19th Sao Paulo International Biennial, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, 1987 (catalogue)

¹ Barthes's own language obviously reveals both a voyeuristic and a touristic orientation which can hardly be claimed as anti-ocular when both modes depend (similarly) on a detached (in all senses of the word) retinal separation and scopic specialty (Proust and Flaubert), and both orientations are endemically the subjects/objects of literature (and film). As well, Barthes's use of the boy Eiffel, aged twelve, as a historical example of a provincial discovering the capital equates climbing the tower to "conquer the city" and gain a "kind of precious world of which knowledge makes the man" with an "initiation" which "marks an entrance into a true life of passions and responsibilities". The "obligatory monument" takes on its full pubescent phallic significance of a "rite" when conjuncted with the "rite of inclusion" of Gustave's first visit when he was to "be incorporated into a race", "quite like the neophyte who in order to accede to the initiate's status, is obliged to traverse a dark and unfamiliar route within the initiatory edifice". Following this Bettelheimian direction, the proper name Paris would take on significantly different meanings throughout where, for instance, to climb the tower is "to perceive, comprehend and savor a certain essence of Paris" etc. See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Vintage Books, New York, 1977. Tangentially, it was Andre Breton who first suggested the 'masculine' qualities of the towers and the 'feminine' qualities of the arcades in the *metafisica* paintings of de Chirico. Barthes's project here seems to be to reaffirm the problem set to music... "How are you going to keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Parcee?"

a space of the *litterateur*, the *ecrivain*, the reader¹. For Barthes, then, the tower itself functions (anthropomorphically) as a surrogate author, a literary personnage, which has "the generally intellectual character of the panoramic vision" which produces "nothing happier than a lofty outlook", and for whom "Paris offers itself to him as an object virtually prepared, exposed to the intelligence", through "the euphoria of aerial vision" which has an "intellectual character" (the better to look down one's nose). Stephane Mallarme thought that "the world exists to end in a book and Victor Hugo's famous description of Notre Dame Cathedral is that "humanity wrote an

¹ In the most complex elision (which contradicts his earlier claim that the Tower is "blind"), Barthes makes the tower into a "new sensibility of vision" ... "an object which sees, a glance which is seen; it is a complete verb, both active and passive"..."The tower (and this is one of its mythic powers) transgresses this separation, this habitual divorce of *seeing* and *being seen*; it achieves a sovereign circulation between the two functions; it is a complete object which has, if one may say so, both sexes". In so saying Barthes's claim (fantasy) for the Tower is very much like that moment in the mirror stage of Lacan's ordering when (mis)identification or (mis) recognition occurs, or like that moment in Foucault's description of the break in classical representation in Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas*, in which visual circulation also takes place through a mirrored image. To accept it in the visual economy of the tower, however, is only to accept a metaphor or an anthropomorphism; to accept a literary trope, a grand signifier. Besides, to say that the experience of looking at the tower and looking from the tower is "not in the least banal", "not a usual spectacle", ("an object when we look at it, it becomes a lookout in its turn when we visit it"), is not very convincing. Rather than it being a "singular monument" or "an original monument" which Barthes claims for it, it would seem that most buildings and monuments which are accessible would have the same possibility for description. For instance, Barthes's entire text with some changes of detail could stand as a description of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, or the Empire State Building. Anyway, Barthes's text, although more 'poetically' written, conservatively reproduces exactly the original journalistic fascination of 1889 of the two positions as well the ensuing literature of the tower which is permeated by the inside/outside relation a visitor to the tower has.

admirable stone book¹". So, it is possible to see that Barthes's heurmenutic desire to contain or capture the tower (like Don Quixote?) can be seen to be a continuum, rather than a break, and it seems to be done in the name of "vision", rather than any opposite position. Barthes is precisely trying to convert the tower, through identification with it as the Parisienne panopticon of vision, into a TEXT².

¹ Quoted in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*; Op Cit., p. 59. McLuhan goes on, not unexpectedly, to say "We are now in a position to go beyond that and to transfer the entire show to the memory of a computer." This position is reiterated later by Lyotard when he writes "Data banks are the Encyclopedia of tomorrow. They transcend the capacity of each of their users. They are "nature" for postmodern man". *The Postmodern Condition*, Op Cit. Early journalists, when seeing the Eiffel Tower, which represented to them a Darwinian evolutionary progress of materials from stone to bronze to iron etc asked "When will the world have a steel book?" I owe much here and elsewhere to the generosity of Dennis Kate, who has curated an exhibition entitled "The Eiffel Tower: A Tour de Force", as the Centennial Exhibition to be held at the Grolliers Club, New York, April 18-June 3, 1988 and then at the Mona Bismarck Foundation, Paris, June 5-September 3, 1988, across the street from the Tower itself. Through him I was able to read through such research materials as Miss Olga Finch, *Paris of Today*, (trans. Richard Kaufmann), Cossell Pub. Co., New York, 1891; *Guide Bleu du Figaro et du Petit Journal, Expositions de 1889*, Paris; Raymond Isay, *Panorama des Expositions universelles*, nrf, Gallimard, Paris, 1937; L. Daniel (ed.), *Guide Illustré de l'exposition universelle de 1889*, E. Dentu pub., Paris, 1889; It should not be forgotten that the initial exposition for which the tower was built also had Barthes's "euphoria" of "aerial vision" and a certain *plaisir* as well because the conquest (highest edifice in the world) provided "the joy of seeing the French flag floating higher than all the other flags of the world", just as Barthes's belief that "it is the very essence of the capital it gathers up and proffers to the foreigner who has paid to it his initiational tribute". Barthes's Parisocentrism seems no different from that then when the tower provided the occasion for the slogan "Le monde est venu a nous".

² The *duree* of the desire to convert the tower to words has already been noted. See Henri Layrette, *Gustave Eiffel*, Rizzoli, New York, 1985 where he writes "It was as if the iron latticework was immediately suggestive of the construction of a poem, a homage in which the inevitable spaces in the writing correspond to the voids and solids of the metal tracery". p. 188. That the Eiffel Tower is an "erotic" one (where filagree is the common element) corresponds to Barthes's own "pleasures" when he writes "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?* In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no "erogenous zones" (a foolhardy expression besides); it is intermittance, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic; the intermittance of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is the flash itself which seduces, or rather, the staging of appearance-as-disappearance." from *The Pleasures of the Text*, quoted in O'Neill, Op Cit., p. 185. Similarly, Foucault, in writing of transgression speaks of it as a "flash", *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1977, p. 35. Foucault uses a lightning bolt to express the same 'in-sight'.

To perform this acquisition, this literary apprehension, this trick of the trace, he must indulge in a particularly dismissive stance of technology and stand outside of all 'use-value' (social/historical function)¹ or what he calls "naive utilitarianism" or "utilitarian excuses". Barthes' anti-technological stance is evident throughout the essay. He says haughtily "it is frequently the function of the great books to achieve in advance what technology will merely put into execution²" and, further, that the "problems of telecommunications...seem quite ridiculous alongside the overwhelming myth of the Tower" and, further, that "it has reconquered the basic uselessness which makes it live in men's imaginations". Each of these dismissals (and the 'great books' reference is Matthew Arnoldian enough not

¹ The underlying ennui about "use" is a couched anti-Marxist approach. In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes writes "Marxist writing is of a different order. Here the closed character of form does not derive from rhetorical amplification or from grandiloquence in delivery, but from a lexicon as specialized and as functional as a technical vocabulary: even metaphors are here severely codified." And in a famous statement on Marxist superego which "censures pleasure easily", he defends Brecht separately, writing "In his plays there are compassionate, almost affectionate illustrations of the value of pleasure. Consider his fondness for cigars, and the fact that he used to remind people that Marx was also a cigar lover...There's an entire hedonistic dimension to the progressive camp which really ought to be looked into". *The Grain of the Voice*, Op. Cit. p. 163. The reference is undoubtedly tongue-in-cheek to Freud's famous "sometimes a good cigar is just a good cigar", but as Huyssens correctly notes, "But however convincing cigars may or may not be as signifiers of hedonism, Barthes certainly forgets Brecht's constant and purposeful immersion in popular and mass culture. Barthes' very un-Brechtian distinction between *plaisir* and *jouissance* - which he simultaneously makes and unmakes - reiterates one of the most tired topoi of the modernist aesthetic and of bourgeoisie culture at large: there are lower pleasures for the rabble, ie. mass culture, and then there is the *nouvelle cuisine* of the pleasure of the text, of *jouissance*". Op Cit., p. 42

² Barthes's claim for the panoramic "inclusive visions" of Hugo and Michelet as precursors of technology's "architecture of vision", or for literature as having predictive value seems, at least in this case, just silly. The panoramic or birds-eye-view is in place as a "cognitive style" (to use Baxandall's phrase) in Western Thought from at least the seventeenth-century. See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, Op Cit. Barthes knows this as he had already written on Dutch painting in "The World as Object", *A Barthes Reader*, Op Cit. but his conclusions there were ahistorical as well, "the gaze of the *Doelen* institutes a final suspension of history...an infinite postponement of history". p.72

to mean science fiction) is meant to transform the "touristic rite into an adventure of sight and of the intelligence", or in other words, to transform 'mere' history and the social dimension to ahistorical myth and (clever) sign functions "in which moveable and infinite meanings are mingled". This is a weaving of language, an interlacing or a "complex adventure of style", "a ludic deployment of signifiers", "where structure is made hysterical", which "never finishes up with the demonstration of a signified¹". While it may be all of these avoidances of the "trap of the signified", it also constructs another tower, another kind of writing, another rhetoric, another (visible) screen. In short, a worlding becomes a wording. Barthes's particular construction is another (towering) screen put up to efface history. (In this, it very much resembles and has very much the same spirit as the discourse projected by the organizers of the 1889 Exposition who tried to downplay the one-hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution which it [repressively] celebrated...but, the aristocrats weren't fooled and not one member of European Royalty

¹ Barthes's impossible attempt to circumvent the signified is like trying to eliminate the repressed. It simply returns in yet another guise. In his case, the signifieds returning are THE TEXT, THE WRITER, THE SELF etc. Sontag applauds this as a natural evolution saying..."From the staging of the texts of others, he passed inevitably to the staging of his own ideas" and "it is only another variation on the project of self-examination: the noblest project of French literature". *Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes*, Op Cit., p. 430 and p.444. O'Neill noticed the same dynamic tendency, "Barthes saw in the proliferation of literary language a utopian quest for an Adamic language that might name things prior to all divisions and all conflicts". Op Cit., p.191

attended the opening ceremonies despite all the obsequious official enjoinders¹).

If there is nothing particular suggestive in the attempt to establish or find the anti-ocular in this text, it is because for Barthes, with his emphasis on the TEXT, it is precisely the visible (the surfaces of fashion, the signs of Japan, the spectacle etc) which is knowledge and which is possessable because readable; an ironic mise-en-abyme which strangely echoes all of the doxa of bourgeoisie narratives (in his own terms, "a hierarchy of instances") that he theoretically wants to "steal" from. This may be because, as has been suggested here throughout, language (published) is paramountly a conservative medium². Or, it is a medium which moves toward sight, not

¹ The Imperialist undertones of the original Exposition can be recaptured by a partial list of pavillions which included les Colonies Francaises et Pays de Protectorat, Senegal, Gabon, le Congo, Madagascar, Taiti, les Marquises, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grand Bretagne et Colonies, Algerie, Tunisie, etc. These were individuated against the great narrative themes of Le Palais de la Guerre, Le Palais du Petrole, Le Palais des Beaux-Arts, Le Palais des Arts Libereaux, Le Palais des Machines, etc. The "exotic" countries' pavillions, like the Arab "villages" were much like film sets. Looking at photographs of them today reminds one of shots of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* which includes the production staff and visitors to the set. And they were as popular as visits to Universal City are today, "Mais, c'est surtout a l'Exposition coloniale que va la faveur populaire. On y a rassemble tant bien que mal, en un desordre savoureux, les images de cet Empire qu'une poignee d'hommes de decision et d'initiative, Jules Ferry et quelques autres-soldats, explorateurs, marins-vient de donner au pays". *Panoramas des Expositions Universelles*, Op Cit., p. 185. Of course, Barthes does not mention that many of these former colonies' inhabitants now live in internal exile or colonisation right in Paris, under the gaze of the tower which "makes the city into a kind of Nature". Nor does he mention the architect of the tower, M. Stephan Sauvestre, who was Nicaraguan. Maybe, as Sontag has suggested, he is participating only in "the liberating avoidance of the obvious, as an immense gesture of good taste". Op Cit., p. 428

² This point about the basic conservatism in (printed) language is made over and over by those outside the dominant orbit of (post)structuralism(s) where, like for Barthes, "Everything is language, or more precisely, language is everything". Contrarily, for instance, Charles Taylor writes "Indeed, for purposes of such diachronic explanation, we can question whether we ought to speak of a priority of language over act. There is a circular relation. Structures of action or languages are only maintained by being renewed constantly in action/speech. And it is in action/speech that they also fail to be maintained, that they are altered. This is a crashing truism, but the fog emanating from Paris in recent decades makes it necessary to clutch it as a beacon in the darkness. To give an absolute priority to the structure makes *exactly as little*

away from it and even claims for its anti-ocularity might be inherently self-contradictory. It is also implicitly lodged in the language of Barthes's modernist aestheticism (his desire for the writer to be "the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourse" is a description of the voyeur; in fact the detached eye of the traditional omniscient author who chooses this "morality of form".¹). Not for Barthes the empirical, the statistical, the phenomenological, the kinesthetic, the historical, the hidden, the social. Instead, it is the *style* of the flaneur, the page-turning finger *boulevardier*, who has seduced North American art criticism, an *ecrivain* in the art world—the man who can write "It has been observed that a kind of very old law incites cities to develop toward the west, in the direction of the setting sun; it is on this side that the wealth of the fine neighborhoods proceeds, the east remaining the site of poverty". The fact that many examples from both other cultures and even our own can disprove this ethnocentric, indeed,

sense as the equal and opposite error of subjectivism, which gave absolute priority to the action, as a kind of total beginning.", Op Cit. p. 90. For Anthony Giddens and his "theory of structuration", all knowledge is "bounded by "unacknowledged conditions of action on the one side, and unintended consequences of action on the other" which "situate historically" all social practices, including communication. As he writes "A distinction is made between *structure* and *system*. Social systems are composed of patterns of relationships between actors or collectivities reproduced across time and space. Social systems are hence constituted of *situated practices*. Structures exist in time-space only as moments recursively involved in the production and reproduction of social systems. Structures have only a 'virtual' existence". Op Cit., p. 26. For McLuhan, the mistake is crucial because, " 'Rational', of course, has for the West long meant "uniform and continuous and sequential". In other words, we have confused reason with literacy, and rationalism with a single technology". *Understanding Media*, Op Cit., p. 30

¹ Perhaps coincidentally, that position is at the highly problematic center of all the "points of view" which are assembled, disassembled and reassembled in Alain Robbe-Grillet, *The Voyeur*, (trans. Richard Howard), Grove Press, New York, 1958. For instance, "Why would the girl have mentioned him, unless she had seen him riding over the moor - "under the crossroads" - where there was no reason for him to be? The fact that he had not seen her was all too easy to explain. Their two paths, separated from each other by the considerable unevenness of the ground, had only a few privileged points from which two observers could see one another at the same time. At a given moment he and the girl had occupied these favorable positions, but she alone had turned in his direction, so that the reciprocity of their points of view had not functioned." p. 101

Parisiennocentric, position seems to do nothing to dispel the power of the language as we come to it translated. In another context Barthes has written "There is a relation between the road and the watercourse, and we know that the cities which offer most resistance to signification, and which moreover often present difficulties of adaptation for their inhabitants, are precisely the cities lacking water, the cities without seaside, without a body of water, without a lake, without a river, without a watercourse; all these cities offer difficulties of life, of legibility¹". The self-assured confidence of such speculations is beyond dispute. And even though Barthes intends such hermenutic riddles to create "a certain ingenuity on the reader's part" and "to multiply the readings of the city" and that "we must never try to fix and render rigid the signifieds of the units discovered" etc, the parameters seem stretched in the direction of pure fiction rather than dislodged along an axis of criticism. Can for instance, the problems of homelessness in North America (presumably a difficulty of adaptation for inhabitants) be simply reduced to a pure problem of liquidity and legibility²?

In other words, what if Barthes is simply wrong (to partially raise the T word)? McLuhan has compared telling an audience that a technological systems' "message" is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" to Louis Pasteur trying to convince doctors that the

¹ Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, p.201. Such smirking metaphysics is (unintentionally) like Tom Robbins's view in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, a successful counter-culture novel, that water invented man in order to carry itself from one place to another. Interesting as it may be, it is not persuasive. It doesn't hold water.

² For an excellent discussion of real factors in adaptation, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection* and the Site of Urban 'Revitalization' ", *October* 38, MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 63-98. Not once does she mention water.

greatest threat to health is invisible. Literature itself is a technology of vision (controlling and reducing the orality of language to a visual and fixed form) (transforming the power of the contingencies of time to the rigidities of space) producing a certain air of distance from its subject, turning sites (places of history, smells, bodies, sounds, social actions and reactions, etc) into sights only. In the case of the Eiffel tower, Stephen Kerns has written,

"At 10 o'clock on the morning of July 1, 1913, the Eiffel Tower sent the first time signal transmitted around the world. The independence of local times began to collapse once the framework of a global electronic network was established. Whatever charm local time may have once had, the world was fated to wake up with buzzers and bells triggered by impulses that travelled around the world with the speed of light".¹

These impulses, as McLuhan has suggested, were invisible, but are nevertheless available for analysis. They are also profound. Barthes himself, begins his essay by writing "...at the moment I begin writing these lines about it, the Tower is there, in front of me, framed by my window; and at the very moment the January night blurs it, apparently trying to make it invisible, to deny its presence, two little lights come on, winking gently as they revolve at its very tip: all this night, too, it will be there, connecting me above Paris to each of my friends that I know are seeing it...". From the very first moment, then, Barthes does not realize he is looking at a technologically assisted image (a memory of McLuhan's famous aphorism "The electric light is pure information"). He is joined to his friends, at this moment anyhow, by visible

¹ Stephen Kern, *Op Cit.*, p.14. Speaking of just the private time created by technological systems which shifted an interest from a historical past to a personal past near the end of the nineteenth-century Kern writes "These thinkers did not discover this past, but they broadened and deepened understanding of the ways it persists in germ cells and muscle tissue, dreams and neuroses, retentions and involuntary memories, guilt and ghosts". p. 64. He is invoking Bergson who he quotes "Real duration gnaws on things and leaves on them the mark of its tooth". p. 43

electricity¹, by a culture of inhabited systems, by a discourse which includes language but which is not restricted to it, and certainly not by the tower, *per se*. Just as he avoids mention of the Expositions' commitment to electricity and the introduction of Edison's phonograph, for instance, in any description of the Tower, so he doesn't pay attention to his own networks of complex circumstances in order to retreat to the shrine of (his) language.

It is obvious that some fifty years after the event occurring on/in/through the Eiffel Tower that Barthes, through literary values only, through a denial of history and technology, can still indulge in the "observatory" mode of author, litterateur, flaneur, voyeur, and most importantly, 'artist'. What Barthes is really describing is an Ivory Tower, not the Eiffel Tower at all². An Ivory Tower where as he says of the Eiffel Tower "one can feel oneself cut off from the world and yet the owner of a world". The threat of the real technological world and systems of social and political power can only be avoided through theories that make vast literary claims with an avoidance of history and materiality.

Obviously, other authors, other texts, other interpretations might have provided a different set of (con and dis) junctions, a different axis of

¹ As early as 1912, a *New York Times* journalist is writing "Few New Yorkers realize that all through the roar of the big city there are constantly speeding messages between people separated by vast distances, and that over housetops and even through the walls of the buildings and in the very air one breathes are words written by electricity." *Ibid.*, p. 67

² In doing so, he is (now, not surprisingly) reproducing the language of Flaubert who he so much admires. Flaubert writes (of writing *Madame Bovary*) that "we must (regardless of our material things and of mankind, which disavows us) live for our vocation, climb up our ivory tower, and...dwell alone with our dreams". quoted in Harpham, *Op. Cit.*, p. 140. Harpham sees this letter as seminal, writing "Literary Modernism can almost be said to begin with this letter which announces the 'religion of art'...etc., p.141

consideration for analysis. But, the point here has been to provide a kind of closer fragility by suggesting a cautionary attitude in the presence of "criticism" which makes claims about and around aesthetic objects. Simply, how much is a text radical ("anti-ocular" in this case) when its very form is not and when the objects of its attention are not ¹? When someone like Lyotard (who has just written a book on *painting*) says "There is more revolution, even if it is not much, in American Pop art than in the discourse of the Communist Party", what kind of writing is that and to what art does it really refer and when²? Is he "holding language under suspicion", which is what he hopes for in his projection of the "unpresentable" in art? And why does Foucault choose Magritte to write about (rather than say, Robbe-Grillet's films)? Is there something in the "language paintings", in the "visibility" of

¹In this case, for instance, Barthes's insistence on the tower as an "utterly *useless* monument" simply recreates the heated debates which took place before, during and after the tower's erection where it was variously described as "useless and monstrous", "a disgrace", "a frightful birdcage", "a metal spider web", "iron lace" with "no meaning" and "absurd". Barthes has taken these original objections (which he refers to disparagingly) and returned them all with the connoisseurship of a modernist semiotician to reveal their opposite meanings for aesthetics. Even his use of the myth of Babel is part of the original discourse in that one of the Tower's intentions (meanings) was to differentiate it from that Biblical tower. Max de Nansantý compared the two originally at the opening of the Exposition, saying, of the Eiffel Tower, "we can only hope...that it will be built in the languages of the universal voice that would link the nations in a common drive toward unlimited Progress and a Liberty that does not suffer from excesses". (1889) Nantasy is referring to the tower as a symbol of the impulse of "universal free competition" which was the Minister of Trade's guiding capitalist motor for the Exposition. Importantly, in popular culture, from the very beginning, the Eiffel Tower was always seen as a "Cyclops", an image of surveillance that is only reinforced by Barthes's descriptions. All that aside, Barthes's "reversals" of early philistine receptions seems very much like the dialectical destructions he doesn't adhere to when he writes "The awkwardness of this alternative is the consequence of the fact that destruction of discourse is not a dialectical term but a semantic term: it docilely takes its place within the great semiological "versus" myth (*white* versus *black*); whence the destruction of art is doomed to only *paradoxical* formula (those which proceed literally against the *doxa*): both sides of the paradigm are glued together in an untimely complicitous fashion: there is the structural agreement between the contesting and contested forms". *The Pleasure of the Text*, Op Cit. It is, then, possible to wonder where Barthes's "third term" of "subtle subversion", the "eccentric, extraordinary term" is in this text which could be "innovative" or "mutant" to "disarticulate meaning".

² Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Driftworks*, (ed. Roger McKeon), Foreign Agents Series, Semiotext(e), New York, 1984, p. 83

the image/text paradox which confirms rather than disrupts Foucault's own stable project of genealogy? What is the relation to the object chosen and the kind of writing? Although there is a necessary instability in codes, like language and all other sign-functions, and although there are polyphonic possibilities in all writing and a certain "unease" which is endemic to images themselves, all of which contribute to the possibilities of resistance (decoding, de-constructing, de-limiting) to powerful conventions of knowledge, "criticism" must take into account its own relations to the objects of its construction and not just to the self-reflexive qualities of writing. In order to activate the critical "gaze", it is necessary to understand the constraints of writing per se and to disobey any blind obedience to fashionable notions of critical style. The relation of writing to art and vice-versa is a never-ending (unnatural) circulation of the assignment of meanings and values when two forms of representationality meet uneasily. The stress of that first encounter must be maintained, the anxiety of their difference must be heightened and their meanings for one another must be elaborated through fertile and engendering methods of interaction. Familiarity (transliteration and translation) and comfortability (steady and settled text/images relations) must be avoided in order to preserve the tension in both fields which can live up to the continuing and changing demands of both.

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