

many other effects there is this one: if the old museum, as imagined from Baudelaire through Proust and beyond, was the site for the mnemonic reanimation of visual art, the new museum tends to split the mnemonic from the visual. More and more the mnemonic function of the museum is given over to the electronic archive, which might be accessed almost anywhere, while the visual experience is given over not only to the exhibition-form but to the museum-building as spectacle - that is, as an image to be circulated in the media in the service of brand equity and cultural capital. This image may be the primary form of public art today.

SIX

ANTINOMIES IN ART HISTORY

In this chapter I turn from the vicissitudes of the art museum to those of art history. What were the preconditions of this discipline at the end of the nineteenth century, and what are its preoccupations today? Are there particular contradictions that drove its formulations regarding art then, and others that guide its accounts of visual culture now?

In 1928 the Russian theorists Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev published an essay on "the formal method in European art scholarship."¹ There they associated the development of art history as an academic discipline at the end of the nineteenth century with the development of modernist art as an autonomous activity during the same period. In particular they related two aspects of the new discipline to two attributes of the new art: its foregrounding of "the constructive aspect" of the art work (i.e., its abstract structure) and

its attention to "alien art" in an imperialist age (i.e., its interest in exotic art - Japanese, African, etc.). Indirectly, Bakhtin argues, the first attribute helped to orient the new discipline to formalist questions of style, as in the work of Heinrich Wölfflin, and the second to different artistic wills or *Kunstwollens* of different periods and cultures, as with Alois Riegl.²

In this account of "West European formalism," then, art history and modernist art are not opposed, certainly not regarding the principle of aesthetic autonomy. The foremost American legatee of this formalist tradition insisted on this counterintuitive point again and again: "Modernism," Clement Greenberg wrote in 1961, "has never meant anything like a break with the past."³ By this time, however, the principle of aesthetic autonomy had largely narrowed to the protocol of medium-specificity (i.e., that painting is painting and nothing else), a narrowing that was very effective institutionally. For through a sharing of this protocol, art practice, art museum, and art history alike could agree on parameters for the proper making, exhibiting, and narrating of modernist art. No doubt the museum was first among equals here, for it provided the institutional illusion of autonomy that the other two parties required. In *The Voices of Silence* (1951) Malraux opens his discussion of "the museum without walls" with this celebration of the museal transformation of diverse things into formal mediums: "A -Romanesque crucifix was not regarded by its contemporaries as a work of sculpture; nor Cimabue's *Madonna* as a picture. Even Pheidias's *Pallas Athene* was not, primarily, a statue" ⁴ Only the museum could elevate such different object-functions to the art-status of painting and sculpture alone - an elevation that was well suited to the abstraction of modernist art.

Often the protocol of medium-specificity in modernist art aspired to an ontology of all art: painting and sculpture were

thought to possess an essential nature that art practice, art museum, and art history might disclose, each in its own way. Where once this ontological assumption offered all three parties a coherent way of working, it has not done so for some time now.⁵ Due to artistic transgressions, theoretical critiques, political demands, and technological pressures (some sketched in Chapter 5), these old institutional arrangements have broken down. Not only has the practice of modernist art fallen into ruins, but so too have the protocols of art museum and art history that attended it.

Of course it was not only "constructive" art that inclined art history to the principle of autonomy (prominent scholars like Wölfflin were mostly suspicious of modernist practice); there was also the philosophical imperative of Kantian self-critique (revived at the time in neo-Kantianism). And it was not only "alien" art that disposed the new discipline to a narrative of different artistic wills or *Kunstwollens*; there was also the philosophical model of Hegelian history, its account of the symbolic expressions of different cultures. These two motives guided the foundational figures of art history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in two principal tasks: on the one hand to demonstrate the autonomy of art, on the other to connect it to social history.⁶ Obviously both operations were crucial to the new discipline - the Kantian to distinguish art from other kinds of expression, the Hegelian to historicize it - but just as obviously the two operations were in tension, and this tension has run through the discipline like a fault-line.

On this fault-line art history seems contradictory, even oxymoronic: how can art be both autonomous in form and imbricated in social history? In *Principles of Art History* (1915) Wölfflin simply split the opposition: style has a "double root," he claimed; an extrinsic one determined by individual and national character, and an intrinsic one driven by perceptual and formal pressures. Thereafter formalist

critics like Greenberg tended to fold the extrinsic root into the intrinsic one, and to argue that, in the first instance, art constituted its own history. Yet, as this response resolved the opposition in favor of the autonomous term alone, it was no resolution - which is also true of responses that favored the social-historical term alone (as with the work of Arnold Hauser, say). Many important concepts developed in art history - such as the *Kunstwollens* of Riegl and the "symbolic forms" of Erwin Panofsky - were also concerned to reconcile the opposition between formal autonomy and social-historical imbrication. More recently art historians and critics have appealed to other discourses, semiotics above all, to ease this tension. Yet, however useful, the terms developed to this end have tended to be metaphorical or tendentious or both.

In his introduction to the work of the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, Claude Levi-Strauss reflects on such terms in critical discourse. There he speculates that language arose all at once, in an explosion of signification - a kind of semiotic Big Bang that left a surplus of signifiers for all time. "There is always a non-equivalence or 'inadequation'" between signifier and signified, Levi-Strauss writes, and "every mythic and aesthetic invention" works to cover over this "non-fit," to soak up this "overspill."⁷ His prime example of such invention is the term *mana*, the secret power that, according to Mauss in his great essay on gift exchange, *Essai sur le don* (1925), certain indigenous people ascribed to certain exchange items. Yet, Levi-Strauss insists, this term has primitive force only for Mauss: the semiotic "overspill" and semantic soaking-up occur only in his text; the magical thinking here is his. And Mauss is hardly alone: all critical discourse has its *mana* terms, its "floating signifiers," its magical words.

Where do these terms appear, and what magic do they work? "Somewhat like algebraic symbols," Levi-Strauss tells us, they "rep-

resent an indeterminate value of signification."⁸ Most often in art history this "indeterminate value" concerns the "signification" of context; hence its *mana* terms tend to point to social connection and historical causation - they are often verbs (like "reflect" or "embody") that point to these determinations but do not explain them. Perhaps this problem is basic to any discourse concerned with such determinations, or that constructs its object in oppositions of text and context, object and frame, inside and outside.⁹ What historian or critic does not have such a fetish word, a favorite term where, as in a black box, such mediations only appear to happen? But it is especially marked in art history because of its simultaneous claiming of formal autonomy and social-historical imbrication. Many concepts, often as productive as they are problematic, have risen out of this contradiction, and most feature *mana* terms.

Consider *Kunstwollen* in this regard. Riegl advanced the concept in the interests of aesthetic autonomy against the claims of material determination made by the followers of the architectural historian Gottfried Semper: where they had argued the fundamental nature of technical *skill*, he argued the relative independence of artistic *will*. Yet for Riegl this will was not only about artistic form; it also expressed the distinctive character of its period and/or culture. In a 1920 essay Panofsky objected, rightly, that *Kunstwollen* psychologized art; yet this was one of its implicit purposes: to ease the antinomy between formal autonomy and social-historical imbrication through a cultural psychology, the ascription of a "will" to a period and/or culture.¹⁰ Moreover, Panofsky substituted a concept that did much the same thing. Although concerned with conceptual structures rather than expressive wills, his idea of "symbolic form" also worked to reconcile formal autonomy and social-historical imbrication; in effect, where Riegl endowed a period and/or culture with a volition, Panofsky gave it a mentality.¹¹ And these two *mana* terms are among the most

sophisticated in art history; others, such as the "modes of vision" proposed by Wolfflin, are more brutal. On the one hand, Wolfflin defines these modes, through his master opposition of Classical versus Baroque styles, as radically diacritical (the Classical is relatively linear, open, clear, the Baroque relatively painterly, closed, obscure). On the other hand, on the first page of *Principles of Art History*, he is even more radically referential: "every painter paints 'with his blood.'"¹² Here, notwithstanding the distance carved out by the scare quotes, Wolfflin collapses formal autonomy and social-historical imbrication through a racialist invocation of a folkish mind-body. And this psychobiology, which is at once reductive and totalistic, returns in art history whenever tribal terms like "Gothic" and geocultural oppositions of North and South, East and West, are used in the old ways. That is to say, it never goes away, so deeply inscribed are these notions in our courses and texts, exhibitions and museums.¹³

Certainly, in the wake of postcolonial discourse, art historians are more self-aware on this score. Yet the antinomies in the discipline have not disappeared, and so the *mana* terms have not either. Important texts of the last three decades that have extended the history of art to visual culture are also not free of such signifiers. In *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (1972), an inaugural work in this discourse, Michael Baxandall uses tropes like "period eye" and "cognitive style" that still evoke a cultural mind. However, he does so in order to *undo* the opposition of formal autonomy and social-historical imbrication: emphasis falls on the mediations between "painting and experience," "visual skills" and "social facts."¹⁴ Most often Baxandall sees these relations as dialogical relays; yet sometimes he figures them in passive ways, as in the geological trope that opens his book - "a fifteenth-century painting is the deposit of a social relationship" - or in the paleontological trope that soon follows - "paintings are among other things fossils of economic

life."¹⁵ Again, such analogies are somewhat magical - though, as Paul de Man often insisted, they may be so rooted in language that, were we to dig them out somehow, there might not be much left.

More recent studies of visual culture eschew the generality of a cultural mind for the specificity of historical spectatorship; I have in mind such signal texts as *The Art of Describing* (1983) by Svetlana Alpers, *Body Criticism* (1991) by Barbara Maria Stafford, and *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) by Jonathan Crary. Under theoretical influences that range from Lacan and Althusser, to Foucault and new historicism, to Raymond Williams and cultural studies, such texts present historical viewers as social constructions. As constructed, they are specific, indeed singular, and there are no vague abstractions of *Kunstwollens* or symbolic forms; yet these subjects are also presented as so determined by the social as to be flooded by it, one with it - *Zeitgeists*-in-person, as it were.¹⁶ Here it is the subject, not the art, that becomes the "deposit of a social relationship," and often it is the principal object of analysis as well. Paradoxically, then, this historically specific subject becomes generally consistent, broadly representative of its period and/or culture, and so we are offered portraits, often brilliant, of *the* seventeenth-century Dutch viewer, *the* eighteenth-century Enlightenment spectator, *the* nineteenth-century European observer, and so on. If the painter in the old art history once painted "with his blood," the viewer in this new art history observes "as constructed to do so," and it is this subject that provides discursive consistency (as it has for some time now in literary studies influenced by "new historicism"). Here, then, the partial shift from the old art history to the new is marked by a partial shift in object - away from histories of style and analyses of form toward *genealogies of the subject*.¹⁷

So far I have touched on visual studies as it emerged from art history, but most of this work is concerned with more recent visual culture. In this sense "visual studies" represents a wide array of criticism that draws on film theory and media analysis; in effect it is the visual wing of "cultural studies," the study of popular and subcultural forms of expression, and its topics range from movies, television, and the Internet to visual representations in medicine, the military, and other sciences and industries. "Visual culture," then, represents our contemporary world of heightened spectacle pervaded by visual commodities and technologies, information and entertainment.¹⁸ As a social description this seems clear enough: the image dominates our society perhaps as never before. As an academic subject, however, "visual culture" is less clear, and maybe as oxymoronic as "art history." Certainly its two terms repel each other with equal force, for if art history is strained between the autonomy implied in "art" and the imbrication implied in "history," then visual culture is stretched between the virtuality implied in "visual" and the materiality implied in "culture." One way to draw out the implications of this shift is to consider these substitutions further.

The turn from "history" to "culture" suggests a new affiliation with *anthropology* as a guardian discourse. Art history was also affiliated with anthropology in the late nineteenth century; historically the relation between the two disciplines resembles a sibling rivalry, with periods of intimacy followed by times of disconnection. Some foundational figures of art history redefined artistic production in anthropological terms: Riegl through his involvement in lowly forms like textile ornament and marginal fields like the late Roman art industry, Aby Warburg through his notion of art as "document" and his study of Pueblo Indian rituals and early Renaissance cosmologies. As noted in Chapter 5, these two figures have attracted much attention lately, which suggests a revived interest in this

anthropological dimension of the discipline.¹⁹ Yet the immediate source of the ethnographic model in visual studies remains cultural studies. Over the last two decades cultural studies has investigated texts and images long shunned by scholars, and so challenged hierarchies of high and low culture and major and minor forms. This challenge to elitist canons has brought great gains; but the shift from art history to "image history," as proposed by various advocates of visual studies, might have some costs as well.²⁰ In general terms visual studies might be too quick to dismiss aesthetic autonomy as retrograde, and to embrace subcultural forms as subversive. Its ethnographic model might also have this unintended consequence: it might be encouraged to move horizontally from subject to subject across social space, more so than vertically along the historical lines of a particular form, genre or problematic. In this way visual studies might privilege the present excessively, and so might support rather than stem the posthistorical attitude that has become the default position of so much artistic, critical, and curatorial practice today.²¹ The ethnographic turn is general to cultural studies, visual and other, and it is important to understand why. Again, anthropology studies culture, and postmodernist practice has long claimed this expanded field as its own. Second, anthropology is contextual, another important value for contemporary artists and critics, many of whom conceive projects as fieldwork in everyday life. Third, anthropology addresses alterity, and along with psychoanalysis this has made it a lingua franca of much recent art and theory. Fourth, anthropology seems to arbitrate the interdisciplinary, which renders it a court of appeals for disciplinary disputes. And finally, fifth, the self-critique of anthropology makes it attractive (I mean the recent work of James Clifford, George Marcus, and others), for it promises a reflexivity of the ethnographer even as it preserves an alterity of the other.

Yet, epistemologically speaking, the ethnographic turn over the last two decades may be clinched by another factor. According to Marshall Sahlins, two models have long divided anthropology: one stresses "symbolic logic," with society seen in terms of exchange systems; the other privileges "practical reason," with society seen in terms of material culture.²² In this light anthropology already participates in the two contradictory models that have divided so much recent art and criticism. On the one hand, it participates in the old model of *textuality*, which, in the hands of structuralists, reconfigured society as a symbolic order or a cultural system and, in the hands of poststructuralists, conjured up "the death of the author" and "the dissolution of man." On the other hand, it also participates in the new longing for *referentiality*, for a grounding in identity and community, which has led many artists and critics to reject the old text models and subject critiques altogether. With a turn to the already-split discourse of anthropology, then, artists and critics can resolve these contradictory models magically: they can take up the roles of both cultural semiologist and contextual fieldworker; they can continue and condemn critical theory simultaneously; they can perform subject critiques and identity politics at the same time. For these reasons, in our extended period of theoretical ambivalences and political impasses, anthropology remains the compromise discourse of choice.²³

Just as social imperatives and anthropological assumptions have governed the shift from "history" to "culture," so technological imperatives and psychoanalytic assumptions have governed the shift from "art" to "visual." Here "the image" is to visual studies what "the text" was to poststructuralist criticism: an analytical tool that has revealed the cultural artifact in new ways, especially regarding the psychological positionings of different viewers, but sometimes to the neglect of its historical formation. For often in visual studies

that develops out of film theory and media studies, the image is treated as a projection - in the psychological register of the imaginary, in the technological register of the simulacral, or both - that is, as a doubly immaterial fantasm. Moreover, where once critics were slow to concede the importance of the image in our political economy, perhaps today they are too quick to grant it a dominance that it does not possess.²⁴

This imagistic turn seems to contradict the ethnographic turn discussed above. Perhaps, as followers of Kant and Hegel once wrestled for the philosophical soul of art history, so psychoanalysis and anthropology now vie for the theoretical heart of visual studies. Yet this new struggle might soon be overwhelmed by more worldly forces. In this regard consider how Barbara Stafford argues, in *Body Criticism*, for a visual studies attentive to the equal rights of the image.²⁵ She insists, rightly, that Platonic philosophy long degraded the image as bodily and feminine, that old biases against the image persist (Puritanical suspicion of its pleasures, Enlightenment suspicion of its deceptions, and so on), and that the humanities remain rooted in literary protocols (philological, exegetical, rhetorical, hermeneutic, deconstructive). Yet this critical suspicion of the verbal humanities leads her to an uncritical celebration of visual culture. "The task at hand," Stafford writes in *Good Looking* (1996), is to abandon "deconstructive autopsy" and to demonstrate "the historical virtues of visualization for the emergent era of computerism."²⁶ In this embrace of virtuality (or what she calls "the aesthetics of almost"), painting, sculpture, "linear sentences" - any practice not "consonant with an era of insubstantial and endlessly variable transformations" - seems destined for the historical dustbin. For all its provocative enthusiasm, this call for a "new pedagogy" of "visual aptitude" betrays a profound anxiety about the continued relevance of art history, indeed of the humanities in general.²⁷ Of course terms

like "literacy" and "aptitude" are deeply ideological; and along with "digital literacy" "visual aptitude" is a primary version of this ideology in our present, with potential losses as well as gains at every level of education and research.

I began with the interest, in art history and modernist art at the end of the nineteenth century, both in "the constructive aspect" of art and in "alien" forms of culture. Might the discourse of visual culture today depend on two parallel preconditions — on the virtuality of visual media and on the multiplicity of postcolonial culture? A third parallel might be proposed straightaway. Art history then relied on techniques of photographic reproduction to abstract a wide range of *objects* into various systems of *style* - as defined in diacritical terms by Wofflin in *Principles of Art History*, or in cross-cultural affinities by Malraux in *The Voices of Silence*. Might visual culture now rely on techniques of electronic information to transform a wide range of *mediums* into various systems of *image-text* - into a digital database without walls, an electronic archive beyond museums? The discursive effects of photographic reproduction on artistic culture were not thought through until the late 1920s and 1930s. How long will it take us to work out the institutional implications of electronic information?²⁸

Perhaps another historical juxtaposition might help here - a model of the subject in a different kind of archive or order of images. In "The Age of the World Picture" (1938) Heidegger related the rise of the Renaissance subject to the (re)discovery of perspective. Indeed he defined this new humanist subject almost as a function of this new "world picture":

The interweaving of these two events, which for the modern age is decisive - that the world is transformed into picture and man

into *subiectum* - throws light at the same time on the grounding event of modern history, an event that at first glance seems almost absurd. Namely, the more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at man's disposal as conquered, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively, i.e., all the more importunately, does the *subiectum* rise up, and all the more impetuously, too, do observation of and teaching about the world change into a doctrine of man, into anthropology. It is no wonder that humanism first arises where the world becomes picture.²⁹

Perhaps the new subject of "the era of computerism" descends from this old humanist subject, but if so its will to mastery may be pushed to an inhuman point — to the point, that is, where the humanism of the world-become-picture is reversed into an inhumanism of the world-become-information. For in the virtuality of the electronic archive, according to Mario Perniola, "what is real is not what appears at any moment, but what is conserved in memory," and this memory is "external to the spirit, to the actuality of its acquisition of consciousness":

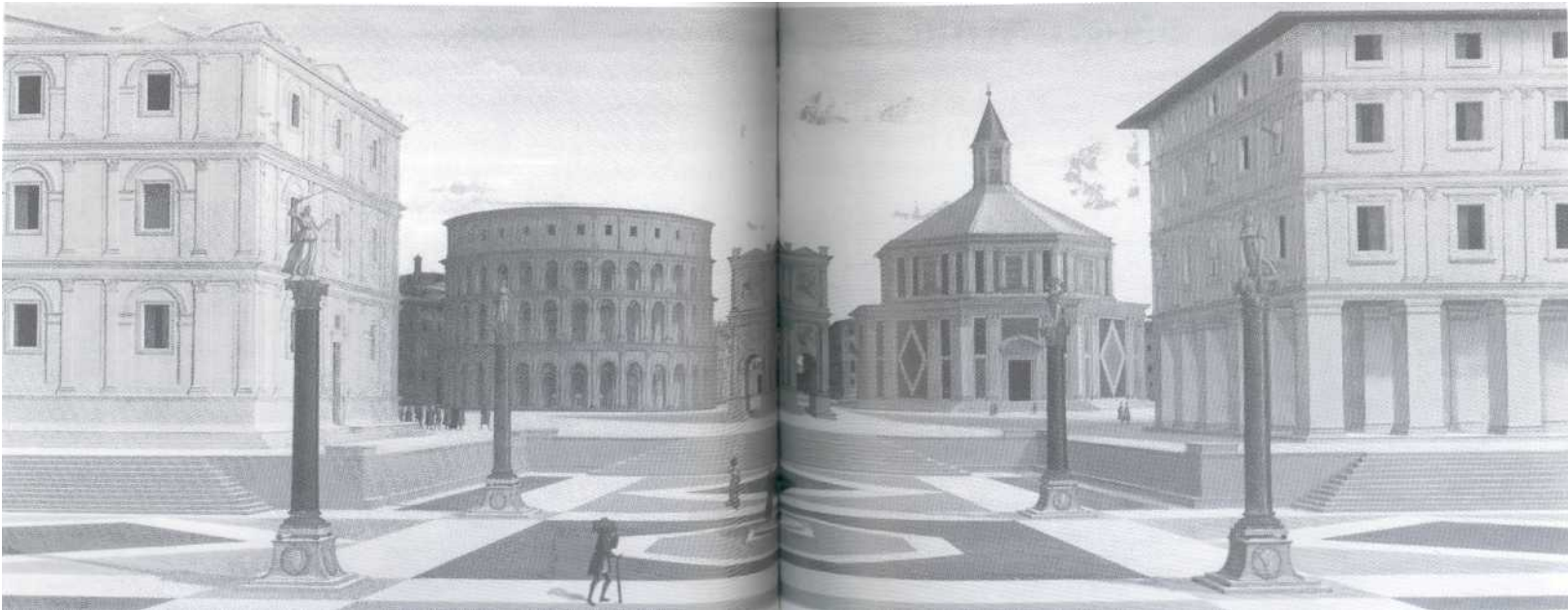
If effectual reality is no longer conceived as actual (as in the metaphysical tradition that survived until the advent of mass-media society), but as virtual (as in the society of information technology), the entire humanist world vision that conferred upon the subject its ontological meaning collapses ... What is essential does not issue from the inwardness of the soul, but from the outwardness of writing, of the book, of the computer.³⁰

My purpose here is not to mourn the "inwardness of the soul" (as Perniola seems to do) any more than to celebrate the "outwardness of the computer." As for the latter, "the era of computerism" has already produced its own suspect myths - myths of community and

globality, of access and interactivity.³¹ At the same time it has also projected new sorts of spaces and subject positions - certainly ones different from those of "the age of the world picture."

Here again I have only impressions to offer. First, however digital in operation, this new world is still visual in appearance, as its language of "screens," "windows," and "interfaces" underscores. The screen remains the dominant modality of the electronic archive, but what kind of image is it exactly? Clearly it differs radically from

Anonymous central Italian artist, *View of an Ideal City*, c. 1490-1500: "the more objectively the object appears, all the more importunately does the subject rise up" (Martin Heidegger).



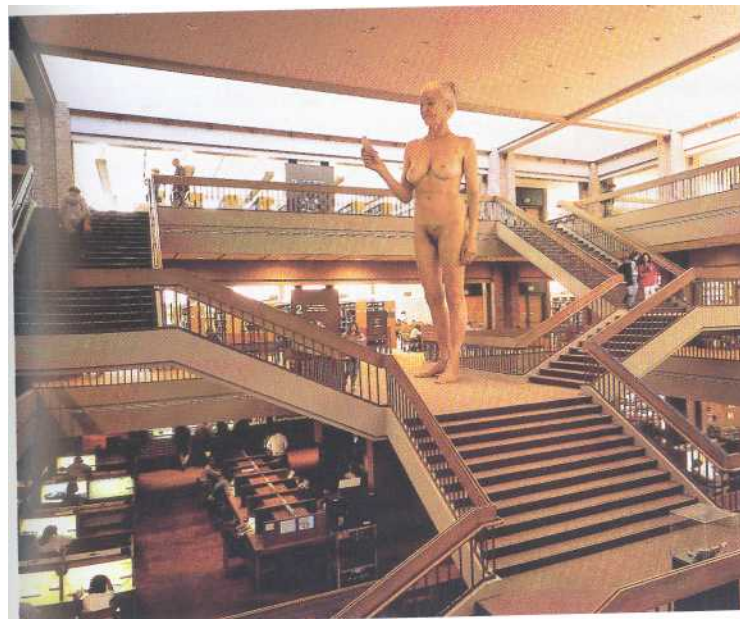
the pictorial tableau of painting, but it also diverges from the projected image of cinema as well as the broadcast image of television. (In some ways it retains the problematic aspects of both mediums: the fascination of viewers as in film, the separation of viewers as in television.) A luminous scrim of information, it arises from elsewhere, on command like a genie, to be manipulated at will. But what one manipulates on the screen is *data* (Latin for "given"), which suggests that we do not produce this information so much as we manipulate its given-ness. This has two different ramifications for two different publics.

For the initiate public the computer is the ultimate instrument

of "computability," and this operation, which is also a value, has become pervasive. Finance capital has flowed to two sites above all others, technology and biology, and especially to convergences of the two, such as ventures concerning the human genome.³² More and more technology and biology are understood as information, as media, and this understanding supports the model of computability of all life in these terms. Here the goal seems to be the total transparency of this information, the total transformability of this data (a potential Taylorism of the gene). For the noninitiate public the situation is quite different: rather than the ultimate instrument of manipulability, the computer is the ultimate black box where production (or is it "signification"?) is occluded - perhaps occluded *as* information. In some respects the computer gives the subject enormous control, in a great upgrading of "the world picture" put at our "disposal as conquered." In other respects, however, its operations are so auto-generative as to be oblivious to the subject, who thus occupies "an ambiguous and unfixed location" in relation to the computer.³³

If the place of the subject is ambiguous in the electronic archive, so is its tabulation of things. Again, a fundamental operation of this archive is the transformation not only of particular objects but of entire mediums into image-texts; all sorts of sites are turned into information-pixels.³⁴ In 1966, before "the era of computerism" was understood as such, Foucault was prompted to consider different tabulations of "words and things." *The Order of Things* begins, famously, with a "certain Chinese encyclopedia" imagined by Jorge Luis Borges, an absurd list of monstrous animals that disrupts "the age-old distinction between the Same and the Other."³⁵ From this list Foucault generates an allegory about a catastrophe in the very allegorical structure of knowledge, that is, of words related to things in a spatial system. Here, he implies,

even the emblematic objects of Surrealist collage - "the umbrella" and "the sewing-machine" - had lost "the operating table" that allowed them to come together, in a chance encounter, in the first place. "What is impossible," Foucault writes of the Borgesian encyclopedia, "is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible."³⁶ Now, for all appearances, this Borgesian disorder has become our order, this post-Surrealist heterotopia is our topos. After photographic reproduction the museum was no longer so bound by walls, but it was still organized by style. What is the limit of the archive beyond



Jeff Wall, *The Giant*, 1992: the subject empowered by the computer or placed in "an ambiguous and unfixed location"?

museums? Like any archival shift, this one both liberates and constrains - perhaps at the same time. Perhaps for all its apparent mobility of signs there is an actual stasis of system here. Perhaps the museum and the library have returned, recombined in a new Alexandria, an electronic box in which other "orders of things" are melted down: an entropic archive.³⁷

Secretly or otherwise, all discourses either mirror or model a subject. This is clear enough in aesthetics, concerned as it traditionally is with proper judgment, refinement, and taste, but art history is not very different in this regard. Certainly, to proclaim the autonomy of the art *object*, as both aesthetics and art history often do, is to presuppose or to project an autonomy of the art *subject*, and on this point - that art might reconcile opposed faculties and so demonstrate a freedom of mind - Kantian and Hegelian traditions in both disciplines have agreed.³⁸ Of course this self-fashioning can be forced, rigid, moralistic. "The only means of access to art work remains exaltation, i.e., a feeling of moral obligation," Benjamin wrote of a disastrous experience of a Wofflin lecture in 1915. "He does not see the art work, he feels obliged to see it, demands that one see it, considers his theory a moral act; he becomes pedantic, ludicrously catatonic, and thereby destroys any natural talents that his audience may have."³⁹ But this moral act can also enliven rather than embalm the subject, or so formalists have often claimed, as Michael Fried did fifty years after Benjamin condemned Wofflin:

While modernist painting has increasingly divorced itself from the concerns of the society in which it precariously flourishes, the actual dialectic by which it is made has taken on more and

more of the denseness, structure and complexity of moral experience - that is, of life itself, but life as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness.⁴⁰

What sort of subject does visual culture mirror or model? Not an autonomous subject, for good or for bad; instead the subject is understood as a kind of image: this axiom has passed from theories in psychoanalysis (where the foundational act of our identity is an imaginary mimesis, an identification with an image) into everyday behavior in the culture at large.⁴¹ At the same time the reverse is true as well: the image is defined as a kind of subject with desires of its own.⁴² Neither development is particularly new. For example, this equation of subject and image is isomorphic with the structure of commodity fetishism as outlined by Marx in *Capital*, but this fetishism has received a great upgrade in the present. In the capitalist divorce of producer from product, Marx argued, the relation between people takes on "the fantastic form of a relation between things," and inanimate things take on the even more fantastic form of human agents - a confusion that he associated with "the misty realm of religion" where "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own."⁴³ This confusion, which Marx figured as a *visual* projection, indeed as an imaginary misrecognition, is so deep in the image fetishism of visual culture that we rarely notice it. Not only does this new fetishism obscure productive relations and material conditions like the old, but it also renders this confusion more internal to the subject, almost constitutive of it. This fetishistic image-anthropomorphism drives many discourses today: no longer just friendly, computers are interactive; not just communication, the Internet offers interconnectivity; and so on. Today the "pathetic fallacy," the projection of the human into the nonhuman, approaches a

technological reality, and here too the reverse must be considered as well: a "technological fallacy" whereby the machine projects its modalities into the subject.

For many of us "autonomy" is a bad word - a ruse in aesthetic discourse, a deception in ego psychology, and so on. We forget that autonomy is a diacritical term like any other, defined in relation to its opposite, that is, to subjection. Historically this subjection was often figured in the primitivist terms of fetishism. In the Enlightenment the irrational fetishist (a fantasm almost always projected to Africa) was an important foil for the rational European: in many ways the autonomy of the latter depended on the subjection of the former.⁴⁴ Explicitly in *Du culte des dieux fetiches* (1760) Charles de Brosses defined fetishism as "an infantile cult" that traps its worshippers in a "perpetual childhood"; and implicitly in "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784) Kant presented fetishism as the secret epitome of "the self-incurred tutelage" to be vanquished by the Enlightenment.⁴⁵ Marx was part of this same Enlightenment project: his critique of commodity fetishism was also made in the name of autonomy, as was the Freudian critique of sexual fetishism (though Freud knew it could not be vanquished). As given to us by the Enlightenment, aesthetic autonomy is secretly articulated against fetishistic enslavement as well: the orderly austerity of the Kantian art work is opposed to the sensuous seduction of the fetish, the disembodied disinterest of the Kantian viewer to the embodied desire of the fetish worshipper, the sublimation of Kantian object and subject alike to the perversion of fetish and fetishist alike.

In the 1920s artists and critics often seized the fetish to challenge this aesthetics of autonomy. For example, if Marx once described fetishism as "the religion of sensuous desire," Surrealism aimed to be this religion in art: it sought to inject desire into the aesthetic, to bind subject to object fetishistically, and to this end it modeled the

art work as a sexual part-object rather than an ideal body-ego. Not cognitive disinterest but libidinal investment was the new goal of aesthetic appreciation: "I dare any amateur of painting," Georges Bataille once wrote, "to love a picture as much as a fetishist loves a shoe."⁴⁶ But the problem with this anti-aesthetics of the fetish today is that this dissident position in modernism has become a dominant position in postmodernism. There is no tradition of autonomy to subvert; in many ways our tradition - our world - has become quasi-Surrealist (or, as suggested above, post-Surrealist), and the exploitation of the unconscious is hardly the project of artists alone.⁴⁷

Again, autonomy is a bad word for many of us. We tend to forget that it is always situated politically. Enlightenment thinkers proclaimed autonomy in order to wrest institutions away from the *ancien regime*; art historians like Riegl proclaimed autonomy in resistance to reductive accounts of art; modernists from Manet to the Minimalists proclaimed it to challenge the priority of iconographic texts, the necessity of illustrational meanings, the imperialism of mass media, or the overburdening of art with voluntaristic politics. Like essentialism, autonomy is a bad word, but it may not always be a bad strategy: call it strategic autonomy.

28. On this relation see Denis Hollier, "On Paper," in Cynthia Davidson, ed., *Anymore* (New York: Any Foundation, 2001). Also see Rosalind Krauss, "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls," in Reesa Greenberg *et al*, *Thinking about Exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996). The "museum without walls" is the unfortunate translation of *le musee imaginaire*. For a contemporaneous critique of the notion see Georges Duthuit, *Le musee inimaginable* (Paris: Libraire Jose Corti, 1956).
29. Yet this too is implicit in the "Artwork" essay, though most commentators overlook it. "At the time of its origin a medieval picture of the Madonna could not yet be said to be 'authentic'," Benjamin writes in a footnote. "It became 'authentic' only during the succeeding centuries and perhaps most strikingly so during the last one" (*Illuminations*, p. 243).
30. Andre Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 112.

All that remains of Aeschylus is his genius. It is the same with figures that in reproduction lose both their significance as objects and their function (religious or other); we see them only as works of art and they bring home to us only their maker's talent. We might almost call them not 'works' but 'moments' of art. Yet diverse as they are, all these objects ... speak for the same endeavor; it is as though an unseen presence, the spirit of art, were urging all on the same quest, from miniature to picture, from fresco to stained-glass window, and then, at certain moments, it abruptly indicated a new line of advance, parallel or abruptly divergent. Thus it is that, thanks to the rather specious unity imposed by photographic reproduction on a multiplicity of objects, ranging from the statue to the bas-relief, from bas-reliefs to seal-impressions, and from these to the plaques of the nomads, a 'Babylonian style'¹ seems to emerge as a real unity, not a mere classification - as something resembling, rather, the life-style of a great creator. Nothing conveys more vividly and compellingly the notion of a destiny shaping human ends than do the great styles, whose evolutions and transformations seem like long scars that Fate has left, in passing, on the face of the earth.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Malraux is hardly alone in this totalizing mode; this was a moment for grand speculations on art and architecture by Siegfried

- Giedion, Gyorgy Kepes, Henri Focillon, Joseph Schillinger, Alexander Dorner, among others.
32. It is no accident that my narrative of archival relations matches, loosely, the periodizations of spectacle proposed by Guy Debord, T. J. Clark, and Jonathan Crary.
33. Michel Foucault, "Fantasia on the Library" (1967), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 92-93.
34. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), p. 186. The most trenchant account of this dialectic remains Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (1973; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979)- On the "mediation" of modern architecture, see Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994). Also see Chapter 2.
35. In some ways the contemporary museum (the Guggenheim is the flagship of this new fleet) reconciles in perverse fashion the dialectical opposition first presented by Malraux and Benjamin. On the one hand, a version of what Malraux imagined, the virtual Museum without Walls, has become a reality with the electronic museum, the museum on-line. On the other hand, a version of what Benjamin foresaw, a cinema beyond the museum, is now brought back within the museum in the form of exhibition design calculated to flow cinematically, or to stream like webpages. In this way too, the institution of art continues to conform to new structures of exchange, to be reformatted around the visual-digital paradigm of the website. And many artists and architects have followed suit, either affirmatively or critically - though what might constitute critique in this context is not yet clear.

6 ANTINOMIES IN ART HISTORY

1. See M. M. Bakhtin/P. M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 41-53. On the disputed authorship of this text see the foreword by Wlad Godzich.

2. Of course the art-historical recognition of other *Kunstwollens* was partial at best, and they were often sublated into Hegelian narratives centered on Western art.
3. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965), p. 199. Also see note 20 of Chapter 5.
4. Andre Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 13. Malraux often repeats this celebration: "The Middle Ages were as unaware of what we mean by the word 'art' as were Greece and Egypt, who [*sic*] had no word for it. For this concept to come into being, works of art needed to be isolated from their functions. What common link existed between a 'Venus' which *was* Venus, a crucifix which *was* Christ crucified, and a bust? But three 'statues' can be linked together" (p. 53).
5. Often this ontological assumption was extended to mediums that defied it, such as film, which now seems to disappear, in its past, into related forms of popular attractions and, in its present, into new forms of digital technologies.
6. Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). Often the difference between semiotic and social—historical methods is understood as another version of this split (which it is not).
7. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (1950), trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 60-63. Like the primal murder of the father in Freud, this origin is obviously heuristic, outside the very system that it founds.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
9. There are many variations of this opposition — psychological or social, structure or history, Freud or Marx, Lacan or "the historicists" — and many attempts to reconcile it. Perhaps, as it predetermines all versions, the opposition is the problem, and often a theory is most productive when it breaks down this opposition, or when its own oppositional structure breaks down.
10. Erwin Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition" (1920), *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1981).
11. In both cases a figure of agency is smuggled in to animate either text or context and so to connect the two. Drawn from Ernst Cassirer, "symbolic

- form" is developed by Panofsky in early texts like "The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection on the History of Styles" (1921) and "Perspective as Symbolic Form" (1924-25).
12. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (1915), trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950), p. 1.
13. This is not to question that significant differences are registered by these terms but to ask how they are registered. Was there an Aryan motive in the nineteenth-century reformulation of art history as a discipline, as there was, according to Martin Bernal, in the nineteenth-century reformulation of classics as a discipline? See his *Black Athena* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
14. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), unpaginated preface. Apart from its importance I refer to Baxandall because of his sensitivity to the significant difficulties of terms and lexicons.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.
16. For example, the gendering of the subject is remarked, almost automatically now, but only as a social construction; rarely acknowledged is the intransigence of a sexuality, an unconscious, or any other "substance" that might exceed the historically specific.
17. There is a rough division in visual studies between projects concerned a la new historicism with the genealogy of the subject, and projects concerned a la cultural studies with popular media and subcultural expressions, to which I turn now.
18. Of course cultural studies is not a singular entity, divided as it is by its different formations in Britain and North America. For a representative anthology see Cary Nelson *et al.*, *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992). For an overview of visual studies see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
19. Recent studies of Riegl include Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), and Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). Recent translations of Warburg include *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, ed. Kurt Forster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1998), and *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North*

America, trans. and ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

20. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, the editors of *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), propose "history of images" in the Introduction. In "What do Pictures Really Want?", *October 77* (Summer 1996), W. J. T. Mitchell substitutes "the study of human visual expertise." For critiques of the initial version of my critique here (also published in *October 77*), see Douglas Crimp, "Getting the Warhol We Deserve: Cultural Studies and Queer Culture," *Visual Arts and Culture*, vol. 1, part 2 (1999), and Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Persuasion: Paradox and Power in Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). In *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Mitchell writes of a "pictorial turn."
21. I discuss this problem in art practice in "The Artist as Ethnographer" in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
22. Marshall Sahlins, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
23. This is a reductive account of anthropology, I admit, but these exchanges *are* reductive. They seem to follow a used-car principle of discourse. First some anthropologists adapted poststructuralist methods from literary criticism to reformulate culture as *text* - just when literary criticism had worn out this model. Then some literary critics adapted ethnographic methods to reformulate texts as *cultures* writ small — just when anthropology was about to trade in this model for others that focus on the state, legal codes, and so on. This interdisciplinary exchange of damaged goods prompts an obvious question: if the textual and ethnographic turns pivoted on a single model, how interdisciplinary could the results be? More specifically, if cultural studies, new historicism, and visual studies often smuggle in an ethnographic model (when not a sociological one), might it be "the *common theoretical ideology* that silently inhabits the 'consciousness' of all these specialists . . . oscillating between a vague spiritualism and a technocratic positivism"? (Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Ideology of the Scientists and Other Essays* [London: Verso, 1990], p. 97). In the initial version of this text I wrote of a "culture envy"; in *Academic Instincts* (Princeton: Princeton

- University Press, 2001) Marjorie Garber writes of the general phenomenon of "discipline envy."
24. This is the tendency of Fredric Jameson in *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), and I admit to it too.
 25. Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
 26. Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), cover copy. Also see her *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
 27. Stafford, *Body Criticism*, pp. 475, 472.
 28. This hypostasizing of the visual is already active in art history, not only in its technology (again, the photographic abstraction into style: *le musée imaginaire*) but also in its teleology, for, in one quasi-Rieglian account, the story of art is a long, complicated sublimation of the tactile into the optical. Here again modernist art is not necessarily opposed to art history, for, in one formalist account, this art also works to purify the pictorial in terms of the optical - that is, to map the impressions of the retina onto the support of the picture (e.g., the painting of Robert Delaunay). Apart from its artistic interest, this purity has a social function: to save modernist art from its corrupt double, mass culture. Yet the rarefying of optical effects and the fetishizing of visual signifiers are hardly foreign to capitalist spectacle; they are fundamental to it. So too, visual studies might advance more than resist further hypostasizing of the visual and disembodiment of the viewer today. The inadvertent doubling of spectacular culture by postwar painting was first remarked by Leo Steinberg in *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), but also see Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).
 29. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 133. This humanist "mans the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole" (p. 132).
 30. Mario Perniola, *Enigmas*, trans. Christopher Woodall (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 65-66.
 31. Perhaps the primary myth of this world is "interactivity"; in relation to the museum this is sold to us as a capacity to explore its galleries from a

distance, to scan information about its collection, and so on. But this relation is less interactive than "interpassive."

32. Over the last few decades the sciences have retooled around biology, and the priorities of institutions like universities have followed suit: like physics before it, biology is the straw that now stirs the drink.
33. Anthony Vidler, "Warped Space: Architecture and Anxiety in Digital Culture," Power Institute Lecture, University of Sydney, 2000.

Ostensibly, there is little to distinguish Alberti's [perspectival] window from a computer screen, as there is to differentiate an eighteenth-century axonometric by Gaspard Monge from a wire-frame dinosaur generated by Industrial Light and Magic. What has changed, however, is the technique of simulation and, even more importantly, the place or position of the subject or traditional 'viewer' of the representation. Between contemporary virtual space and modernist space there lies an aporia formed by the auto-generative nature of the computer program and its real blindness to the viewer's presence. In this sense, the screen is not a picture, and certainly not a surrogate window, but rather an ambiguous and unfixed location for a subject.

34. One danger vis-a-vis the museum is this: the museum is not only a repository of different objects; it is also an archive of different regards or gazes, and they too might be flattened in the transformation into information.
35. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. xv.
36. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
37. Speaking for Being, Heidegger would regard this Alexandrian archive as the epitome of "the standing-reserve" fundamental to all technology, of which "man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer." Speaking for the Old World, a George Steiner might see it as the manifest destiny of America, the land not of open territories but of museum-malls that simulate the remnants of European cultures. But one need hardly agree with these arch-conservatives. Moreover, this Alexandrianism is hardly complete, and it may permit other uses (and abuses) not yet foreseen. So too, as Greenberg argued long ago in "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), "the avant-garde moves while Alexandrianism stands still.

And this, precisely, is what justifies the avant-garde's methods and makes them necessary." This remains the case today, even if the terrain of engagement has changed. See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 27; George Steiner, "The Archives of Eden," *Salmagundi* 50-5r (Fall 1980-Winter 1981); Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 8.

All these tropes are Orientalist - the "Chinese encyclopedia" in Borges and Foucault, my "new Alexandria," the "Egyptian effect" in Perniola (this one runs back, in photography and film studies, to Andre Bazin on the "mummy-effect" of these mediums). That is, they project a deathliness elsewhere, when this deathliness is uncannily alive in the West. In "Literature Considered as a Dead Language" Denis Hollier argues "that the regime of the uncanny within which postmodernism operates is the very definition of classicism." Even neo-national literatures that advance a romantic model of oral traditions cannot escape the classical status of dead languages: "Let us call it the irreality effect: the numbing citationality that gives rise to a kind of generalized Pompeiization" (in Marshall Brown, ed., *The Uses of Literary History* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1995] PP- 233-4i)- This "irreality effect," this undead quality, is also foregrounded, technically and thematically, in much digital photography today (I have in mind recent works by Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky, among others), in which uncanniness becomes almost routinized.

As suggested above, a principal manifestation of this new Alexandrianism is the posthistorical presupposition of much art production, reception, and exhibition. In this default at the museum, iconography and thematics return, and the only "disruptive" gestures are idiosyncratic hangings. But there is no longer any narrative norm to disrupt, chronological or otherwise; indeed this kind of "disruption" is the norm - another version of a rampant routinization. For many this is a good thing: it permits diversity. But, from another angle, it abets a flat indifference, a stagnant incommensurability, precisely a new Alexandrianism. I don't lament the old historicist dimension of art museum and art history; but I don't like the present posthistorical options either. As it is, we often seem swamped by the double wake of modernism and postmodernism (more on which in Chapter 8).

38. See Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, passim.
39. Walter Benjamin, Letters to Fritz Radt (dated "Munich, November 2r, 1915" and "Munich, December 4, 1915," the year in which *Principles of Art History* was published), cited in Thomas Y. Levin, "Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History," *October* 47 (Winter 1988), p. 79.
40. Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1965), p. 9. As defined here, this "alert" sense of autonomy seems more compensatory than dialectical; it also seems to be undercut by the very "conviction" that, according to Fried, modernist art must also inspire in the subject. That is, conviction suggests a dependence on the art object, even a devotion to it, which might render the object less an ideal mirror of the subject than a prosthetic support that this subject needs, desires, fetishizes (more on which in Chapter 7).
41. This is one reason why psychoanalysis might reinforce rather than reveal the inflation of the imaginary in visual culture. See Krauss, "Welcome to the Cultural Revolution," *October* 11 (Summer 1996).
42. See Mitchell, "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?." One might say the same thing about other human qualities projected on to images. For example, after a conversation with Benjamin on aura, Brecht dismissed it in his journal as "a load of mysticism" (25 July 1938; *Journals 1934-1955*, ed. John Willett, trans. Hugh Rorrison [New York: Routledge, 1996], p. 10). For a history of such projection see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
43. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), P-165.
44. See the extraordinary genealogy of fetishism in William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," *Res* 9, 13, r6 (1986-88), as well as my "The Art of Fetishism," in Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For a related logic in American literature regarding the possessive white subject - that its presence required the supportive nonpresence of the black slave — see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1993).
45. Charles de Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fetiches* (Geneva, 1760); Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?," in David Simpson, ed., *German Aesthetic*

- and Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 29-34.
46. Georges Bataille, "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions," *Documents* 8 (1930).
47. In this regard consider the language of the electronic revolution of the 1980s and 1990s - all the hallucinogenic and aleatory tropes in which virtual reality and the Internet were first presented to us. The exploration of the Information Highway was promised as the exploration of the mind, and in "the era of computerism" a principal frontier of capitalism remains the unconscious.

7 ART CRITICS IN EXTREMIS

1. Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962—74* (New York: SOHO Press, 2000). Unless otherwise specified, all quotations are from this source.
2. The most succinct formulation is this of Donald Judd in 1964: "I'm totally uninterested in European art and I think it's over with" (Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art* [New York: Dutton, 1968], p. 154).
3. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965), p. 199.
4. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), vol. 1.; *Partisan Review* 7 (July-August 1940), p. 310.
5. On this dialectic see Chapter 5. Steinberg makes this connection in *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
6. Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1965), reprinted in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 219.
7. See Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975). Criticism can sometimes serve as a placeholder for artistic ambition at a time of artistic decline - clearly this is how Greenberg saw much of his later writing - which is hardly the same as a "painted word." Criticism