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## Contents

## Reviews and Discussion

# Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs

## Irene J. Winter

## Definitions

While "story" is a major component in narrative, the terms are not synonymous. Story evokes content. Narrative, however, demands that one address oneself at the same time to both content and structure—what Culler (1975:244) would call the means by which "the end is made present throughout the work"; and what Chatman (1979:176) has called discourse: "the expressional means of presenting content." Narrative, then, is structured content, ordered by the "telling" which is a necessary condition of the form.

The genre seems inextricably tied to words: oral or written, fiction or nonfiction. Even when narrative is pursued into the visual realm, the notions of word and story remain, as does the frequent assumption of a text *behind* the images (Weitzmann 1957, 1970; Schapiro 1973:9). Stimulated by analyses of contemporary visual media and their impact, however, I should like to re-examine an ancient situation in which, although "event" may be interchangeable with "story," similar principles of sequence and flow appropriate to narrative (i.e., content plus telling) pertain; yet the text exists parallel to rather than behind the image, and the totality of images itself creates a "narrative space."

I speak of a particular segment of the ancient Mesopotamian world: the Neo-Assyrian period, for which monuments have been preserved roughly from the ninth through the seventh century B.C., and during which time there was an extraordinary flowering of "historical narrative" in the representational art associated with royal palaces. To better understand this phenomenon, it is essential to deal not only with the givens of the narratives themselves but also with the "storyteller" behind (in this case, the king) and with the intended audience ahead—not only *what* story was being told, but *how* it was told and *why*.

Several scholars have dealt with the particular nature of the art of this period (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951; Frankfort 1954; Moortgat 1969; Akurgal 1968; Reade 1965, 1979a, b, c), and a symposium held at the University of Chicago in 1956 attempted to explore narration in ancient art specifically. Although studies on the nature of literary narrative have become far more precise and sophisticated in the past 20 years, the papers from the Chicago symposium have stood more or less alone in attempting to grapple with the issues of visual narration in the ancient world. The general definition was provided by Kraeling (1957:43): "Narrative art is identified as representations of a specific event, involving specific persons, where the action and persons *might* be historical, but not

Irene J. Winter is Watkins Assistant Professor in the Humanities and the History of Art, and a Research Associate of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

necessarily." Within that framework, Perkins (1957:55, 61) emphasized both the use of "episodes"—or a very abbreviated segment or segments to stand for the whole sequence—as typical of early Mesopotamian art; and the frequent selection of the "culminating scene," or moment of climax, where the completion of the story was to take place in the viewer's mind. In this, as with most art, the primacy of a text is assumed, as well as the individual's familiarity with the text that would allow recognition of the pertinent episodes. Güterbock (1957:62) came closer to the particular situation to be discussed here when he insisted that, in order to qualify as narrative, not only must a specific rather than a generic event be pictured, but it must also incorporate some coherent progression of events: the story must be "told," not "implied."

Beyond this, it is essential to recognize that there are many types of narrative. The term may be applied equally to representations of myth, lore, and ritual, or, as in the present case, to the representation of a specific historical event—not generic emblem or hieroglyph, but individuals and elements presumed to have been associated with the actual spatio-temporal experience. Moscati, therefore (1963:14-15), defined historical art in the ancient Near East as "related to a concrete, momentary fact that cannot be repeated," distinct thereby from the ritual or mythic depiction which goes beyond location in time and space, or the cyclical, where it is precisely the recurrent and not the specific that is stressed. In this commitment to deal in "real" events, historical narrative in art functions exactly as historical narrative in text (see White 1980), where there is further evidenced a strong inclination to support the historicity of the event precisely through the display of its formal coherence-as-story.

Our "historical narratives," then, occur as representations on architectural reliefs of alabaster and limestone which lined the walls of selected rooms in Neo-Assyrian palaces. The genre may be further defined—in the beginning of our period, at least—as depicting a quite limited universe of historical events: specifically, scenes of battle and tribute, with the king as both author (his palace) and subject (principal actor).

Even without recourse to the actual representations, some of the visual implications of such scenes should be evident: they demand action, and thereby the likelihood of profile views and directionality (the profile being most effective when heightened interest in action is required—that is, engagement in a space which does not necessarily include the viewer as participant; Schapiro 1973:29). In addition, the disposition of figures is likely to be in sequence, such that the narrative may be "read," and specific elements—in this case, topographical features and signature elements of dress, headgear, or associated goods—carefully selected to provide the "particularity" of the place and the moment. These elements, especially, become verifiers of the "truth" of the scene, the spatial immediacy that modifies the temporal anteriority of the action—what Barthes has called the illogi-
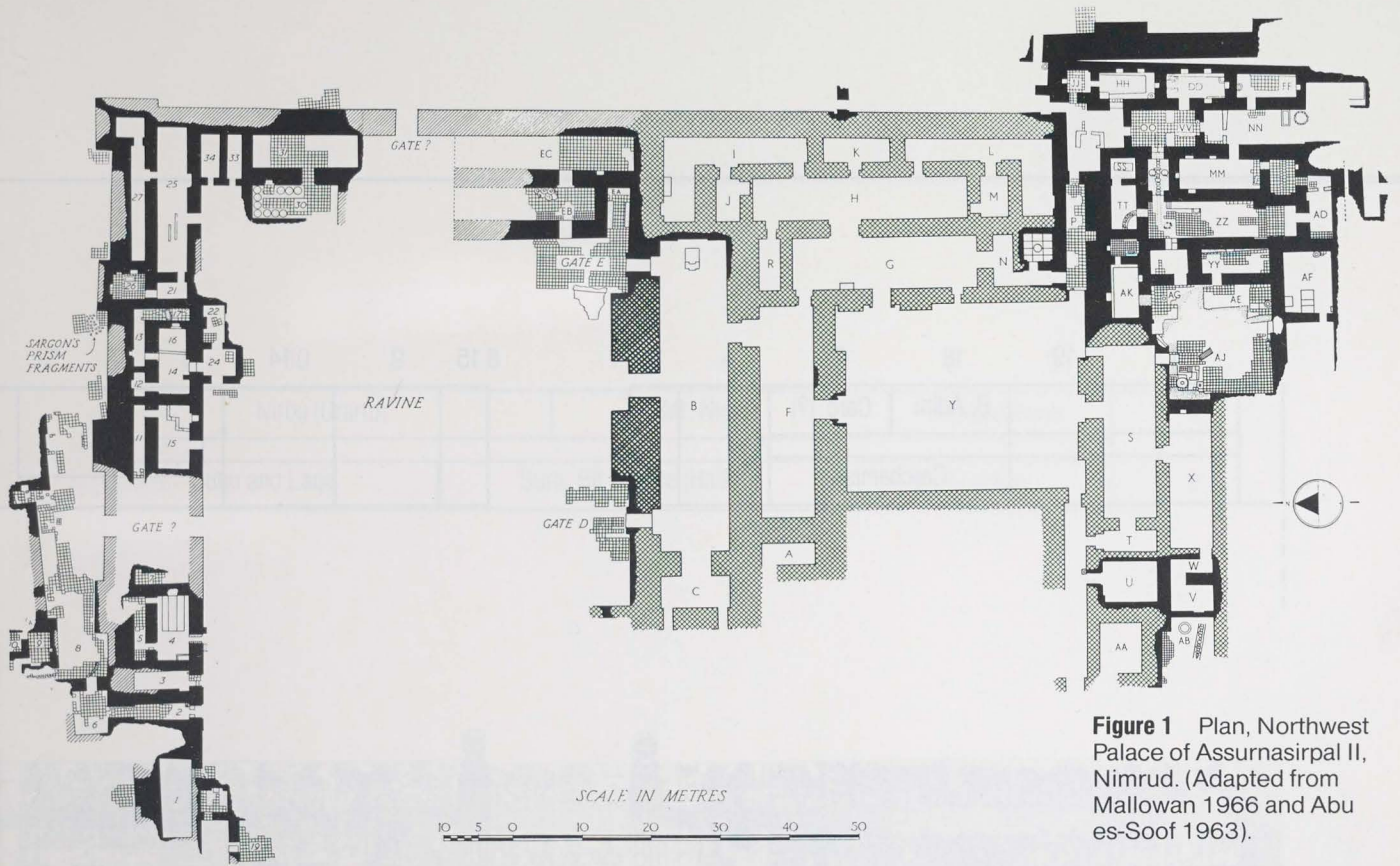
**Figure 1** Plan, Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II, Nimrud. (Adapted from Mallowan 1966 and Abu es-Soof 1963).

cal conjunction in certain highly manipulated but purportedly "real" images between here-now and there-then (1977b:44).

The historical narratives do not constitute the only decoration of the palaces; the buildings are embellished in addition with monumental gateway sculptures, and with apotropaic and cultic themes in relief that have a long history in the art of ancient Mesopotamia. But the display on large-scale architectural reliefs is new, as is the incorporation of the historical scenes. Like the modern news photograph, the narratives attempt to provide a "pure spectatorial consciousness of 'historical reality,' as distinct from the more projective 'magical' consciousness" of the other reliefs (Barthes 1977b:45). They are aimed at "a kind of zero-degree of reality" as opposed to the fictive elements of myth or legend (White 1979:215), but the operational word here is "aimed," for in the art of the period, as with the written texts as well (Liverani 1979), there is an ideological "end" to the apparent historicity of the representations. In fact, content is carefully manipulated, and the spectator is enjoined to participate in a foregone conclusion: only the enemy fall; the Assyrians never lose and, given the strength of the king and the benevolence of the gods, are never even wounded.

The historical record is thereby selected and arranged; reality is invoked, but the artifact of construction is also apparent (White 1973). The tension is thus immediately created between the supposedly denotative (*what* is being told) and the obviously connotative (*how* the story is being told)—further enhanced by the very fact of the

presence of these (hi)stories in the palace in the first place (suggesting meaningful context, the *why* told). And embedded even more deeply, in the very presence of the historical narratives, is the "extent to which social authority and narrativization are mutually implicated in one another" (White, forthcoming).

Trends evident during the course of the Neo-Assyrian period include a development toward greater use of the pictorial field and spatial dimensions, the inclusion of more pervasive identifiers such as topographic details, and the addition of parallel information in the form of inscribed epigraphs or labels directly on the reliefs. But these developments do not substantially change the genre; they merely serve to increase the particularity and the historicity of the scenes. That this evolution is tied to political developments within the Neo-Assyrian Empire I shall endeavor to demonstrate below; however, the desired effect of the narrative seems to remain constant, the mode itself once established changing only in degree.

Therefore, it is perhaps most interesting to emphasize the beginning of the sequence: the initiation of the genre and the reasons underlying the use of historical narrative as decoration. To do so, we must look at the extraordinary achievement of Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (885–856 B.C.), who established his capital at Nimrud (Kalhu) in about the fifth year of his reign and completed his primary residence, the Northwest Palace, as it has been called by its excavators, sometime probably between 865 and 859 (see plan, Figure 1; Postgate and Reade 1977:304–307 for discussion and complete bibliography of excavation; also Reade 1965:119 and de Filippi 1977:168 re date; and Layard 1849b, Budge 1914, and Meusczyński 1975 for
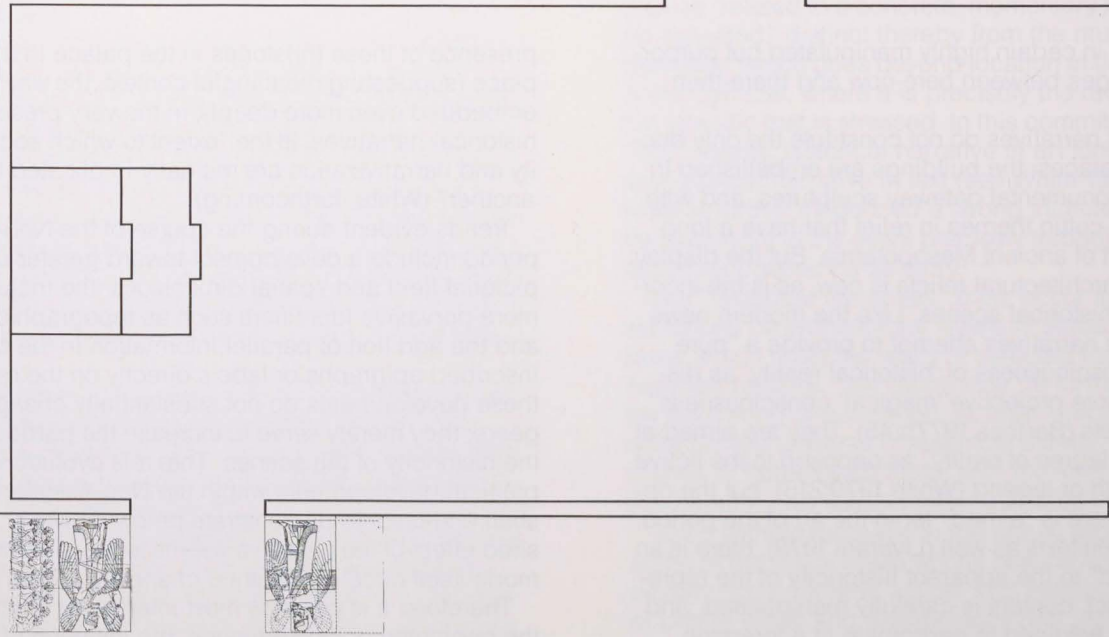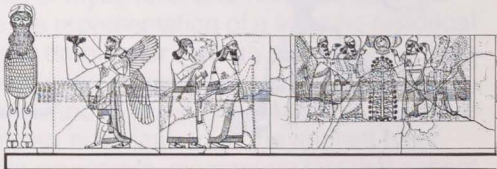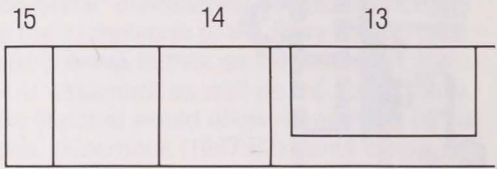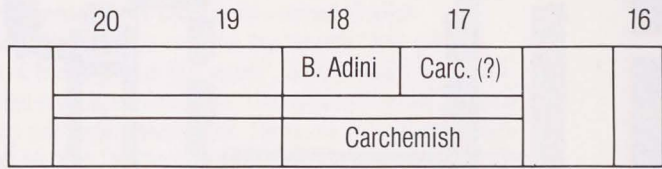
**Figure 2**   Detailed plan of Throneroom (Room B), Northwest Palace.

| 12 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Nirbu (Urartu) | | | | Mt. Nisir? | | | Damdammusa | | a |
| | Suhu and Laqe | | | Sura, Bit Halupe (Habur) | | | Mt. Kashiari | | | b |

| (Iran)? | Zamua | a |
|---|---|---|
| | | b |
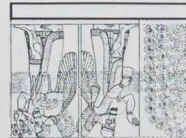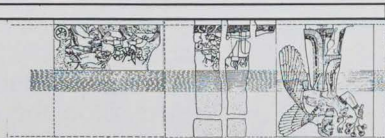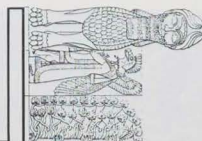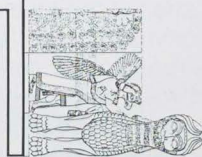
27    28

**Figure 3**   Room B, Slab 23: King and sacred tree (British Museum 124531).

publication of the reliefs). In his Banquet Stele inscription, commemorating festivities for the inauguration, Assurnasirpal himself announces the decoration of the palace walls with scenes representing his heroic deeds (Grayson 1976: ¶ 677); and indeed excavations have confirmed that the palace was lavishly decorated with wall paintings, colossal portal sculpture, and architectural reliefs, concentrating on those which we would call "historical narrative" in the most important Throneroom, Room B, and on its external north facade.[1]

## The Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II

### Convention and Innovation

Room B constitutes the core of the public reception area of the palace, approached from two sides: either directly from the large Court D, to the north, or from the smaller Court Y and anteroom F, to the south (plan, Figure 1, and detailed plan with reliefs, Figure 2). The room is long in proportion to its width, measuring some 45.5 by 10.5 meters, and, judging from the thickness of the walls, likely to have stood at least 6 to 8 meters high (Meusczyński 1975; the height based upon reconstruction by Reade, cited in Mallowan 1966:454). At the short, eastern end, before a niche in the wall, stood a low socle clearly intended to have served as a throne base. Colossal human-headed bulls and lions flanked the major doorways "c" and "d," and butted up against these were the orthostats on which the reliefs were carved. These slabs averaged 2.7 meters in total height and were sunk into the ground for support, such that from 2.2 to 2.3 meters stood above ground. Each slab was inscribed across the middle with a complete version of what is known as Assurnasirpal's Standard Inscription, a text of from 18 to 26 lines presenting his titulary and major achievements (Grayson 1976: ¶s 650–653); and when carved figures extended the entire height of the slab, the text was simply incised across the representation.

Flanking all doors were reliefs of apotropaic mythological winged genii of various types, who stood the full height of the orthostat. Frequently these genii were also associated with representations of the many-branched "tree of life." Directly behind the throne, and opposite doorway e, were identical scenes set in shallow niches and occupying only the upper two-thirds of the slab,

which show the king duplicated on either side of such a "sacred tree," with winged male genii to his left and right and the emblem of the god Assur within a winged disc above (see detailed plan, Figure 2: slabs 23 and 13; Figure 3: slab 23). The scenes we would call narrative were disposed in two registers divided by the Standard Inscription, and were installed down the long (north and south) sides of the room. The reliefs of the north wall are largely missing; on the south, one begins with bull and lion hunts in the eastern end (Figures 4 and 5) and moves toward the west with a series of battle and tribute scenes interrupted only by door genii and the complex surrounding slab 13 (Figures 6–10).[2] The room terminated in a very

**Figure 4**   B19a: Lion hunt (British Museum 124534).

**Figure 5**   B19b: Libation over lion (British Museum 124535).

**Figure 6**    B18a: Siege of citadel (British Museum 124536).



**Figure 8**    B18b: Submissive king (British Museum 124537).

**Figure 7** B17a: Citadel in river (British Museum 124538).



**Figure 9** B17b: Prisoners and booty (British Museum 124539, detail).

**Figure 10** B4a: Chariot siege (British Museum 124553).

broad door at the center of the far west end (plan, Figure 1) that issues into the shallow Room C. On the back wall of that room, opposite the doorway, were set three relief slabs that combine to show a scene most likely of a seated king with cup in hand flanked by attendants and winged male genii (Reade 1965).[3] Because of its placement, this relief, too, effectively participates in the decorative scheme of Room B—situated, in fact, directly opposite the seated king himself, installed on his throne at the eastern end.

In its totality, the throneroom represents a complex play between convention and innovation in the sequence of ancient Mesopotamian art up to that point. One long-standing convention is the architectural form of the throneroom itself. A long, narrow room entered from a long side and necessitating therefore a 90-degree turn toward the focal area of the east wall, it is based upon a 2,000-year tradition of bent-axis approaches in Mesopotamian cult rooms, while the particular arrangement of throneroom, anteroom, and large courtyard had been seen as a formal reception suite at Mari in the early second millennium (Moortgat 1969:Figures 4, 21, and 57).

Another feature with a long tradition in Mesopotamia is the heraldic composition of slabs 13 and 23: the doubled king and genii flanking a tree (Figure 3). Antecedents may be found in the cylinder seal repertoire, going all the way back to the Uruk period, ca. 3200 B.C., in particular, with a representation of a bearded male (king?) tendering branches to flanking rams (Moortgat 1969:Figure 1a). The role of the sacred tree as emblem of the provisioning of the land, and the role of the king in relation to it, has been dealt with extensively (Frankfort 1948; Oppenheim 1964). Interesting for our purposes is its mirror, or axial, symmetry. The semantic centrality of the tree is emphasized by its position and should probably be considered comparable to the frontality with which the Virgin or Christ are represented in symmetrical compositions of Christian art (Gombrich 1966; Schapiro 1973; Summers 1979). The king is clearly represented twice, at left and at right; and while the duplication of figures within a single representational unit also has a history in Mesopotamia (see the altar of Tukulti Ninurta I [1244–1208], Figure 11), it is the scale and placement of the motif in relation to its symmetry that is significant here.

Slab 23, set directly behind and above the throne and king, functions essentially as does the tympanum on the facade of a Gothic cathedral, with scenes of the Day of Judgment set above the figure of Christ on the trumeau (Schapiro 1969). As for slab 13, after restoration activities by the Iraqi Department of Antiquities in the Northwest Palace, it was determined that the original plan showing only two entrances at the far ends of the north facade was incorrect and that there had been in addition a monumental central portal in that wall, the opening of which was



**Figure 11**    Altar of Tukulti Ninurta I, Middle Assyrian period, ca. 1225 B.C., Assur (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, VA 8146, 8227; ht. 57.5 cm.).

exactly opposite the placement of the slab on the south wall (Abu es-Soof 1963; Reade 1965; and see plan, Figures 1 and 2). Thus, as one entered by the main entrance from the public Court D, as the general audience would presumably have done, one faced immediately this representation, then turned ninety degrees to face the king, and above him the repetition of the same scene. These two slabs thus become the organizing pivot-points of the Throneroom. That this was clearly intended is apparent not only from the placement of slab 13, interrupting the narrative sequence from slabs 18–17 to 11–3, but also by the fact that these reliefs neither occupy the full height of the slab, as do the apotropaic doorway genii, nor are they divided into two distracting registers, as are the narrative scenes, but rather are set one-third of the way up the orthostat in their own unique disposition of space, visually apart from the others (Schapiro 1969:229: "The picture field has local properties which affect our sense of the signs").

The fact that the reliefs are executed symmetrically contributes greatly to their organizing capacity. As Moortgat has noted, they "rendered a political and religious idea as a heraldic abstraction, divorced from time and space" (1969:134)—what Akurgal would call a purely conceptual representation (1968:16ff). More than that, the symmetry and particularly the un-"realistic" repetition of the royal figure and genii serve to lift this most important function of the king—the metaphoric maintenance and sustenance of life through the care of the tree—up to the realm of the "ideal" world that implies the divine (Schapiro 1973:33; Winter 1974:505). And I would submit that this occurs not only on the intellectual, conceptual level of the contents of the representation but also at the physiological/psychological level at which symmetry functions in general, producing an effect of anchoring through the central axis and balance through the flanking figures, which for the ancient Near East pertains to the stability (balance) of the eternal order reflected through the proper exercise of kingship.[4] Precisely what one does not want in this case is directionality and the movement of the eye across (and beyond) the image but, rather, the

absorption of the whole at once, as the perceived order of the universe.

Certain elements in the narrative scenes also reflect conventional Mesopotamian usage, in both theme and detail. The hunting of animals goes back to the lion hunt stele from Warka, ca. 3200 B.C. (Moortgat 1969:Figure 14), and that it was not merely an anecdotal or casual theme will be argued below. It is difficult to call these representations (here, the bull and lion hunts of slabs 20 and 19) "historical" narratives, despite the fact that such hunts are mentioned in the king's royal annals (Grayson 1976: ¶ 598). They seem rather to participate in the generic of king-as-vigorous-and-victorious-hunter, the "master-of-animals." Battle scenes, too, had been represented before—for example on the Standard from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, dated to the Early Dynastic Period, ca. 2600 B.C. (see Figure 12). While this may be read as a narrative of sorts, leading from the siege wagons in the lower register to the capture of prisoners in the second, and the presentation of them to a central figure at the top, still it does not provide us with sufficient information to suggest the specificity of time or place required for the truly historical narrative. But, conversely, we cannot insist that every action and gesture in a historical narrative be observed from life; and certainly the stock formulas of bound prisoners or of a fallen enemy beneath the belly of the chariot draft animals that we see on the Assurnasirpal reliefs are quite literal repetitions of the Standard of Ur. The innovative aspects of the Nimrud reliefs lie, therefore, in their intended specificity despite the incorporation of stock images, and in the articulation of the parts, including those conventional units, into a unified sequential composition as opposed to the earlier "serial episodes."[5]

Battle scenes may be broken down into two categories: field campaigns and sieges. The field sequences simply show Assyrian chariotry or cavalry against enemy chariots (slabs 5a–4a, Figure 10), horsemen (slab 27b, Figure 13), or footsoliders (slabs 11a–8a).[6] The direction of movement is down the wall from the throne end, and it is here that fallen opponents are depicted beneath the chariot horses. In the siege scenes, the simplest components may be seen in slab 18a (Figure 6), where the king with drawn bow, his shield bearer and attendants, and a siege-tower-cum-battering-ram attack the walls of an enemy citadel being defended by armed bowmen on the ramparts. These basic components can be further elaborated upon, as in slabs 4a–3a (e.g., Figure 10), where Assyrian chariotry pursue enemy chariots, infantry battle in the upper part of the field, and soldiers destroy trees directly outside a citadel also being defended from its walls. In a final case, slabs 5b–3b, the siege itself is depicted in greater detail, with scaling ladders, rams and siege towers, while the king and crown prince flank the city and an empty (presumably royal) chariot waits at the side. In addition, several slabs show mere approaches (e.g., slab 17a, Figure 7, and slabs 11b–8b), particularly across bodies of water, where boats and goatskin floats are used; others deal with aftermaths: the return of king and chariotry to camp, preceded by prisoners and soldiers carrying enemy heads (7a–6a), and the presentation of bound individuals and goods to the king (slabs 18b–17b, Figures 8 and 9, and slabs 8b–5b).[7]
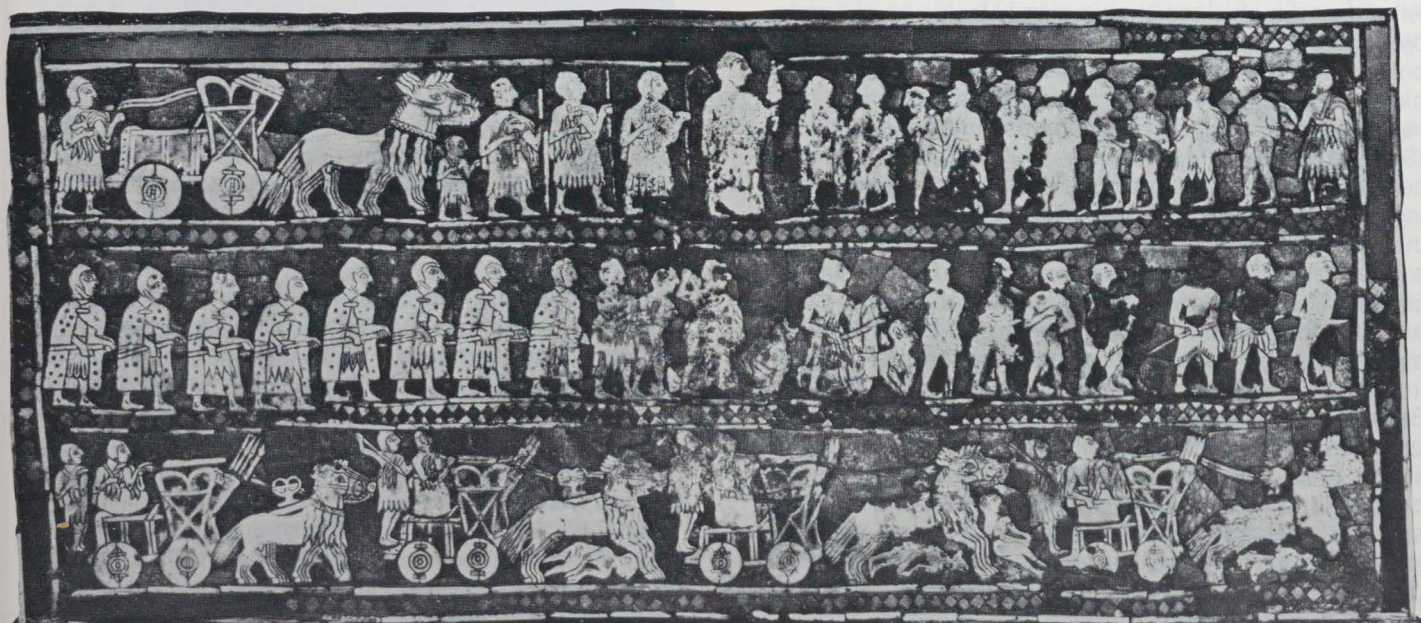


**Figure 12**   Standard of Ur, Early Dynastic period, ca. 2500 B.C. (British Museum 121201; 20.3 x 48.3 cm.).
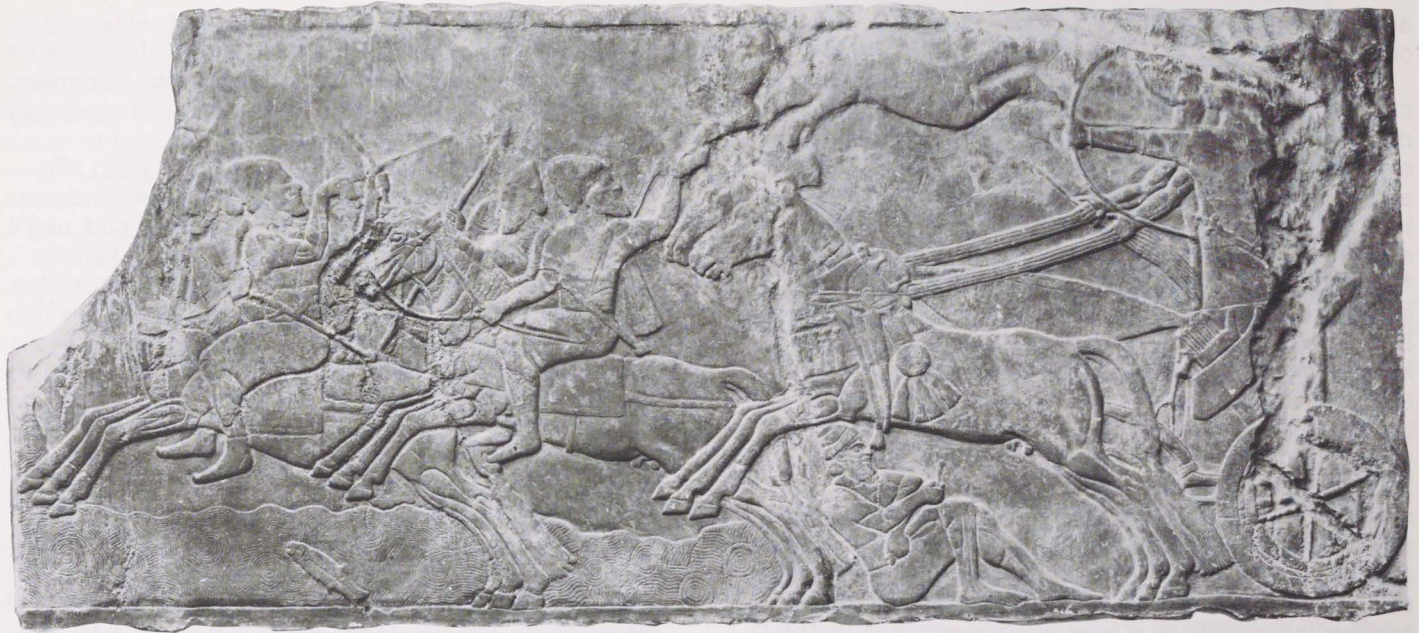
**Figure 13**    B27b: Pursuit of horsemen (British Museum 124559).

Bodies are shown in various positions, from almost frontal to complete side view, but all heads are rendered in profile. As noted above, the profile view conveys action and involvement of the actors in a space of their own, and is hence most appropriate for the representation of the historic event in its actuality. Furthermore, the king is shown at the same size or only marginally larger than his fellows, and is distinguishable mainly by his royal head-dress, fringed and wrapped garment, and palanquin-bearer behind, and occasionally also by his pride of place in battle.[8] As a result of this equality in scale—a major signifier in the scenes (Barthes 1977b:46; Schapiro 1969)—the historicity of the action is not diluted by conceptual distortions, and emphasis is on the action unfolding in each sequence. Levels of description move from the total battle sequence to individual components of the scenes to details of action and the surrounding inanimate objects. The king, however, is the principal actor, and the essential formulation is in the transitive: "Assurnasirpal did X." Everything surrounding the basic formula—rivers, trees, side actions, additional actors—constitutes what Barthes would call the "catalyzers" in the narrative as opposed to the primary "cardinal functions" (1977c:93). That is to say, they are functional, insofar as they are correlated with the nuclear elements of the action and add to the discourse, but functionally they are parasitic, and their absence would not alter the story. What they provide is a furthering of the identifiable particularity of each sequence.

This combination of sequence, action, and particularity is precisely what distinguishes the Assurnasirpal reliefs from their predecessors in the ancient Near East. Despite certain gaps in the archaeological record, the earlier monuments we do have are consistent in their differences from the Neo-Assyrian. The Standard of Ur, as we discussed above, consists of a series of episodes following in sequence from the lower register to the upper, but without particularity or syntax. The victory stele of Eannatum of Lagash (ca. 2450 B.C.), sometimes referred to as the Stele of the Vultures (Moortgat 1969:Pls. 118–121), does indeed refer to a specific historic event, the successful military settlement of a border dispute with the neighboring city-state of Umma. This we know from the extensive inscription on both obverse and reverse. The visual component, however, is again either generic or episodic. On the obverse, the god Ningirsu, to whom the victory is attributed, is shown holding a mace and his emblem, the lion-headed eagle, while alongside him is a net full of captured enemy, a representation which could be transferred to any victory monument. On the reverse of the stele is a series of at least four registers, including the king on foot leading a phalanx of spear-bearing warriors who walk upon supine enemies; the king in his chariot, himself armed with a spear; and what seem to be a pile of enemy bodies and an accompanying ritual. Again, although the reverse is extremely fragmentary, it seems that it cannot be read continuously as what we would call "historical narrative," despite the fact that it was clearly meant to be a historical referent.

**Figure 14**    Stele of Naram Sin, Akkad period, ca. 2230 B.C., found at Susa (Musée du Louvre Sb 4; ht. 2 m.).

The same appears to be true of the stele of Naram Sin (2254–2218 B.C.) of the succeeding Akkad period (Figure 14). Here, the king celebrates his victory over an Iranian border tribe identified by inscription. He is shown standing triumphantly before a mountain and the bodies of fallen enemy, while his soldiers are aligned below him on ascending diagonals toward the mountain (for the best description of this monument, see Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951:163–165). The inclusion of two trees and real contour lines in the landscape add considerably to the sense that a real place/space is being represented, such that some scholars would see this as a fully developed historical monument (e.g., Moscati 1963:30). Yet here again, it is not to be read as a linear progression of action, but rather as a whole, as a frozen celebration. In fact, as the king does not draw his bow but merely stands triumphant, there is less "action" than in the preceding stele of Eannatum, despite the extraordinary advance in

freedom from registers through the use of the total field. What one would have to say in both of these cases is that while they clearly refer to specific battles and are therefore "historical," the imagery is still emblematic and episodic; they are *commemorative* rather than narrative.

In a sense, the use of a stele determines to some extent the selection of a "culminating scene." The wall is a surface far more conducive to a continuous narrative. Yet, on the one hand, many of the individual slabs of the Throneroom reliefs have self-contained scenes which nevertheless can be read as narrative (see the hunts, slabs 20 and 19, and the battles, 18a and 17a); and on the other hand, not all cultures that employed stone reliefs as wall decoration ever used them narratively.

The use of architectural reliefs seems to have been assimilated into Assyria from the West during the reign of Assurnasirpal (see discussion in Winter, forthcoming), and the use to which the wall is put can best be compared with the more or less contemporary or slightly earlier reliefs of Carchemish, an independent city-state of Hittite/Luwian origins situated on an important crossing of the Euphrates in northern Syria. On the earliest Herald's Wall at Carchemish, series of mythological themes are displayed, one to a slab, all comprised of culminating scenes or simple emblems and with no apparent relation to each other (Orthmann 1971:Pls. 26–28d). On the subsequent Long Wall, soldiers and chariots were clearly arranged in order along adjacent slabs and were possibly meant to convey the idea of a procession behind a row of deities (ibid.: Pls. 24 and 25); but as some of the gods were frontal, and the wife of the donor/ruler is shown seated immediately behind the gods (Figure 15a), it seems rather as if the divine figures were "in array" as opposed to motion, and there are no compelling signs to suggest that the chariots and soldiers were anything other than emblematic either.

The chariot slabs from Carchemish (Figure 15b) provide a good contrast to the Assyrian representations, for they have many elements in common, including the shape of the yoke-pole and chariot cab, the shield and spear at the back of the chariot and crossed quivers at the side, and the fallen enemy below the draft horses. However, the archer in the chariot has no object for his knocked arrow, as the enemy is alread fallen and there is no continuation beyond the edge of the slab. There is, in short, no syntax; nor are there any signifying elements to provide specificity of time or place. And, as we have been trying to establish, one of the requirements for narrative representation is that the units of the narrative find integration, such that ultimately the narrative itself "transcends its contents" (Barthes 1977c:115). This the reliefs of Assurnasirpal achieve even in sequences that are confined to a single slab. On those in which the action extends over three or more slabs, it is even more dramatic: one literally reads the register as one would a line of text.

On some occasions, there is also a play from top to bottom of the divided registers on the same slab, as, for example, with the hunt scenes (e.g., Figures 4 and 5, slabs 19a and 19b), where the action of the story—the sequence of the slaying of the animal—takes place in the upper register, and the consequence—the ceremonial libation poured over the dead animal—is depicted below. Such a reading could also be applied to the adjacent slabs 18 and 17 (Figures 6–9), where 18a shows the simple attack on a citadel and 18b an individual embracing the feet of the king, and 17a shows swimmers crossing to a citadel in a river and 17b a line of prisoners and goods. While this may be the case, 18b plus 17b can also be read as a continuous sequence of prisoners headed by individuals who are subservient to the king. I personally think this latter reading is the more likely, given the sequence of slabs 8b–5b; however, it is also clear that action is at the top and subsequent response below.

This relationship applies only to those slabs east of doorway "b" in the south wall, however. For the rest, sequences of approach, conflict, and consequence seem to be distributed over both top and bottom registers. Nevertheless, the general direction of the reading lines is consistent: action generally proceeds down the wall, away from the throne; and in every case the king is shown facing down (i.e., west), as he would be facing when seated on the throne, while the individuals who approach him on the reliefs come from the western end, as would any actual audience. The only exception to this is the camp scene, where the king is shown entering the camp from the west, and here, I would submit, it is because the king is "returning" to the camp after a battle and therefore shifts direction to conform to the narrative.[9]

In each of the individual sequences,[10] action proceeds along a basic horizontal ground line. There is little spatial depth, and no real "background" to the field (as there is with the reliefs of Sargon and Sennacherib later), the only exceptions being the water scenes with swimmers, slabs 17a and 11b–9b, and a scene of Assyrians cutting trees between which is visible a pattern of scales indicating mountains, that was re-used in the Southwest Palace at Nimrud and may have come from the Throneroom (Barnett and Falkner 1962:Pl. CXIV). Occasionally, action also takes place in the upper part of the register, as headless bodies are indicated or hand-to-hand combat is depicted (slab 4a, Figure 10); but the figures seem to float in the air—there is no unified field of action. It is rather the overlapping of figures on the ground line that becomes a substitute for spatial depth.

The details which distinguish one scene from another were carefully added: trees, river, and so on, such that one citadel sits in the midst of a river (17a); another has four walls (5b–3b); a third is surrounded by fruit trees (4a–3a). We have mentioned before that these details grant particularity to each sequence. While they are not sufficient to convey what we from our post-Renaissance perspective would call realism, the question is really

whether one can get closer to how they might have been perceived in their own time. Roman Jakobsen, in writing about realism in art, has noted that there are two conditions which must be fulfilled: (1) that the author be concerned with displaying verisimilitude and (2) that the audience or individual judging it perceived it as true to life (1971:38). In other words, one needs to know the conventions in order to "see" an image as an ideologue for the object(s) portrayed, and at that point, recognition becomes instantaneous: one no longer sees a "picture" (ibid.:39). Our details would then become the devices employed to heighten the perception of realism through the recognition of particularity.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I began to wonder to what degree the individual sequences as they have been isolated might have been recognized and identifiable in antiquity, not only as generally designated regions but as specific places and campaigns.[11] Although the Standard Inscription that is written across the face of each slab includes references to major military campaigns and territorial control assumed during the reign of Assurnasirpal (Grayson 1976: ¶s 650–653), it is a very abbreviated text. The most complete inscription preserved is that from the Ninurta Temple at Nimrud (ibid.: ¶s 536–591), which includes annalistic accounts of campaigns from the king's first through eighteenth year of reign. It has been assumed that these building inscriptions have been taken from state records or annals, recounting major undertakings by regnal year such as those preserved for later Assyrian kings. In each account recorded in the Ninurta Temple text, the process of a campaign is presented in three stages: the (geographical) approach, the actual conflict or interaction, and the consequences (booty, tribute, imposition of corvée, etc.); that is, just exactly as the sequences are depicted on the reliefs. Furthermore, very precise wording was used to describe each campaign.

**Figure 15a**
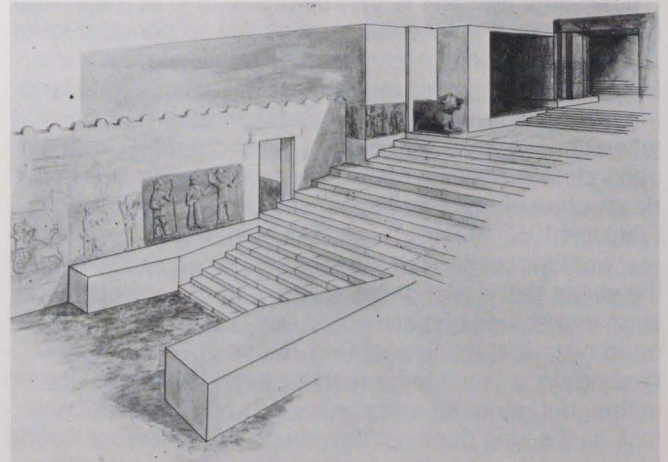
When we compare that wording with the reliefs before us, we find surprising correspondences. In relation to slab 17a (Figure 7), for example, only three times are places mentioned not "at" rivers but "in" waters: Anat, an island in the Euphrates near Suhu (i.e., south; Grayson 1976: ¶ 577); Arwad, on the Phoenician coast of the Mediterranean, described as being an island in the sea (ibid.: ¶ 586); and Carchemish, when the Euphrates was in flood, at which time the Assyrians crossed on floats (ibid.: ¶ 584). Or, for example, with regard to slabs 18b–17b (Figures 8 and 9), although a number of booty and tribute lists are given, including ivory and metal vessels (visible in the upper part of the register), only Carchemish (¶ 584) is listed as giving tribute in ivory tusks, as represented, and the account also includes hostages and kings of the region who seize the feet of Assurnasirpal—all carefully noted in the relief. With regard to slabs 11b–9b, while many river crossings are noted, the only other time in addition to the mention at Carchemish cited above that refers to floats is at the Middle Euphrates area of the lands of Suhu and Laqe (ibid.: ¶ 579), where boats are also mentioned as having been built to transport the troops. For the siege of slab 5b–3b, only twice are towns described as many-walled: the three walls of Nirbu (Urartu,

**Figure 15b**



in the north; ibid.: ¶ 549) and the four walls of Nairi (also in the north; ibid.: ¶ 569); while both are equally likely candidates, we have a further reference to a later campaign around Nirbu, at Mount Kashiari, in which siege towers and battering rams were used, as in the representations here (ibid.: ¶ 587). This would leave the only other reference to siege towers, visible also in slab 18a (Figure 6), to Bit Adini near the Euphrates (ibid.: ¶ 582); and as the territory of Bit Adini is just before Carchemish on the line of Assyrian march to the west, this would make the sequence from slabs 18a and 17a most appropriate, as well as the tribute below, 18b–17b, if associated also with Carchemish. As for slabs 4a–3a (Figure 10), of the many sieges listed, the attack against Damdammusa on the northern Tigris in year 18 (ibid.: ¶ 587) is the only instance in which specific mention is made of cutting down orchards, as well noting the piles of heads made following the massacre, and both the trees and decapitated bodies are carefully represented in the reliefs. Finally, for the two historical narrative slabs preserved on the north wall (28 and 27, Figure 13), Barnett (1967) has suggested that these figures are Iranian, on the basis of the mounted archers, which may be corroborated by the helmet types and equestrian ornaments related to objects actually found in northwest Iran (Winter 1980). In addition, it is in the east (at Mount Nisir, at the Babitu Pass in the Zagros; ibid.: ¶ 556) that Assurnasirpal describes encounters with warriors on horseback along side mountain torrents, here depicted as a running river.

It would seem, therefore, that we are indeed dealing with very specific references in the reliefs, once they are read in conjunction with descriptions in the Annals. The designations given as part of Figure 2 present the various optimum choices for location, based upon verbal descriptions for each sequence. These equations are made with great caution, since a situation occurs later, in the reign of Sennacherib, in which one of the major visual representations of his Syrian campaign of 701—the well-known siege of Lachish in Judah—is clearly identified by label on the relief, but in the annalistic account of the campaign the site is not even mentioned (Luckenbill 1927: ¶s 311–312).

This does not preclude the possibility of exact parallels in the reign of Assurnasirpal, however, and I am further encouraged to make these equations by accounts of the as-yet-unpublished embossed bronze door-bands of Assurnasirpal from the Temple of Mamu at Imgur Enlil (modern Balawat), which are reported to show scenes specifically labeled as Suhu, Bit Adini, Carchemish, Urartu (i.e., Nirbu), and the cities of the Phoenician coast (Barnett 1973:21). It will be interesting to compare these scenes with the Throneroom reliefs when they are finally published.[12] Until that time, I would suggest that there seems to be a close correlation between the wording of the Annals and depictions on the reliefs—a high degree of parallelism therefore between text and image, if not the likelihood of exact correspondences.

**Figures 15 a & b**   Carchemish, Long Wall (a) reconstructed drawing; (b) chariot relief (Archaeological Museum, Ankara, Inv. 94; ht. 2m.).

**Figure 16**   Court D, North-
west Palace: Tributary
figures (British Museum
124562).



## The Program

Having established the content of the wall scenes, it is
possible to proceed to an investigation of their integration
into the Throneroom as a whole and to explore the inten-
tion behind the decorative scheme. That the Neo-
Assyrian palaces were clearly intended to impress is
stated most explicitly: by Assurnasirpal, who decorated
his "in splendid fashion" (Grayson 1976: ¶ 653); and by
Sennacherib, who intended his to be the "astonishment of
all nations" (Luckenbill 1927: ¶ 413). And that there would
also have been a program in mind seems likely, given the
nature of the building and the public function of the room
in question, just as palaces, reception suites, and
thronerooms have been important vehicles for decorative
schemes relating to notions of the state and the ruler in a
variety of subsequent cultures and periods (see Root
1979; Nylander 1979; Davis-Weyer 1971:84–88; Schlosser
1891:58–64; Walter 1970; Rosenberg 1979; MacDougall,
forthcoming; Biddle 1963; Partridge 1978; Gorse, 1980).

Before proceeding, however, it is important to look at
the impressive north facade of the Throneroom that gives
onto the large outer Court D/E. The importance of this
facade is linked to the significance of the courtyard into
which it faces, and the other sides off of which were most

likely distributed the public offices associated with the
functioning of the palace administration. Oppenheim
(1964:328) recognized this court to be virtually as impor-
tant as the Throneroom itself, with the monumental tow-
ered facade similar to those which stood at the entrances
to temple cult rooms.

The reliefs and colossi associated with this facade
have been enumerated by Reade (1965:131) and are the
subject of a recent article by Meuszyński (1979). Along
with the standard genii that mark the doorways, a number
of fragments were preserved which represent figures in
procession. They stand the full height of the slabs, with
the Standard Inscription carved across their bodies.
Some of the figures are clearly foreigners—wearing tur-
banlike caps and wrapped garments, and carrying
goods such as a tray of bracelets, earrings, and pectorals
(Mallowan 1966: Figure 47; Meuszyński 1979: Figures
1–3), or accompanied by exotic creatures such as a pair
of long-tailed monkeys (Barnett 1975:7; here, Figure 16).
Other figures on reliefs found in the Southwest Palace but
almost surely re-used from this context, for which only
drawings now exist, wear pointed caps and open over-
garments with scalloped borders and carry small vases
or buckets (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. CXXIV).

There seem originally to have been anywhere from two to four figures to a slab; fragments of at least eight individuals are preserved. In addition, several Assyrians are also depicted—both bearded and clean-shaven, wearing pectoral ornaments, carrying staffs of office, and shown with hands clasped rather than with the subservient clenched and raised fists of the foreigners (Mallowan 1966: Figures 45, 46, and 49; Meuszyński 1979: Figures 4 and 5). Apparently also in Layard's original drawings of Court D, a figure of the king receiving the procession had been preserved (Mallowan 1953:28).

The garments worn by the foreigners all correspond to standard dress for individuals from the West when compared with later, labeled figures—in particular, from Bit Adini, Carchemish, and Phoenicia (Wäfler 1975). This is especially noteworthy, because it is precisely these areas which provide the most elaborate tribute to Assurnasirpal, including gold bracelets and necklaces from Bit Adini and Carchemish (Grayson 1976: ¶ 584), bronze pails from Carchemish (ibid.), and two female apes, large and small, from the Phoenician coast (ibid.: ¶ 586).

Once again, then, we seem to have a literal representation of what is also preserved in the Annals. Assurnasirpal further tells us in the Standard Inscription (Grayson 1976: ¶ 653) that he filled the palace with gold, silver, and other valuables from the lands over which he had gained dominion—the same goods he seems to be representing. Like the battle scenes in which the Assyrians always win, there is no intimation of exchange or that the king gives anything in return. All wealth comes to him (see Mauss 1967 ed., in regard to less hierarchical societies in which articulated patterns of exchange are what maintain social relations and the state); thus the king's unique position is underscored, his ability to elicit tribute serving as a validation of power. The outer facade of the Throneroom, therefore, sets the stage most appropriately for the actual reception and presence within.

How then was the desired effect achieved inside? First of all, through scale: the scale of the physical space itself—Court and Throneroom; and the scale of the decoration—reliefs standing well over the average height of a man, doorway colossi towering over these, and paintings up to the ceiling. Second, in the emphasis on doorways in general: that is, the significantly marked "passages" into and out of the space, passing the mythological beings of the genii and the composite creatures of the colossi who fully confronted an approaching individual, both announcing and controlling the liminality of the threshold (Turner 1974:237). Further, as Rio has pointed out (1976:507), images such as monsters and genii, which belong only to an invented universe, predispose the viewer much more strongly to highly charged space. The frequent repetition of the sacred tree further enhances this "specialness"—belonging to an abstract realm of ideal intentions. The repetition of the tree at each corner is particularly significant, as the central axis of the

tree is the corner and the image bends around the corner to right and left (see Figure 2). By this simple device, we are not presented with four separate-though-adjacent wall surfaces, but rather with a unified and continuous space.

The role played by slabs 13 and 23 (which feature the tree in context, as central to the desired universal order) was discussed above. They orient the viewer to the main focus of the room. From there, the disposition of the other slabs also becomes important. At least on the preserved south wall, the narrative reliefs proceed down from the king, who would have faced west on his throne, as indeed he does in the reliefs. All events thereby emanate from him and his reign, as, conversely, the individual approaching the throne goes counter to the direction of the reliefs, confronting the events as he passes.

In the narratives, as we have seen, a high degree of selection is operative. It is surely no accident that although numerous animals are hunted by the king according to his Annals (lions, bulls, ostrich, elephants; see Grayson 1976: ¶ 681), only lions and bulls are represented as appropriate opponents here. The significance of this selection is underscored by the fact that the royal seal of the ninth-century Assyrian kings showed them also in combat with a lion (Sachs 1953). Details in the historical narratives are also carefully selected and clearly represented to allow for easy recognition, with certain distortions and simplifications occurring to focus attention and thereby facilitate recognition.[13] In this context, the work of Barthes on the advertising image is not a casual referent, for there, as here, certain "signifieds" must be put across, and so long as transmission of the "message" is paramount, these signifieds have to be communicated as clearly as possible and thus are framed with a view to optimum reading (Barthes 1977b:33).

Hence, despite the changes in scene or specific action in the individual sequences, all the historical narratives have the identical grammatical structure. All are articulated in simple declarative sentences, with the firm implication of objectivity (never is an emotional component introduced to heighten the drama by qualifying the triumph of victory with the tragedy of defeat, as, for example, in the mosaic of the battle between Alexander and Darius from the House of the Faun at Pompeii; see Gombrich 1960:136–137). The "subject" is always clearly defined, and it is always the same: the king.

Variation therefore occurs in the predicate. But while the visual emphasis may be on the actions, together they illustrate the character of the subject, and so, in effect, the topic never shifts from the king (Todorov 1977:66–67). The order of events as represented may even be said to follow the word order of unmarked Semitic Akkadian: subject-object-verb (Givon 1976). The king, with or without attendants, appears at one side, usually the left (hence the subject). The object of his attentions and/or actions follows. And only at the end of the sequence is

the verb perceivable: in battles, for example, he *conquers;* this is clear after the array of casualties, falling men, and so on, because what you see (king shooting bow) may be the immediate action, but the *governing* action is apparent only in the totality.

The "person" of the subject is more complex than it might seem. We have discussed above the tendency to read profile views in narrative in the third person: "He (Assurnasirpal) did X." However, the king as principal actor whose presence is invoked in his very Throneroom, where he sits upon the throne, and would be present by association even with the empty throne, also adds a dimension of "I (Assurnasirpal) did X." The play is ambiguous, therefore, between the third person and the first person singular, between the fact of the thing/event and his assertion of it.

It is in this context that we understand better the function of the historical narratives of the Throneroom. In combination with the other reliefs, they give substance to the structural tension between the "ideal" cultic and mythological world and the purportedly "real" world. Yet, it is precisely, as we have shown above, in the selection of scenes that constantly show the invincibility of the Assyrians that the "real" world has been much manipulated. The reliefs, therefore, further mediate between history and the king's "assertion-of-history." Because the scenes appear so real—even to appropriate landscape elements and dress—the denoted images function to naturalize the underlying rhetoric; the very realness "innocents the semantic artifice of connotation," allowing the message to be bought without defensive armor, since the message is seemingly founded in nature (Barthes 1977b:45–46). The traditional structuralist dichotomy between nature and culture (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 1975) seems both recognized and artfully exploited in the cultural use of nature; for the cultural message—the royal rhetoric—is the power of the king and of the state, as demonstrated in the historical event.

Power is clearly what is conveyed in the inscriptions as well, and it must be remembered that the carving of the Standard Inscription over each slab cannot be seen as accidental or arbitrary. The Standard Inscription is a highly condensed formulation of the titles and activities of the king, including the king's name and ancestry, royal epithets expressing piety, valor, and military strength, enumeration of early campaigns, a summary of territorial expansion in general terms, and reference to the establishment of the capital at Nimrud and the building of the palace (de Filippi 1977:127).

The same ambiguities in grammatical subject discussed just above also occur in the text, where attributes in the titulary are presented in the third person, actions in the first. The activities mentioned in the Standard Inscription are clearly abstracted from the Annals, as is the far more extensive account preserved in the Ninurta Temple inscription which has been used above to identify the individual historical narratives in the Throneroom. But I

would suggest that, rather than seeing the text—Annals or Standard Inscription—*behind* the images, they should be seen as separate but parallel systems, particularly as we are here concerned with an essentially nonliterate population.

As the Throneroom reliefs may thus be seen as a very explicit and extensive rendering of the same concepts and events recorded in the Annals and expressed in the Standard Inscription, so the greatly abbreviated decorative scheme of the rest of the palace—repeated human- and eagle-headed genii flanking the sacred tree as well as occasional representations of the standing or seated king (Stearns 1961; Reade 1965; Brandes 1969)—should be seen as the résumé of the essence of the Standard Inscription: the articulation of the right order of the universe. That this is so is supported by the pride of place given to slabs 13 and 23, the full statement of the maintenance of the divine order by genii with lustral cone and bucket and through the person of the king. Thus when Reade says that the documents and the sculptures are inseparable (1979a:329), I would agree; but when he further adds, "like print and picture in an illustrated book," I must diverge, for this is more like a book in which there are only pictures, telling the same story as a book in which there are only words.

One may question the standardization, both in the inscription and in the repetitive decoration of most of the palace (see Paley 1976); however, this can perhaps best be understood in terms of modern communication theory, and the fact that the more standardized the message, the more reduced the cost per message event in emission and energy expended in decoding (Wobst 1977:323). This is further understood as necessary when we remember that we are here at the beginning of the incorporation of historical narrative into architectural decoration, and redundancy, necessary at all times to ensure reception, is particularly important as new modes of expression take time to be processed and become familiar to an audience. As the genre develops within the course of the Neo-Assyrian period, we shall see that it increases in acceptable variation; before proceeding to an investigation of later representations, however, it might be well to draw in the threads spun out thus far.

The appearance of historical narrative in works of art of the ancient Near East is correlated with the establishment by Assurnasirpal of a new capital at Nimrud/Kalhu, after 1,000 years of residence by Assyrian kings at Assur.[14] It is further correlated with the expansionist activities that made Assyria a territorial empire. The decorative scheme of Assurnasirpal's Northwest Palace as we have laid it out may therefore be seen as a response to the imperial situation and to imperial needs.

A similar moment of fluorit of the historical narrative occurs later, in the Roman Empire, coinciding precisely with the mounting of extensive foreign campaigns (Hamberg 1945; Hannestad 1979), and had occurred earlier, in Egypt during the New Kingdom. In particular, the battle

**Figure 17** Sargon II Throne-base, Room VII, Khorsabad (top: northeast side, Iraq Museum; bottom: southwest side, Oriental Institute, Chicago, A 11257).
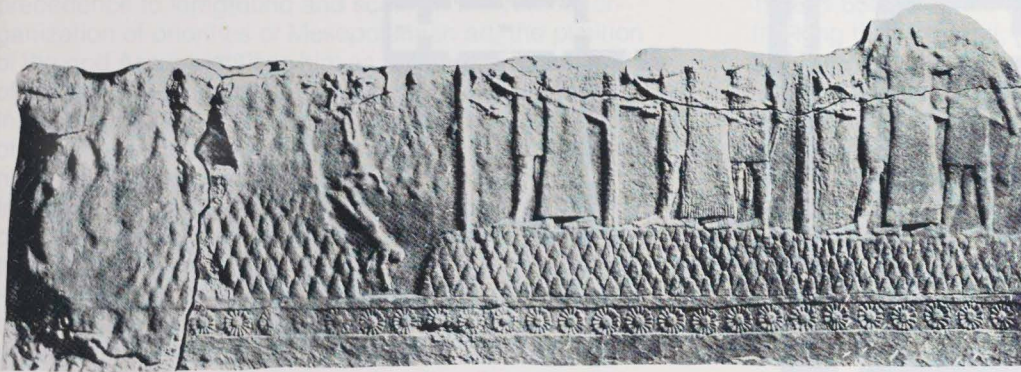
scenes of Ramses II (1279–1212 B.C.) of Dynasty XIX at Qadesh have led some scholars to see Egypt as the likely source for Assurnasirpal's innovations (Breasted 1932; Moscati 1963:99). I would say rather that the similar desires to represent events as reality all spring from very similar imperialistic concerns, as Ramses II was as much involved with validating his Empire in Syria as was Assurnasirpal. In Egypt, this marked a significant change from the more traditional means of representing victory in battle by the icon of a king smiting an enemy, an emblem of supremacy sometimes complemented by inscription or specificity of garb and hairstyle but never incorporating real time and space. The appearance of true historical narrative in Egypt was a short-lived phenomenon which, on the basis of what we know of the realpolitik of the period, seems to have been largely rhetorical and for purposes of display. In Assyria some 400 years later, the historical narratives appear to reflect the actual political situation, as Assyrian expansion is attested from many corroborating sources and continues on through the next two centuries.

We have suggested that the historical narratives reflect actual campaigns, as recorded in the royal Annals. In addition, if one looks at the disposition of the identified campaigns on the south wall, one notes that they are all situated in the southwest, west, or north (Suhu and Laqe, Carchemish, Bit Adini and the Habur River, Nirbu/Urartu and Damdammusa), while the only certain sequence from the north wall seems to represent an event in the east. This is especially striking, for, in both the Ninurta Temple inscription and the Standard Inscription, in the phrases in which Assurnasirpal expounds upon his territorial control, he groups the southwest, west, and north into one sequence, and the east, southeast, and south in the next. While we do not have enough evidence from the north wall to sustain a strong argument, it is tempting to

see this same division as part of the conscious program of the Throneroom, much on the same lines as the exterior of a Gothic cathedral often allocated Old Testament scenes to the north (cold) side and New Testament to the south, and as interior fresco cycles from Byzantium to the Renaissance were also frequently organized around similar polarities (Davis-Weyer 1971:84–85; Ettlinger 1965).

This division of elements bound together by their opposition into a whole that comprises and integrates extremes is thus a not uncommon device, used to imply the whole that lies within the extremities at the same time as the multiplicity of individual examples suggests the totality of places conquered. The opposition between east and west can be found clearly expressed in Neo-Assyrian texts of the period as a chosen metaphor for the extent of the Empire—for example, in an inscription of Shamshi-Adad V (823–811 B.C.), which announces the extent of Assyrian power from Nairi in the east to opposite Carchemish in the west (Luckenbill 1926: ¶ 716), and in Assurnasirpal's *own* words, that he has "brought under one authority ferocious (and) merciless kings *from east to west*" (Grayson 1976: ¶ 652; emphasis mine). Such textual references serve to strengthen the likelihood that this opposition would be articulated visually as well, and there is evidence from subsequent reigns to support such a reading. In text, mountain and water zones are invoked as border areas *par excellence,* in order to evoke both the spatial diversity of the land governed by Assyria and the frontiers which thus stood in contrast to the "center" (Liverani 1979:306–307).[15] Pictorially, the very throne base of Sargon II shows a campaign taking place in mountain country on one side (east?), riverine territory on the other (the Euphrates, west? Figure 17); while in the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, we see the unusual incorporation of two separate campaigns in a single room, jux-

taposing Phoenicians of the seacoast and opponents
from a mountainous region (Loud 1936:65 and Figs.
79–80; Paterson 1915:Pls 7–11). In all other cases of the
palace of Sennacherib, there is but a single campaign
depicted in each room, and it would seem that the stand-
ard organization is not followed here precisely because
the room in question, designated Room I, was originally
the main Throneroom of Sennacherib, its monumental
facade facing Court H virtually identical to that of Assur-
nasirpal's Court D (see plan, Figure 18; also Turner
1970:183; Reade 1980b:76). Here, too, the individual en-
tering would be presented with a visual parenthesis of the
extent of the Empire, just as has been suggested for the
Throneroom of Assurnasirpal.
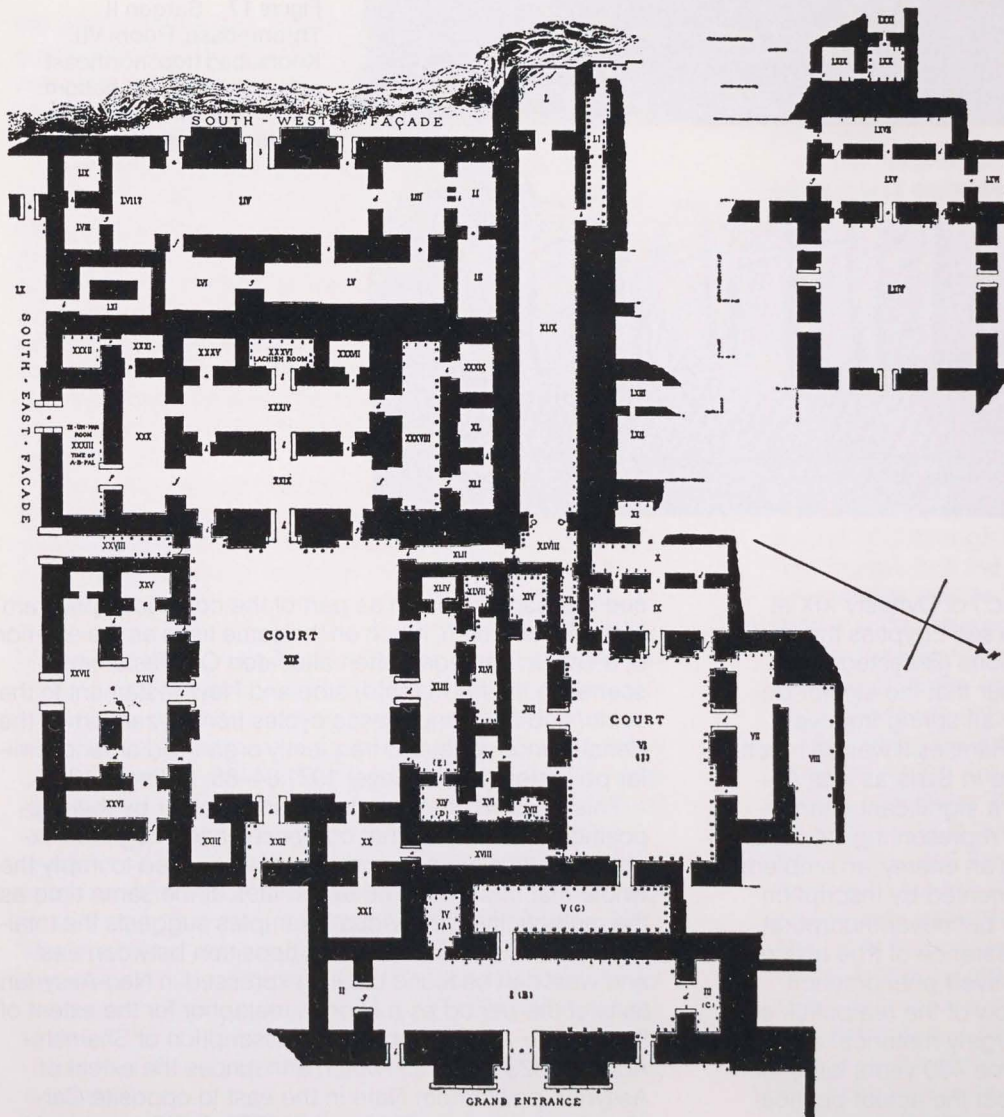
In a sense, then, the parenthesis serves not only to
delineate the borders, but also to mark the center (see
Geertz 1977; Liverani 1979). Throne base or Throneroom,
therefore, becomes the symbolic "true center," encap-
sulating the Empire itself, a microcosm of the state.

It should be emphasized that no stress on the secular
in the art of either Assurnasirpal or succeeding kings is
intended (*contra* Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951:171; and
with Speiser 1955:66–67). The representation of the god
Assur in the winged disc may occupy less space on the
reliefs than did the god Ningirsu on the stele of Ean-
natum, but the texts put victory into the hands of the god,
just as they had done in the Early Dynastic period
(Grayson 1976: ¶s 543 and 651), and this is expressed
visually by the presence of the god, not only above the
sacred tree of slabs 13 and 23 but also above the chariot

of the king in battle, shooting bow and arrow as the king shoots, standing when he stands, gesturing as he gestures (see slabs 3a, 9b, 5a, 11a). Although we in the West have been acculturated since the Renaissance to give precedence to foreground and scale, in the vertical organization of priorities of Mesopotamian art, the position of the god Assur identifies him as the governing principle of the action—as he is so represented in the Standard Inscription. Whether this is to be viewed as an expression of belief or as the metaphor by which the king expresses his legitimacy and which enables him to exercise his franchise to rule (Liverani 1979:301), the god is clearly a central feature of the system, and it is under his aegis that the king functions.

The whole Throneroom can then be read as a statement of the establishment and maintenance of the exterior state through military conquest and tribute, and the maintenance of the internal state through cultic observances, achieved through the person of the all-powerful king.

These attitudes are also found in the texts, where the titles employed by Assurnasirpal show similar concerns. I would even go further and suggest that, just as we have posited exact correspondences between verbally and visually described events in the historical narratives, there is an equal correspondence between the epithets assumed by the king and his various categories of representation. Thus, the titulary that closes the annalic recounting of the king's activities in the Standard Inscription (as well as in the Ninurta Temple inscription) begins:

(I,) Assurnasirpal, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods, ferocious predator, conqueror of cities and the entire highlands . . . [Grayson 1976: ¶s 652 and 539]

I would see in this sequence the same four roles in which we see Assurnasirpal in the Throneroom: A. himself seated on the throne (and most likely depicted as such on the far west wall of Room C, exactly opposite); A. as the maintainer of divine order through the care of the sacred tree; A. as vanquisher of wild bulls and lions; and A. as warrior.[16]

This multidimensional definition of kingship, which straddles the secular and the divine, is again well known in the ideology and artistic representations of subsequent periods (e.g., Root 1979; Corrigan 1978; Mango 1972:108–110; A. Grabar 1936). More important, however, the articulation of divine favor and the role of the king, including civic, priestly, and military functions, can be traced back in time to the Old Assyrian period in the early second millennium B.C. (Larsen 1974:296). There is thus a clearly established tradition in Mesopotamia upon which the Neo-Assyrian king stands. What is distinctive here is the manner in which these aspects were displayed visually (and verbally) in the palace.

In fact, I would even suggest that both words and pictures adhere to the identical structural principles. In the extended titulary at the beginning of the Standard Inscription, immediately after the king's genealogy (Grayson 1976: ¶ 650), a series of characteristics are ascribed to the king that, I submit, follow closely the organization of the Throneroom reliefs.

The governing principle is that the king's achievements are granted through divine sanction, brought about through his piety. From there, a string of epithets follows, all equally weighted; but it is striking that the first, "fearless in battle," is given in an active, attributive mode, while those epithets that follow are rather consequences: the subjugation of the unsubmissive, enemies being trampled, and so on. Inserted in the middle is a recapitulation of divine sanction, then a second active image is evoked: the king who "captured lands," from which again the consequences are enumerated—receipt of tribute, taking of hostages. In the first series, the quality of "fearless" governs the consequences that follow, and the fact of having captured lands governs the second. In the total string of descriptive phrases enumerating the king's attributes and achievements, one can virtually see corresponding relief scenes: organization around the piety of slabs 13 and 23, then individual historical narratives such as subject kings kissing Assurnasirpal's feet, enemy trampled beneath the chariot horses, cities conquered, tribute exacted, prisoners received. Perhaps even more significant, however, we are also presented with the same expression of resolution from action to consequence as is seen in the reliefs: for example, in the hunt slabs, where action is above and the consequent ritual below, and in the sequence from battles to aftermath.[17]

Correspondences in both content and structure are therefore to be found in the texts and the imagery: first, the similar organization around a governing principle of divine sanction once the king himself is introduced; second, a similar syntax of action and explicit articulation of action to consequence; third, the same grammatical and compositional play on the ambiguity between the subject of the action/the king in the first and third persons; fourth, a correlation of campaigns enumerated to campaigns depicted; and fifth, the same four major facets of royal identity, which in the reliefs take the form of four different types of scenes in the Throneroom.[18]

In this parallelism, which I feel is demonstrable between text and image, we are clearly in the presence of compelling royal rhetoric: two powerful and reinforcing statements, linguistic and visual, that both carry the same message. That it was a program consciously applied is strongly indicated, not only by the coherence of the scheme, but also by evidence that in the *temples* built by Assurnasirpal at Nimrud a very different sort of decoration was executed in relief—heraldic and mythological representations of divine combats as opposed to images of the king and historical narratives (Meusczyński 1976).

This is not, however, the "biography" of an individual or
his personal propaganda (Reade 1979a:331) but rather
the ideology of the state. If, with Culler, we see ideology
as "a theory which justifies particular economic, political
and intellectual practices by concealing their historical
origins and making them the *natural* components of an
interpreted world" (1973:471; emphasis mine), then we
see immediately the logical investment of Assurnasirpal
not only in the specific use of what appear to be purely
denotative "historical narratives" but also in the overrid-
ing program of the Throneroom as a whole.

The impact of the Throneroom was charged with the
tension established between apparently opposing ele-
ments. In slab 23, the tree is central and the king serves it
on each side, yet it is placed directly behind the throne in
a position such that the king himself, when present,
would also be central. The symmetrical reliefs are played
against the asymmetrical historical representations. The
text of the Standard Inscription is posed against the im-
ages. And the subject of both, while always the king,
alternates between the first and third person singular. It is
the power of the Throneroom that, withall, these opposi-
tions are bound into a tight whole, strengthened through
the binary play (Lévi-Strauss 1974:196) into a definition of
the cultural function of the presiding individual and the
space.

The production of art on this scale and in this sort of
context has definite advantages. Once the initial expendi-
ture in time, money, and conception has been made, the
message contained in the program continues to be
beamed with great longevity and little or no further main-
tenance cost (Wobst 1977:322). That this message was
deemed important by Assurnasirpal himself is reflected
in his concern about the care of the palace after his own
lifetime (Grayson 1976: ¶ 620), as well as by his obvious
pride in its initial achievement.

As for the nature of the message, it is a very fine line
between the statement of an ideology as a monument to
an existing or wished-for status quo and the beaming of
that ideology as propaganda, designed to manipulate
social forces. I doubt very much if the two can be effec-
tively separated, for in the very statement lies the implica-
tion of reinforcement—with exactly the same duality of
the term, having connotations both military and social, as
in modern usage. I feel we must therefore assume that the
representations were aimed not only at the education by
example and the manipulation of foreign visitors but also
at the shaping and maintenance of the local popula-
tion—those individuals who must buy the royal message
if the state is to remain stable and the king securely in
power (see Liverani 1979:298–299).[19] In the end, what is
before us in the Throneroom is therefore an integrated
architectural, pictorial, and textual representation of the
institution of kingship and the ideal of the Neo-Assyrian
state.

**Figures 19 a & b**   (a) Shalmaneser III, Black Obelisk, Nimrud (British Museum 118885; ht. 2.02 m.); (b) detail.

## Historical Development and Cultural Perspective

### The Monuments

Many of the issues raised with regard to the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal become clearer when we see the form they took and how they developed over the course of the Neo-Assyrian period. In this, much is owed to the recent work of Julian Reade, who has charted the development of narrative composition in Assyrian sculpture (1979c). But it might be well to put this material together briefly from the particular perspective of the present discussion.

The art produced in the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.) seems heavily dependent upon that of his father, Assurnasirpal. Small fragments of wall paintings from the Throneroom of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud (as yet unpublished, but described in Oates 1963:28) indicate that the room was decorated with a procession of figures from the royal bodyguard and probably therefore included also the king himself, possibly receiving tribute. Other unpublished fragments from the building include standing genii and traces of a sacred tree (ibid.:30). The glazed brick panel, also from the Fort, shows the king duplicated right and left, with Assur in a winged disc directly above him, and above that, divided by a cuneiform inscription giving the name of the king, his father, and grandfather, stand two rampant opposed bulls and a sacred tree (Reade 1963). All of these, despite minor variations, have strong parallels in the Northwest Palace. In addition, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, with its carved registers on four sides (Figure 19 a & b), owes a great deal to the sequences of the Throneroom reliefs of Assurnasirpal showing booty and tribute, as does the carved throne base of Shalmaneser from the Fort (Layard 1849a:Pls. 53–56; Oates 1963; Hulin 1963). Both monuments may also be compared to the tributary figures of Assurnasirpal's Court D, where, in particular, figures with trays of bracelets and earrings and others with apes seem virtually copied from the sculptured facade (Figure 16). One group of tributaries from the throne base is actually labeled as coming from Bit Adini, further strengthening the identification for Assurnasirpal's procession suggested above. And finally, once it was discovered that two sets of bronze door bands belonging to Assurnasirpal had been preserved from Balawat/Imgur Enlil (Barnett 1973), the bronze bands of Shalmaneser III could no longer be discussed in terms of innovation in design (King 1915). Nevertheless, some trends observable in the Shalmaneser Gates from Balawat are worth remarking upon. The order in which the bands should be read has been discussed by various scholars (most recently, Reade 1979c). The eight pairs of double-register bands seem to show a definite expansion in the amount of space and information given in the earlier bands. The bull and lion hunts of the Assurnasirpal bands, closely related to those depicted on his Throneroom reliefs, are entirely omitted in the bands of his son, and only military

**Figure 20**  Shalmaneser III, Bronze door band, Balawat (British Museum, ht. 27 cm.).

and campaign activities are included—what we have called the "historical narratives." The Shalmaneser gates also go further in including landscape elements to mark the terrain and site of each campaign (King 1915: Pls. III, XIII, XXX, etc.; here, e.g., Figure 20). Therefore, just on the basis of this one king, successor to Assurnasirpal, we may tentatively predict a general trend of elaboration in the genre of historical narrative at the expense of other themes.

The next king for whom there is any relevant information is Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.). Although he apparently built a palace at Nimrud, identified as the Central Palace, the structure is now largely eroded (Reade 1968; 1977:314–315), and the reliefs are therefore very poorly preserved. In addition, some of the sculptural decoration from this palace was apparently removed and re-used in the Southwest Palace of Esarhaddon (Barnett and Falkner 1962). Of those Central Palace reliefs still *in situ,* it has been possible to reconstruct representations of two campaigns, one against Babylon in 745 B.C. and the other possibly against Media, in 737 B.C. (Reade 1968:72). Each room apparently also contained a complete version of the Annals of the king, as was also the case with the later Sargon II but not with Assurnasirpal, who condensed the Annals into his Standard Inscription. In the siege scenes of Tiglath-pileser, we see many connections with the Throneroom reliefs of Assurnasirpal—in captured cities and goods and falling enemy—but there is also a general increase in overlapping figures and animals (Barnett and Falkner 1962:Pls. XXVI, XXVIII); more complex spatial renderings of citadels in their landscape (Ibid.:Pl. XL); and perhaps even a purposeful use of the total field of the register, including diagonal rows of animals to suggest the recession of space beyond the picture plane (as suggested by Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951:175).

In general, in the expansion of historical narrations throughout the palace, in the allotment of individual campaigns to individual rooms, and in the greater use of the pictorial field, Sargon's reliefs look ahead to those of his son, Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), as well as to those of Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.), both of whose palaces were discovered at Nineveh (Paterson 1915; Meissner and Opitz 1939). The reliefs of Sennacherib in particular show not only seascapes but also campaigns against a patterned background of terrain that implies the three-dimensional space in which the action took place (Paterson 1915: Pls. 68–76, 83–84; here, Figure 21). In addition, Sennacherib expands the subjects of his narrative concerns to include building and quarrying activities related to domestic, internal events (Paterson 1915: Pls. 23–28, 31–35), and the diagonal lines along which he distributes men throughout the field are clear attempts to represent pictorial space (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951; Akurgal 1968)—the closest we come, in fact, to a consistent perspective; and the suppression of formerly more prominent figures in favor of the overall composition (Reade 1980a:73) further reduces the conceptual component, thus strengthening the "perceptual." We must assume, I feel, that behind this interest in illusory space is the notion that the "truer" the space, the greater the degree of historicity, as if visual progress across the field of the relief were comparable to the actual progress of the army through its field (Bersani and Dutoit 1979:21). At the same time, we have no preserved heraldic or ceremonial reliefs of Sennacherib, nor any genii, and this, too, would tend to suggest an interest in the historically verifiable universe.

That interest notwithstanding, however, the representations of Sennacherib are no less "manipulated" than those of Assurnasirpal, but whereas the earlier reliefs were clearly divided into separate sequences of action and consequence, in the later scenes, time is telescoped into a single unit so that the flow from approach to siege to prisoners and booty becomes continuous and we are presented with simultaneous action within a single space.

**Figure 21** Sennacherib, Siege of Lachish, Room XXXVI, Southwest Palace, Nineveh (British Museum).

It would seem that Sennacherib also arranged campaigns in specific rooms according to some conscious program. I have already mentioned the particular case of the Throneroom, Room I, with its grand facade, which I feel purposely includes sea and mountain battles to encompass the Empire. In addition, a group of reliefs of activities amid marshes and palm trees decorated the north end of the northwest facade, which seems on the basis of comparison with reliefs of Court XIX in the same palace to be situated in Babylon (Paterson 1915: p. 3; Pls. 40–41, 43; plan, our Figure 18). Since the Babylonian campaigns of Sennacherib were the most important of his reign (Luckenbill 1927: ¶s 234, 241–243), it seems not accidental to have depicted them on the great facade, just as the eastern and western campaigns were inside, in Room I.[21]

It is really Sennacherib who begins to fully exploit the epigraph—a written label, inscribed directly on the face of the relief, identifying the scene and the action taking place, not only by content, but also by careful placement. For example, above the figure of the king seated on a carved throne in the hills before Lachish, we read: "Sennacherib, king of the universe, king of Assyria, sat upon a chair (while) the booty of Lachish passed before him" (Luckenbill 1927: ¶ 489). For a literate audience, such epigraphs would tend, like captions to a photograph, to "quicken" the image (Barthes 1977a:25), thus avoiding

possible misinterpretation—the caption being one of the major sources of information governing correct reading of a picture, along with knowledge of the visual code and an understanding of the context (Gombrich 1974:247). Such captions are different from texts which accompany an image, in that the text may be exactly parallel or it may be amplifying, providing more information, whereas the caption tends rather to focus, getting one closer to the intended meaning—that is, it "anchors" the image (Barthes 1977a:27; 1977b:38). For a nonliterate or semiliterate audience, as would be the case here, the relationship of word to image exists more on an ideal than a real level, but the increasing explicitness of the visual information is paralleled by the increasing explicitness of the accompanying epigraphs.

For Sargon II (721–705 B.C.), we have a great deal of information. In his inscriptions, we are told that the king restored and resided for a long part of his reign in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud before building his own new capital city and palace at Khorsabad, 15 kilometers northeast of Nineveh (Loud 1936).[20] That the palace of Assurnasirpal was an important model for the new building is clear in a comparison of the reliefs from the facade before the Throneroom of Sargon, designated Court VIII at Khorsabad, with those from the facade of Court D at Nimrud (ibid.: Figures 33–35); it is also clear in the apparent revival by Sargon of the use of griffin-demons or genii (Smith 1938: Pl. XXVII). Nevertheless, there is also a new mind at work, in the great expansion of the use of the

register as a spatial field for both land- and seascapes
(Loud 1936: Figures 83, 84, 87–89). Also, as el-Amin
(1953) and Reade (1976) have demonstrated, the expan-
sion of the concept of historical narrative may be charted,
not only in the amount of wall space it occupies, as the
sieges become the major decorative theme in many of
the rooms, but also in that campaigns of specific years,
as known from the Annals, are organized visually as units
within individual rooms. In fact, once one accepts this
purposeful organization in the reliefs of Sargon, it be-
comes even more likely that there was a similar intention
to refer directly to specific campaigns in the Throneroom
of Assurnasirpal; and we have also suggested that the
mountain-sea duality in campaigns chosen to be illus-
trated on the throne base of Sargon (Figure 17) was a
conscious reference to the extent of the Empire from the
Zagros to the Mediterranean at the time, as was also his
use of two registers of tributaries from east (lower) and
west (upper) along both sides of the passage of Corridor
10 in the palace. What is more, Reade has noted the
purposeful composition of scenes, such that the figure of
the king and the culmination of the action is likely to be
placed opposite the doorway, to be immediately appar-
ent (1979c:83); this is comparable to the placement of
slabs 23 and 13 in the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal.

The epigraphs of Assurbanipal are even more exten-
sive than those of Sennacherib (Luckenbill 1927: ¶s
1040–1117), as are his narrative sequences. Where Senn-
acherib had more or less done away with the double
register on a slab in order to enlarge scale and focus
attention on the all-encompassing action, Assurbanipal
plays with both register and field, combining figures in
great density (Figures 22, 23, 24). Visual rhythms that
aid the reading of the narrative are established not only
across a single register, but from register to register, as in
the case of his battle against the Arabs, where camels
racing from right to left are shown at the far right in the
upper register, progressively toward the middle in the
second, and finally at the bottom left, so that one takes in
the movement of all three registers at once (Figure 22).
This added complexity is apparent in the hunt scenes as
well (Bersani and Dutoit 1979; but their generalizations on
Neo-Assyrian art on the basis of Assurbanipal should be
read with caution). The original sources in Assurnasirpal
for these hunt scenes are readily apparent, even to the
king's pouring a libation over the dead animals (Figure
23); yet the additional episodes and the addition of a
third register allow for considerably expanded treatment
of the theme (Barnett 1976: Pls. A, E). Accompanying this
profusion of narrative information are a number of stylistic
changes: gone are the bulky figures of Assurnasirpal,
executed in broad, flat planes and surrounded by a great
deal of negative space; instead, human and animal fig-
ures decrease in proportion and scale to permit greater

peopling of the pictorial field, and at the same time,
greater attention is paid to surface patterning and detail
that complements the busyness of the scene. These
stylistic changes, then, have adaptive advantages
(Wobst 1977:321) for the narrative intentions of Assurban-
ipal's artists, the results of which are that far more infor-
mation is packed into a single sequence, just as far
greater detail is now included in royal texts (e.g., Lucken-
bill 1927: ¶s 807, 823). But the price paid is so much
distraction that sometimes the focus of the action is al-
most missed, as in the case where Assyrian soldiers de-
capitate an officer of the king of Elam in the midst of
battle (Reade 1979b; here, Figure 24).

At their most successful, the registers proceed in
fugue, related to each other as well as along their own
lines, and attaining heights of drama never seen in the
works of Assurnasirpal. Occasionally, however, the
nonessential amplifiers of these scenes get in the way of
the clear reading of the narrative. Although Bersani and
Dutoit (1979) have argued that this distraction is con-
scious, obviating emphasis on any single focal point and
putting all elements into the service of the whole
episode, the expansion of the total number of sub-
episodes, nevertheless, can sometimes work against the
narrative, or at least require much more accomplished
reading.

In content, one may say that the narratives of Assurban-
ipal continue in the direction we have seen after Assur-
nasirpal, away from the cultic and mythological, toward
greater historical specificity, and the proliferation of his-
torical scenes throughout the entire palace. Yet there is
also some continuity with the prototype. From Reade's
reconstruction (1979c:104) of Room M, the Throneroom of
Assurbanipal in the North Palace at Nineveh, we see that,
whereas adjacent Rooms I, J, and L contain individual
campaigns, the Throneroom combines several: Babylon,
Elam, Egypt, and some unspecified mountain country.
Since Babylon is south, Elam is east, Egypt considered to
the far west, it may be well that the mountain country
would have been in the north, which was indeed moun-
tainous, thus elaborating on the earlier notion of bound-
aries of the realm depicted in the central room. In any
event, in the multiplicity of campaigns alone, guiding
principles similar to those of Assurnasirpal must still
have been operative, providing the conceptual basis
upon which the Throneroom decoration was chosen.

**Figure 22**  Assurbanipal, Arab campaign, Room L, North Palace, Nineveh (British Museum 124926).



**Figure 23**  Assurbanipal, Lion hunt/libation, Room S', North Palace, Nineveh (British Museum 124886-7).

**Figure 24**  Assurbanipal,
Ulai river campaign,
Room XXXIII, Southwest
Palace of Sennacherib,
Nineveh (British Museum
128802).

## Governing Principles

How then do we account for the loss of the mythological and cultic scenes within the continuity and development of the historical narrative over time? I believe these phenomena can be accounted for if we take into consideration the context of the reliefs and their intended audience in conjunction with the historical process Assyria went through in the establishment and development of the Empire from the ninth through the seventh century B.C.

Despite the archaeological accident that the complete decorative programs of intermediary Thronerooms have not been preserved (see Reade 1980b, however, for thoughts on this), the fact that the two reception rooms bracketing the sequence represent a similar range of historical narratives strongly argues for cultural intention rather than idiosyncracy in the decorative schemes. That intentionality, manifest in a public context (the primary reception suite of the palace), further implies the desire that the concepts underlying the intentions be perceivable (received) by those individuals physically received into the royal presence. Now, the ability to receive the message contained in the program, as many have noted, is a direct function of the effectiveness and clarity of the presentation of the message, the "packaging" (Chafe 1976), and of the cognitive competence of the audience: the stored knowledge brought to the situation, ability to understand signs and signals, and skill in decoding (Greimas and Courtès 1976; O. Grabar 1972:563; Gross 1974:60; Gombrich 1974:250; Barthes 1977c:116; Chatman 1979).

In the reliefs of Assurnasirpal, we saw a much greater use of cultic and mythological representations which had had a long history in Mesopotamia, in addition to the introduction of the truly historical narrative. The cultic and mythological scenes require a considerably greater degree of symbolic representation—images for which one must have prior knowledge of the story or custom *behind* what is represented. This constitutes, in other words, what Schapiro (1973:9) has called "reductive imagery": the text, oral or written, must be known in advance.

Precisely what the historical narratives offer is the parallelism between text and image, as opposed to dependence. They require a knowledge of context, but not necessarily of the text itself, for that can be read from the image. The historical narrative therefore simply does not require a code in the same way as a cultic or mythological scene would; it demands less previous knowledge and/or decoding skill (less competence: Culler 1975) from the viewer.

While the historical narrative may thus make fewer demands upon an audience, this can be deceptively manipulated by the "encoder," however. Particularizing elements place the narrative in time and space, attempting to make an equation between pure denotation and truth. As these elements "record," so they serve to verify the natural order (or so the Assyrians would have us per-

ceive). The narratives are then significantly different from other types of representation, because while they are so easily readable on the surface, that very readability in fact "masks the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given" (Barthes 1977b:47).

It is therefore not surprising that the historical narratives of Assurnasirpal began quite simply, both in style and in compositional articulation. The reliefs of the later Neo-Assyrian period clearly move in the direction of greater narrative complexity. Reade has documented this expansion, without, however, putting it into developmental perspective (1979c). To the extent that the reliefs of Assurnasirpal mark the initiation of the genre, one must see them as the early stages of both conception and reading, when images will be simplified and what does not contribute to the immediate core of the message will be eliminated as potentially distracting (Richards 1974:118); and one is even tempted to wonder if there is not a consciousness behind the placement of the simpler sieges 18a and 17a closest to the throne in the Northwest Palace, moving toward the more complex sieges further down as the wall progresses (e.g., slabs 4a–3a, 5b–3b).

Implications are that, as the audience learns to discern what is significant, the genre can become more complexly organized. This is not an absolute, evolutionary statement for all cases; but here, where, by virtue of presentation in public suites of the royal palace, the clear intention is to communicate a message relating to the idea of the state and the institution of kingship, the sender of the message must be certain that it will be understood. Continued exposure and familiarity with the conventions would then pave the way for greater complexity and variation, once the main themes were known.

Such a process would give meaning to the internal development of the genre. But this must then be put into conjunction with the principles that governed the gradual elimination of heraldic and cultic schemes as well; and here, I feel, the external history of Assyria and the expansion of the Empire must be brought into the picture.

While Assurnasirpal and his father, Tukulti Ninurta II, had begun to extend the political boundaries of Assyria beyond the immediate region of northern Mesopotamia, real territorial expansion and the absorption of provinces into an administrated empire began with Shalmaneser III and was further consolidated under Tiglath-pileser III, such that Garelli (1979:319) would actually see this later period as the beginning of true "Empire."[23] Expansion continued with Sargon and subsequent kings, reaching ultimately to Egypt, Anatolia, the Iranian plateau, and Babylon (Smith 1960). All during this time, the current capital—whether Nimrud, Khorsabad, or Nineveh—served as the official center of the Empire, and must have included a complexly heterogeneous population. Not

only did Assurnasirpal write of inviting delegations from surrounding territories to his inauguration ceremonies at Nimrud, but he also settled conquered peoples from Suhu and Laqe, Zamua, Bit Adini, Carchemish, and Patina in the new capital (Grayson 1976: ¶ 653). Those invited to the inauguration banquet included representatives from more far-reaching regions, from northwest Iran to the Phoenician coast and the Anatolian highlands, and it was explicitly stated that they were invited to the consecration of the palace itself (ibid.: ¶ 682). Thus, right from the beginning there was a heterogeneous ethnic and cultural audience for the palace reliefs. Sargon further incorporated units of conquered soldiers into his army and increased the complexity of the diplomatic and political constituency of the capital; in the complaint of Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) that an envoy from the Sealands was *not* sent is implied the fact that foreign envoys were expected to be at the capital (Saggs 1963:145–146).

Hence, as the Empire grew, so did the heterogeneity of the general population and of the prospective audience for the ideological messages incorporated into the art of the public reception suites. We therefore come back to the importance of the receivability of signals, since we have already established the intention to transmit such signals. And we have also suggested that the historical narrative may be read with less prior knowledge than other sorts of imagery. Whether this is due to the fact that a determinate sequence of events is easier to follow because it recapitulates linear human experience (and linguistic utterances; Holloway 1979:482), or whether it is because these particular historical narratives, with their specificity of time and place, were so immediate, it *is* clear that they demanded less degree of shared cultural experience than motifs such as the king and the sacred tree, for example. That the motif is not lost entirely is evident in its use in miniature as decoration on garments worn by Assurbanipal. However, while Reade has made the appealing suggestion that it could have been present in later Thronerooms as wall-hangings, thereby accounting for otherwise inexplicable blank slabs behind the throne base of Sargon and opposite the central doorway of Assurbanipal (Reade 1980b:81), it was certainly not perpetuated throughout the palace, as had been the case with Assurnasirpal. I would suggest that, the growth in complexity of the historical narrative during the period notwithstanding, their proliferation at the expense of cultic and mythological images represents a lowering of the common denominator of what would be intelligible to a heterogeneous audience, and that these developments were a direct response to the increased heterogeneity of the Empire as it developed.[24]

Sociologists have dealt at length with the processes by which a dominant culture absorbs diverse ethnic groups into a unified population, concentrating, however, on the social issues of power and control and adaptation rather than on the resultant symbol systems developed around the process.[25] Nevertheless, it is clearly articulated that social order is dependent upon a feeling of shared group identity (Weber 1978 ed.:395–398). Marx (1978 ed.: 612–613) deals further with the importance of military defense and exterior threats (hence, military *symbols*) in effectively forging social unity, and Simmel (1964 ed.) with *why* and *how* military symbols serve to create a common political consciousness and thus a common history for a group. This raises an aspect of the Neo-Assyrian historical narratives not previously considered: the need for military symbols. The battle scenes are thus not only historical records; by giving voice to potential threats, they also reinforce the need for maintaining the king/ruling elite in power and at the same time serve to create a common history for the Empire which reinforces past shared experience. This view is further reinforced by turning to Durkheim (1972 ed.:145), who noted that as social complexity increases, the "collective consciousness" of a group declines and affiliation is forged instead through shared needs—hence the need to *emphasize* shared needs if one aims at social cohesion.

Hymes has posed the issue in terms of situations in which there exist a diversity of languages within the community and the necessity of arriving at social codes and communication systems that are mutually intelligible, if not a shared language (1967); and it is interesting that precisely within the Neo-Asssyrian Empire in the eighth century—during the reign of Tiglath-pileser, apparently—there is a shift to the use of Aramaic rather than the native Akkadian as a *lingua franca,* certainly at least partially in response to the incorporation of much western Semitic territory into the Empire at that time.[26] Another of the ways in which cohesion is established is through the generation of shared cultural materials (Kroeber 1948:68). Among these last, the importance of symbol systems as prime carriers of cultural values should not be underestimated. Thus Needham (1979:5), following Durkheim, notes that "the function of social symbols . . . is not merely to mark or enhance the importance of what is symbolized, but also to evoke and sustain an emotional commitment to what is decreed to be important in the social group in question. . . ." Symbolism therefore is "doubly necessary: to mark what is socially important and to induce men to conform in recognizing the values by which they should live."

That the diversity of the existing audience should have been taken into account in the encoding process of Neo-Assyrian reliefs is logical if social cohesion was part of the aims of the state, and we know from contemporary Assyrian texts that such was indeed the case: stress was placed on resettling conquered groups and "counting them as Assyrians" (Liverani 1979:312); and in the second

titulary of the Standard Inscription itself, Assurnasirpal announces that through his military activities he has "brought under one authority. . . . kings from east to west" (Grayson 1976: ¶ 652.) Furthermore, as Wobst has argued (1977:324), the ideal target group for public communications is precisely the group at some intermediary social distance from the emitter of the message. Those very close will already know, and (re-)affirmation will be taking place on many levels (not the least of which being that those who are part of the power elite will have a stake in keeping that elite in power). Those very far away, by contrast, would not be able to decode or use the message. The group that is socially distant but potentially able to receive should therefore be the intended object of the communicative act. As the range of the "target groups" widened with the expansion of the Assyrian Empire, the need to lower the common denominator without substantially changing the message became evident. And precisely because the target group is at a certain social distance, one may assume that the majority of the messages will be related to the process of social cohesion and integration (Wobst 1977:327)—in our terms, the various battles and conquests all adding up to the centrality of Assyria and the subsuming of all surrounding regions into the Assyrian political entity, through the action of the king and the patronage of the gods.[27]

It should further be acknowledged that, while we have been immediately concerned with the *affect* of generated symbol systems, such systems are articulated and propounded by individuals in power, to proclaim and to achieve certain ends. Thus Geertz (1977:152–153) observes that "at the political center of any complex organized society, . . . (is) both a governing elite and a set of symbolic forms expressing the fact that it [the elite] is in truth governing." The selection of the palace for the major messages of the state reinforces this view; and the choice of the highly visible outer facades, the inner public court facades, the thronerooms and throne bases as the most publicly accessible places within the palaces for the most explicit messages supports the foregoing thesis of the intended target group—just as outer layers of clothing, visible from a distance and publicly accessible, become major personal communication acts (Sahlins 1976:179–191; Wobst 1977:300–335).

## Conclusions

On these terms, it would seem that the development of the historical narrative in art is closely bound to the historical development of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The palace relief-decoration becomes a "message produced in the artifact mode" (Wobst 1977:322), and the representations become carriers of the prevailing ideology on a public scale.

To understand the "communicative" intent of the Neo-Assyrian reliefs and their use in a decorative program is not to negate the experiential aspect of the work(s) of art, but to strengthen it by embedding the work in its historical context (Ettlinger 1971; Deinhard 1975; Mukarovsky 1978). I have tried to deal elsewhere with the way in which the periphery processed stimuli from the center in the Neo-Assyrian period (Winter 1977), and the way in which the center borrowed from the periphery for its own ends (Winter, forthcoming). We are here concerned with the way in which the center *draws in* the periphery, once it has established a coherent system of communications.

The introduction of the historical narrative is then tied to a situation in which the king is both strong and engaged in "events" as opposed to mere maintenance (Moscati 1963:105); and these narratives in turn become essential to the Empire, not just "representing," but actually playing a role in the shaping of thought. The same message could have taken a number of forms, as, for example, the more ideographic "king smiting" became the expression of royal and national power in ancient Egyptian art. As the code of connotation is neither universal nor entirely invented, but rather is "historical" (Barthes 1977a:27), the question must arise: Why did the formulation of the Assyrian message take the particular shape it did? To say that there was a long tradition in Mesopotamian art and culture of recording the event is merely to push the question back in time; but to do more at present would be outside the limits of the present discussion. The quantum leap taken in the reign of Assurnasirpal was the representation not of an episode or commemorative scene to stand for the whole, but rather of a fully developed narrative; and perhaps we may venture to generalize that, just as in the physical world of elementary particles, where "at each new level of complexity, entirely new properties appear" (Anderson 1972:393), so perhaps also with the development of the imperial state in Assyria, new cultural/art forms emerged that addressed the structure of the new social and political order.

The evolution of the historical narrative within the Neo-Assyrian period also becomes understandable on historical grounds: both the shifts toward exclusively narrative representations based upon the lowering of a common denominator of decoding and the necessity of maintaining a common denominator in the decorative program in the first place. Parallelism between text and

image is also sustained, and the two similar yet independent structures can only be understood as essential isomorphisms generated by the identical culture (Beeman 1976; Vance 1973). To the extent that rhetoric may be defined as the "signifying aspect of ideology" (Barthes 1977b:49), both text and image represent the royal rhetoric of the Neo-Assyrian period.

In the articulation of this rhetoric, the king and the state are represented to a selected yet diverse audience. As the representative of a cultural institution, the king is not only the subject but also the composer of the message. The work is the message; the audience, the decoding receiver. The value of beaming a message on the scale of the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs is that the message, once the original cost is expended, is relatively permanent; it continues to be emitted without further maintenance for the lifetime of the building, and in effect, the message and the messenger become one.

The role the king must play in relation to society is not new in Mesopotamian tradition; but the extent of his constituency and the complexity of the political system has changed significantly. If his message is efficiently (successfully) encoded, its transmission will constitute an institutional activity, the result of which will be the strengthening of the social system—for to the degree that the viewer accepts the message, he is also reassured as to his integration in society (Gross 1974:76; Barthes 1977a:31; Needham 1979:5). At that point, the display has become part of the message; the maintenance of the state and the power elite is embedded in the program; and the historical narratives in Neo-Assyrian palaces function as prime vehicles for royal rhetoric.

## Acknowledgments

## Notes

1 According to the notes taken by Rassam, narrative reliefs were not confined to the Throneroom but were also to be found in parts of the west wing of the palace (Reade 1965:120). Some Assurnasirpal reliefs were also carried off by Esarhaddon for his "Southwest" palace (Barnett and Falkner 1962), including two lion hunt scenes and several battles. Since the entire north wall of the Throneroom is missing except for slabs 27 and 28, it is not impossible that some of the Southwest Palace battle scenes came from that wall; they may also, however, have been taken from other rooms in the highly eroded west wing.

2 It should be noted that fallen painted plaster fragments have been observed in the center of the Throneroom (Abu es-Soof 1963:66–68; Mallowan 1966:105; Reade 1979b:19). Some of the decoration is geometric, and since the fragments had impressions of roof beams on the reverse, they therefore came from the ceiling. Other bits, however, include what was identified as parts of human figures and a chariot wheel, and are assumed to have continued the decorative scheme of the reliefs on the wall surfaces above the tops of the reliefs. A color reconstruction of the interior of the Throneroom is presented in Layard (1849a:Pl. II), and while the reliefs depicted are not accurate for the particular corner given, the western end of the Throneroom, their division into two bands and general placement is correct, affording a good view of how they would have been set in place, with painted border and frieze above, reaching to the equally decorated ceiling. Unfortunately, given the poor state of preservation of the actual fragments of painting, it is impossible to reconstruct what role they might have played in the total scheme of the Throneroom. Nevertheless, it may be noted that since the reliefs stood some 2.3 meters high, clearly they were intended to provide the principal visual impact in the room, and so I have proceeded as if they constitute a complete program. (There is also evidence—Gadd 1934:22—that the reliefs themselves may have been selectively painted, as bits of black pigment still adhere occasionally to eyes, shoes, and bits of foliage.)

3 Although this is a hypothetical reconstruction, there is some evidence for the suggestion. Reade has cited the relief given in Stearns 1961:A-II-a-ii-12, Pl. 36, as the likely male genie at the far right, and the head of the king as possibly A-I-m-3 (see also Stearns 1961:24). Unfortunately, Layard (1849a:Pl. 100, plan III) noted three reliefs on his plan as Room C, slabs 6–8, but illustrated only a single detail of a garment pattern from slab 7 (ibid.:Pl. 39A). Nevertheless, the dimensions of the three slabs given across the wall (± 20 feet across, each slab therefore just under 7 feet) correspond exactly to the three slabs decorating the short, north end of Room G (Brandes 1969; Layard 1849a: Pl. 5). The three slabs from Room G (each 6'7" across) display a scene of the seated king flanked by fan bearers and genii with cone and bucket—figures exactly parallel also to those which flank the king as he stands opposite the "sacred tree" of slab 23 in the Throneroom.

4 This has been the subject of a long series of conversations with Jonathan Silver of Montclair College, New Jersey, and I hope that he will publish his studies on symmetry in the near future. I also had the privilege of discussing symmetry as a physical and physiological phenomenon with Dorothea and Leo Hurwich, of the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, following a lecture on symmetry in physics by Robert Schrieffer in the autumn of 1976. I am convinced that it is no accident cultic and mythico-religious scenes are selected for a symmetrical format, precisely because this disposition of figures, by virtue of its constructedness, does take the subjects out of the "real" world. I will not anticipate Jonathan Silver's conclusions about why this is so; but Dorothea Hurwich has noted that, physiologically, the eye seems to scan and process symmetrical images more quickly than asymmetrical ones. The transformation from strict bilateral symmetry to compositional balance achieved through opposed but not identical forms has been discussed by Gombrich (1966:95) and more recently by Summers (1979).

**5** The incorporation of conventional units into extended sequences is not unique in the Neo-Assyrian reliefs. It is a significant component of narrative in the visual arts of the Roman period, for example (Hamberg 1945:63, on the column of Trajan), and has been discussed as a device in literature as well (most recently, by White 1979:229). The governing factor must thus be the *intended* realism, whereby the stock motifs are embedded in contexts which also included "real," observed phenomena: here, terrain, foliage, dress, and behavior. It may also be that stock motifs included in such a context function in the narrative by being known and recognizable, thus allowing the viewer/reader to pass over them quickly in order to get to the more important points of narrative focus, an observation I owe to Mark Hall, student in Oriental Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

**6** A relief showing enemy in chariots, the chariots distinguishable by their 8- as opposed to 6-spoked wheels, that has been found in the Southwest Palace of Esarhaddon (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. CXVII), may also come from the Throneroom.

**7** The obeisance of one ruler to another depicted on slab 18b is not only repeated in later Neo-Assyrian representations (see below), but in fact has a long history in the iconography of the victorious king (Walter 1970:115) as a special vehicle for the expression of political dominance. It is at present impossible to tell whether the Assyrian officials who lead the procession of prisoners represent individuals within the royal entourage and court structure, or Assyrian regional appointees (a point raised by Michelle Marcus, Department of Art History, Columbia University, in a recent paper, and to be pursued further by her).

**8** There is no attempt at individuation of features here (what one would call "portraiture") to represent the king. Moscati (1963:69) has noted that physiognomic identifiability is not unlikely to accompany interest in the historical act, as it provides an added dimension of historicity in the depiction of specific individuals; but the Assyrians never seem to have pursued this.

**9** See discussion below on whether the organization of simpler narratives (slab 18a), closer to the throne, and more complex scenes (5b–3b), further down the western end of the south wall, was the result of conscious planning to increase the intensity of the scenic development or was simply a question of space and/or differing craftsmen. It is unfortunate in this regard that the north wall is not intact so that the two might be compared.

**10** I was pleased to see, after I had cut up photocopies of the slabs and divided them according to what I thought to be related sequences, that Reade's divisions corresponded with mine (see Reade 1979c).

**11** Olmstead (1918) tried to equate representations on the reliefs with accounts in the texts (see especially p. 247). Perhaps because he tried too hard to squeeze literal readings from the images, his attempt was apparently ignored and never made a place for itself in the scholarly literature.

**12** This is especially necessary as, in a recent lecture on the unpublished Assurnasirpal gates found by Mallowan and David Oates (Joan Oates, "Balawat: Recent Excavations and a New Gate," presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Feb. 23, 1981), bands were illustrated that seem to be identifiable as Suhi on the Middle Euphrates and included booty of ivory tusks—thus increasing the likely candidates for the sequence on slabs 18b-17b, for example. An intermediate step in verifying the present correlations might be to compare those scenes with labels from the bronze bands of Assurnasirpal's son, Shalmaneser III, also from Balawat (on which, see below). In a cursory survey, it would certainly seem that there is a good deal of correspondence: e.g., the strip indicating tribute from Sangara, king of Carchemish (King 1915: Pl. XXXIV), shows the king with simple hair-fillet, garment with fringe at bottom, and one arm raised, indeed identical to the leading figure in the procession of slabs 18b-17b, which I have tentatively suggested to be Carchemish, the unpublished Assurnasirpal gates notwithstanding. In addition, the campaign set in Urartu on the Shalmaneser gates (King 1915: Pls. VII–IX), with chariotry pitted

against fleeing and fallen enemy in a plain, is likewise parallel to scenes independently called Urartu here (slabs 11a-8a). Of course, this verification is not possible in all cases, as the two kings did not always campaign in the same place, but where there is correspondence, the comparisons might prove extremely useful. As for the accuracy and reliability of the details, much has been written on the presence of artists in the field with the army on military campaigns and exploratory expeditions, and the way in which Neo-Assyrian artists were able to render particular details about foreign regions, presumably through actual observation and the keeping of field sketches (see, most recently, Reade 1979b:23-26). It is to be assumed, therefore, that topographical features recorded in the reliefs did actually reflect the specific terrain, just as verbal descriptions did.

**13** See Jakobsen 1971:44 with regard to Dostoevsky, and how, in order to really show an object, it must be "tinted"—i.e., it is necessary to deform the shape it generally has, to call attention, so that the object may be picked up with appropriate focus.

**14** The establishment of a "new capital" is an important phenomenon in the Neo-Assyrian period, from Assurnasirpal at Nimrud to Sargon's installation at Khorsabad, to Sennacherib at Nineveh. The phenomenon in general terms has been discussed by Blanton (1976:esp. 257–258) with regard to the maintenance of neutral political capitals in complex high-order commercial systems. In the particular case before us, Liverani (1979:309) speaks of the foundation of a new capital as the ultimate creative act of the king as founder/hero, whose work thus becomes like the basic creative act of the gods. The two perspectives are not mutually exclusive; the complexity of the system in the first instance may be what can allow the statement of the king to take this particular form in the second. In any event, it is the initial act of Assurnasirpal that is the most significant, because previously the capital city, Assur, had been precisely the name-city and center of the chief god Assur, the people of the state the people "of Assur," a nomenclature significantly different from Mesopotamia in the south. The shift to Nimrud therefore broke the old focus around the god of the city-state and reflects a new imperial movement. Subsequent kings simply continued the pattern.

**15** Gorse (1980) cited a similar usage in the sixteenth-century Villa Doria in Genoa, where the heroic deeds of Andrea Doria are alluded to through opposed frescoes showing mythological battles on land and sea as metaphors for dynastic victory. It is also likely that Doria himself served as the model for both Neptune and Zeus in the two battles.

**16** The Akkadian word *ušumgallu*, which I translate as "predator," is a complicated term. It is a Sumerian loan word, often rendered as "dragon" (e.g., Grayson op. cit., Paley 1976), but I feel this equation must be questioned. In my pursuit of this word, I am grateful to Professor Åke Sjöberg, Babylonian Section of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, for his aid in going through the Sumerian dictionary files; and to Professor Thorkild Jacobsen of Harvard University for his comments. This is not the place to cite all specific references. However, there are a few instances in which Sumerian UŠUM.GAL is preceded by the determinative for snake, hence "dragon"; but in the vast majority of citations it is given merely as a creature or being searching for prey, or as an epithet for a god (e.g., Enki, god of the earth/sweet waters, who is *never* a dragon). Jacobsen would therefore prefer to translate the term literally as the "great (GAL) unique one," having several applications. It is especially significant that the noun *ušumgallu* in the Standard Inscription is followed by the adjective *ekdu*, "ferocious." This word, according to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, 1958:62–63, occurs basically in Neo-Assyrian texts and, outside of the Assurnasirpal usage, is applied only to wild bulls and lions. This fact greatly strengthens, I feel, the suggestion that the epithet for Assurnasirpal is to be directly equated with his appearance on the reliefs as the vanquisher of bulls and lions, a predator equal to the combat with his ferocious opponents. That the correlation of precisely four attributes and types of reliefs may reflect a structurally significant number in the Neo-Assyrian universe, parallel to the title "King of the Four Quarters" and to quadripartite divisions of the army and the administrative hierarchy of the royal palace (see Garelli 1974:140), must be pursued in another context.

**17** The only thing that is missing in the verbal account is the "approach" scene. It may be accounted for in the annalistic portion of the Standard Inscription; however, in terms of references to the "difficult road," the king was able to successfully lead his troops over (see Liverani 1979, and his analysis of these references as metaphors for the king's ability to lead in general).

**18** That such a relationship between the structure of verbal and visual compositions of a single culture should be demonstrable is not surprising, although it has been little explored in ancient art. Roman Jakobsen (1970) has done a study of the special isomorphic relationship between poetry and painting in three cases—England, France, and Germany—which would suggest the need for similar analyses of Sumerian and Akkadian literary compositions. Another aspect of the relationship between literary compositions and visual arts of our period was suggested some 20 years ago by Oppenheim (1960), when he discussed Sargon II's "Letter to the god Assur," that described the details of his eighth campaign against the territory of Musasir in the northwest. In that text, as in the reliefs, very specific details of the traversed landscape, battles, booty, etc., were described; all ultimately aimed at "illustrating the central figure of the king" (ibid.:134). What is most compelling in this text is that the "letter" (and presumably the whole category of Assyrian "letters to the gods") was clearly intended not to be quietly deposited in the temple, but rather to be *read in public* (ibid.:143); thus, narrative text and relief both also share aspects of public audience reception.

Finally, although I suggest this with great hesitancy, I wonder if not only individual epithets and basic principles, but also intrinsic structure and organization of the whole may not be identical in the Standard Inscription and decorative program of the Throneroom. I would draw the diagram as follows:

| Throneroom | Text |
|---|---|
| **1**—King himself on throne | (I am) Assurnasirpal |
| **2**—Slab 23: King flanking tree and Assur in winged disc | Vice-regent of Assur, beloved of the gods |
| **3**—Hunts and Battles (generic attributes; action: consequence) | Titulary I: attributes (action:consequences) |
| **4**—Individual battle sequences | Annalistic account of specific campaigns |
| **5**—King seated on throne (Room C reliefs visible) | Titulary II: more attributes (including "praiseworthy king") |
| **6**—Throneroom as a whole, plus Court D facade of tribute, as center of the palace (and of the Empire) | Description of building of palace, plus tribute, as center of the Empire |

*NOTE:* I do not include the anteroom, Room F, to the south of the Throneroom in this scheme; however, with its repetitive representations of genii, king, and sacred tree, one might say that it functioned, as did the rest of the palace, as a résumé of the essence of order made explicit in the Throneroom.

**19** I am indebted in this discussion to conversations with Elizabeth Meyers, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, who by pressing for a distinction between "rhetoric" and "propaganda," helped me to clarify the fuzzy area of overlap between the two, best understood if governed by "ideology," and the multiple levels of intention that can be simultaneously operative in the statements of that ideology. John Russell, also a student at the University of Pennsylvania, will pursue the relationship of meaning to audience in his dissertation on the reliefs of Assurbanipal, and has initially distinguished much more concisely than I the several components of that audience. In the present case, it is impossible to establish further the extent to which the gods may have been considered an "audience" for the reliefs, however, as the parallelism of text and image would clearly not have been expected to be perceptible to a predominantly nonliterate populace or foreign visitors.

**20** As articulated by Liverani (1979:308), the restoration of the older palace becomes an expression of the dual function of the king: to maintain balance between past and future, not just by founding the new but also by maintaining the old order (i.e., *re*-new).

**21** I think the placement of the Babylonian reliefs in Court XIX, with the Elamite campaigns in rooms to the right, Phoenician campaigns to the left, and Judea at the top, is again likely to be nonrandom. A programmatic study of the decorative scheme of the Palace of Sennacherib is badly needed; and now that Reade has accomplished the herculean task of correlating the published plates of reliefs with individual rooms (1979c:86–90), this task may be undertaken.

**22** The relationship between label and image in ancient Mesopotamian and Assyrian art is a subject which should be pursued. Not only were the bronze bands of the Balawat Gates of both Assurnasirpal and Shalmaneser III frequently accompanied by identifying inscription in
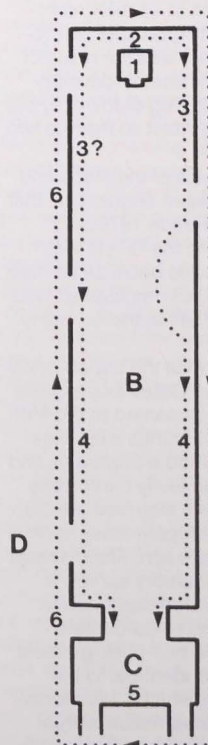
the upper field (see Barnett 1975; King 1915), but so also were earlier monuments, such as the Akkadian stele of Naram-Sin cited above. In addition, there is a series of Old Babylonian period (ca. 1800 B.C.) texts from Nippur that were apparently copies of the labels from other Akkadian monuments, now lost, that had been standing visible in the courtyard of the Enlil Temple in Nippur (some examples of which are preserved in the Babylonian Collection, University Museum; they will be published by P. Michalowski, to whom I am grateful for this communication). The incorporation of epigraphic labels on architectural reliefs, however, does not seem to have been employed until Sennacherib.

23 Garelli goes on to note, however, that from a modern perspective, despite territorial expansion, the state remains in effect a "realm" or "kingdom" more than an Empire—just as the rulers remain kings, never Emperors, their titles merely expanding to include dominion over "the totality." The term Empire has nonetheless continued to be used as a convenience for expressing the accretion of territory; but I think the distinction is an important one. It would make of Achaemenid Persia a substantially different degree of "Empire" in that while in Assyria there is still an attempt to see the expanded country as a single state effectively creating a homogeneous population from diverse peoples, the Achaemenids of the sixth to fifth century B.C. were the first to acknowledge the impossibility of this and emphasized rather variety in *subjects*, not just in external places conquered. Such a distinction would account further for many of the significant differences from Neo-Assyrian to Achaemenid art, many of which have been ably demonstrated by Root (1979).

24 Both explicit and implicit corroboration for this may be found in the work of several scholars. Chafe (1976:54–55) notes how, in order to get the message across, the sender must pay "due consideration to the current state of the listener's mind." Hannestad (1979:365) records the shift in Rome from Republic to Empire and the consequent changes from a rather esoteric iconography beamed at an educated elite to a "lower level of communication" aimed at a middle class and across a widespread geographical area. Finally, Liverani (1979:300) discusses how the central ideology of a conquering culture functions to suppress the culture and ideology of conquered/absorbed places, creating a "leveling out of culture throughout the Empire."

25 Anthropologists, on the other hand, have discussed symbol systems at length (Cohen 1969; Munn 1973; Firth 1973; Lévi-Strauss 1974:178–198); however, for the most part they have concentrated on far less complex societies. The questions are at least posed (see Cohen 1969:218, 232) regarding the role of symbols in relations of power, and the degree to which art is affected by and in turn affects political relationships.

26 Papers by P. Garelli, Université de Paris, and H. Tadmor, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, will eventually be published on this subject in Nissen and Renger, eds., *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn*, Proceedings of the XXV" Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, in Berlin, 1978.

27 As Reade has observed (1979a:332), once a region shifts status from an enemy or tributary state to a province within the Assyrian imperial bureaucracy, it is no longer depicted in reliefs, and this is relevant in the present context precisely because once the province has become part of greater Assyria, the emphasis must be on reinforcing membership and invoking common cause against the farther periphery, thus strengthening dependency on the center (see note 23).

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# Harry Fisher, Pathfinder to the Spirit: A View from Having Been There

## Michael E. Northrup

I found the Harry Fisher photographs (or vice versa) quite by accident, as is the case with most discoveries. And I find in his photographs a hint of mysticism that for me seems to originate from prehistory. Mr. Fisher's work, for me, is symbolic of something much more than the times he portrays; it brings me a feeling that I might trace to the earliest inhabitants of the same area that Fisher photographed.

Roughly a thousand years ago there lived in Marietta a people whose history is lost save for several burial mounds that have survived time and the elements. I've known these mounds since I was old enough to walk on them, and the mystery of their making is still a fascination to me. Added to this there existed an ancient road that connects the burial site, Turtle Mound, which lies in the center of town, with the river, Muskingum. This path became a city street about 150 years ago but still retains its link with its origin through its name, Sacra Via, the sacred way.

When I look at these ancient earthworks, I can't help feeling that, although the religion of these people must have been the dominant law in their life, something with immense spiritual influence, beyond their religion, affected their lives. And having been born in Marietta myself, and having lived there for a quarter of a century, I have a sensation of what that incredible influence might have been. It was the land where Marietta now sits, at the point where two rivers, once rich in fish and soil nutrients, blend to enrich the already Edenlike landscape. The wild game were great in variety and number, the weather a beautiful balance of four seasons and the earth ideal for life with open fields, abundant hardwood forests, and rolling hills.

These people are gone, and much of the game too. But the land is still there, and the two rivers still meet, and it is all still beautiful, with a subtle power.

Five years ago Nancy Stout, who is also a native of Marietta, was appointed to the Historic Preservation Office at Marietta College, at which time she embarked on a project to preserve local architecture having historic value. I was asked to assist her in photographing certain sites for documentation, and to aid our own research we visited the college's library for whatever local visual material we could find. In a well-kept storage-reference room constituting the top floor of the library we found about fifteen file cabinet drawers packed thick with negatives (some 14,000) known to have been made by Harry Fisher.

This work would have gone up in flames had it not been for an old friend who heard, shortly after Fisher's death, that his negatives were going to be burned. He immediately raced to the old studio and, with permission of the family, gained custody of the collection. Realizing their historic value, my friend gave the negatives to Marietta College for safekeeping. They now rest in the same condition as they were when given to the college some 25 years ago—wrapped in crumbling paper envelopes rich in sulfur, negatives in contact with each other; I could go on forever....For three months I was given the freedom to pull from the collection images that strongly reflected the period of Fisher's life. And for those three months I printed nearly every day whatever findings I'd made. It was intense, and in a way I was alone with this work. The darkroom can be like a vehicle in all its isolation, and it is possible to make profound visits to other places and times.

In moving back and forth from Harry Fisher's time to mine, I experienced a remarkable difference in the Marietta of then and now. The more obvious changes were in clothing, appliances, and other superficial aspects of both eras. But most importantly there was a change of spirit. Since this work was connected to a project in preservation, it faced me with the problem of deciding what should be preserved. It was this search that led me to understand that behind all those Victorian houses, behind all those planted fields, behind all those faces, and behind the very making of those 14,000 negatives is a spirit of and for life. It is this human spirit that is to be preserved, this spirit that even the moundbuilders held in the highest esteem. The survival of the burial mounds is a testament to their great concern with preservation of the human spirit.

It is this human spirit that I find so different today from that of Fisher's time. Now it is TV and "mega-business" that dominate our culture. These two activities are dehumanizing, and in a time before their development, such as Fisher's, people were different. Stimulation must have begun inside each person, giving birth to imagination and spirit. Fisher's pictures reflect a more animated people with a life-supporting need to interact. Of course, many conditions of Fisher's time must have contributed to this spirit. At the turn of the century when Fisher was about 20, Marietta experienced its greatest growth. There was an oil boom, a great river transportation system stimulating local business, a still active migration of wealthy easterners to the west, bringing with them money and culture, and a world war in the making, bringing people alive with patriotism.

*Michael E. Northrup was born and raised in Marietta, Ohio. His interest in photography began at age 21, after he had tried other professional studies from commercial flight training to petroleum engineering. He is presently teaching at the University of Virginia.*

Adding to the already existing spirit, Fisher has a way of intensifying that very element in his photographs. I would find it difficult to discuss this work in terms of art, as our definition of art is always changing. There has been in the past 5 years a growing interest in the snapshot, and although there it has a non-intrusive quality, I feel that Fisher's records go much farther. They are powerful and clear documentation. Powerful because one is faced "smack up against" the subject. It is not diluted with excessive self-consciousness or an imposed subjective point of view. It is *straight on*. The subject is made clear not only by large format and good optics but through Fisher's strong sense of basic photographic structure, and it is his sense of order that helps penetrate to the heart of the subject.

One might even see Fisher's use of the camera as akin to some Eastern thought in that his camera is like a stream leading to each image and he merely keeps the current flowing rather than trying to change its course. It is not passively but rather actively helping the camera to perform its greatest function: to document.

Another aspect of Fisher that delights me is his deep enjoyment of this medium, photography. As I look at some thirty random photographs, I can see that many were made on commission but that many others were made on his own initiative for his own enjoyment. Yet all seem to be made with an equal fascination for the subject. This consistency about his work I find admirable.

Fisher was quite caught up in all that life, and, I sense, quite affected by more than just his own present. There is something incredibly influential about that land that is seen or sensed by some locals from each generation. Spirit is a vital and timeless element, and when it is displayed it can embrace the mind and heart. I feel Fisher's work profoundly does this to me.

## Biographical Note

Harry P. Fisher was born in Marietta, Ohio, in 1879, and lived there nearly all his life. In those years he made approximately 14,000 negatives of that local culture, which are nearly all that survive him. Just as it was his position to observe and record, always placing himself behind the camera, so he went through life somewhat unnoticed. These photographs, and Mrs. Max Farley, who was his receptionist for nearly 30 years, give us a bit of his history.

Fisher's schooling was completed at the Marietta Academy in 1896, giving him something equivalent to a high school diploma. For most of his adolescence Fisher worked in his father's shoe store until, at the age of 22, he opened a photography studio on Front Street, near the wharf, at the union of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers.

Fisher devoted his early work to documenting river boats, making some 1,100 glass plates which were printed as postcards. This satisfied two needs: an aesthetic one, stemming from an early-born fascination for this popular river craft, and a financial one, as river boats and postcards made a perfect union and sold well.

As this business developed, he accepted all types of subject matter and for over 40 years photographed nearly everything under the sun, either for commission or for some other kind of gratification. Of all those photographs Fisher made I feel sure that the portraits were his favorite work. One need only see the subjects' response to him and vice versa. These portraits are both spirited and elegant.

I also find it interesting to note that not only did Fisher make photographs of almost anything but at almost any time of day and almost any place. Portraits at night were made with flash powder or flash bulb, and interiors with several electric lights which Fisher would move around himself during long exposures, thereby rendering a room shadowless. And during the day he would always rely on natural light whether on location or in his studio.

The place didn't matter much either. There are photographs made in orchards, of floods from inside a rowboat (including some interiors during that phenomenon), in stone quarries, from over the Muskingum in midwinter, and so on....As if the location weren't challenging enough, Fisher made sure that the documentation was made with great clarity, taking his 8-by-10-inch view camera everywhere, even on those shaky boats during seasonal floodings.

To assist him in the making of those 14,000 negatives Fisher trained two assistants: a receptionist, who also did developing and printing; and a lab assistant, who helped with the greatest bulk of work. His business was housed in a converted riverfront store boasting a reception room, an office, dressing rooms, and a studio on the first floor, and a workshop on the second floor where processing was done. The skylight was on the back of the building. This was the way he worked for more than 40 years, right up to his death.

INTERIOR OF
ANTI SUFFRAGE PLACE
MARIETTA O.
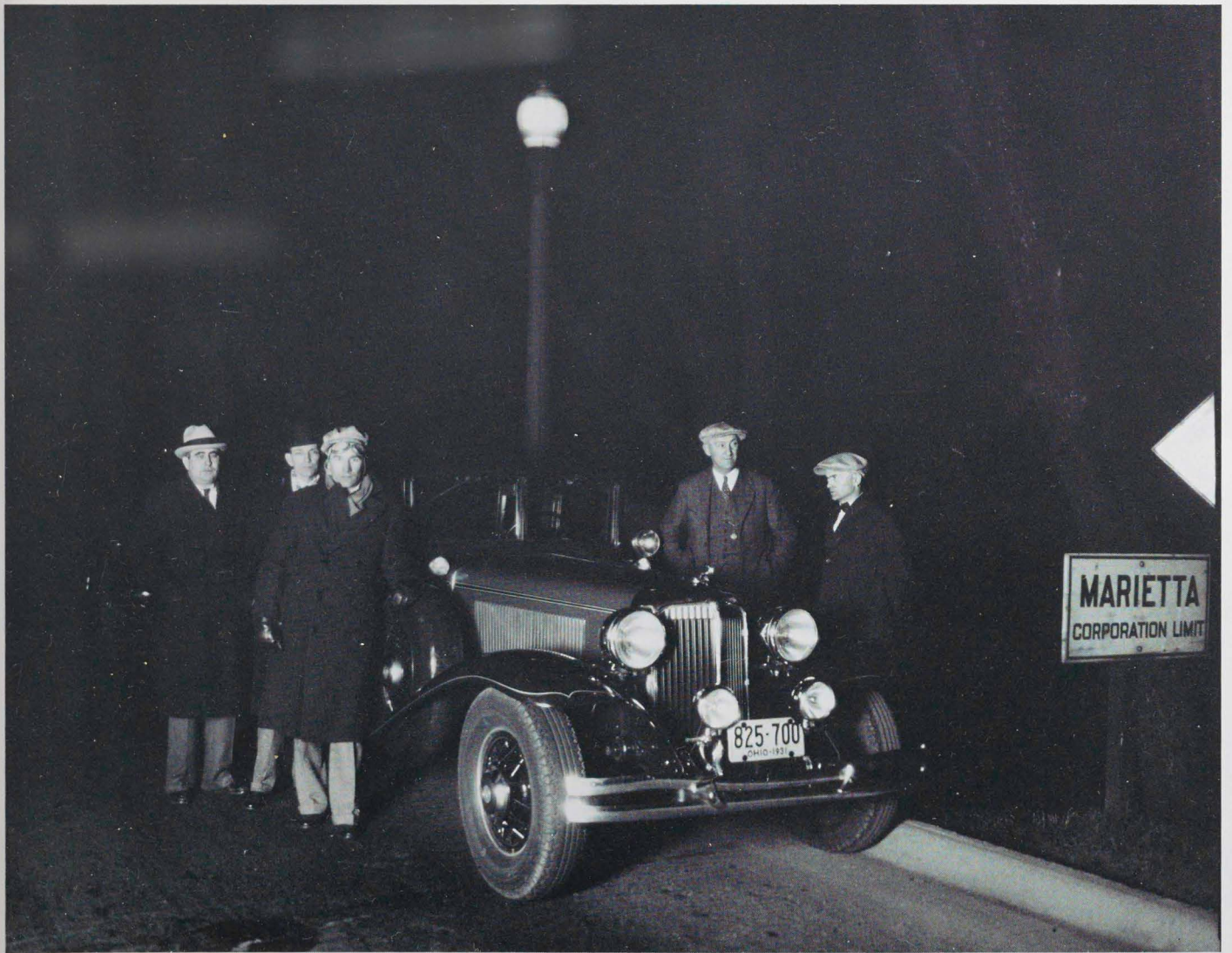
# Miscreation

## Richard Shiff

## Introduction

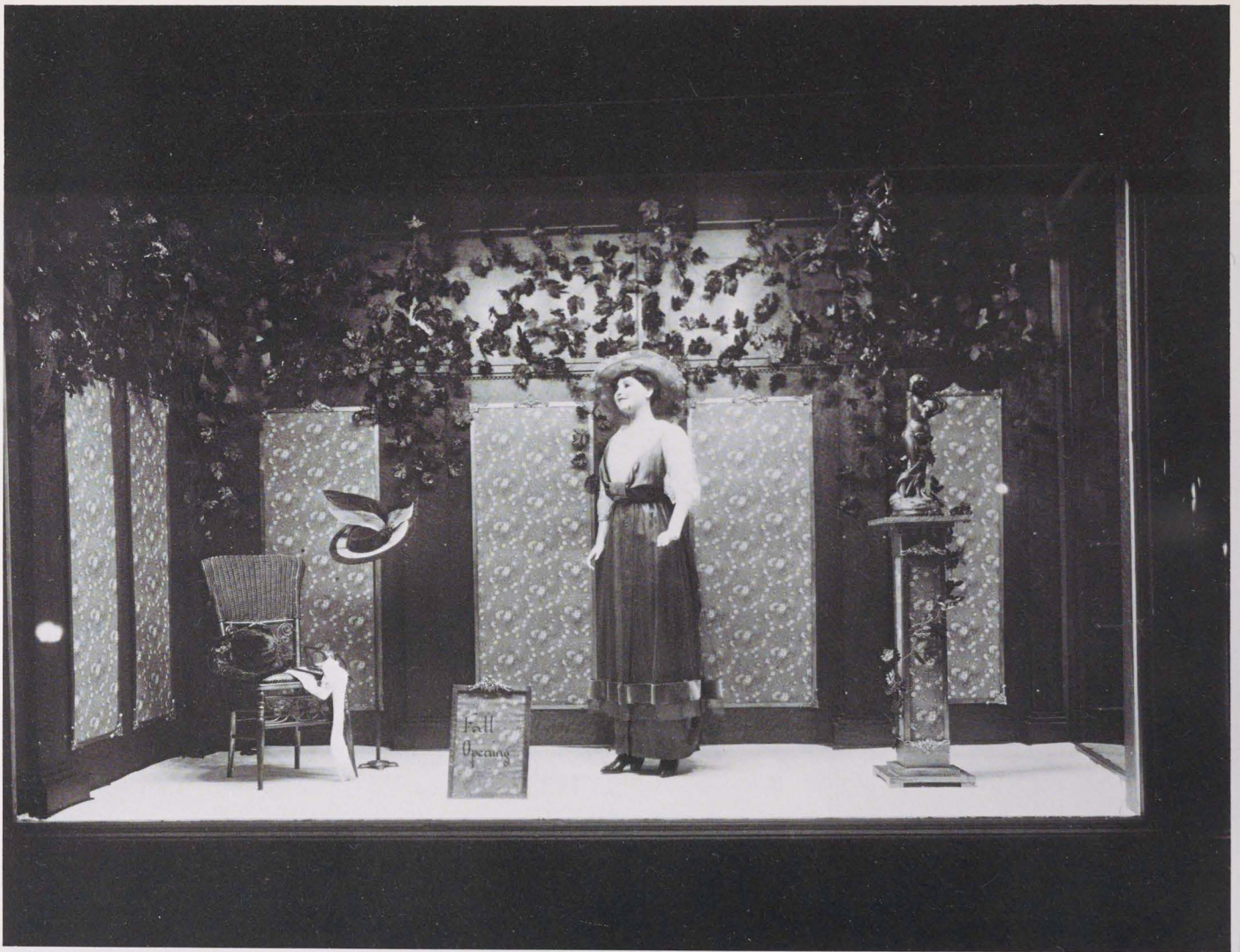Many modern critics of art have regarded criticism as an art in itself. The critical account has its origin in the work of art but strikes out on its own, perhaps to extend the artistic world formed by the object of its scrutiny or even dialectically to confront that world and re-form it into yet another creation. In such critical practice, strict evaluation of new artistic constructs, in terms of old or traditional norms, may in itself be considered bad form; judgment of this kind binds human creativity to a fixed center by a chain of finite length, and the circle of creative activity cannot expand. Yet, as I will ultimately argue in this essay, the critic's first responsibility is to his own fixed principles, not the rude innovations of an unfamiliar art. Criticism has good reason to maintain its critical distance from art and to challenge malformed creations, miscreations, wherever they appear.

The notion of miscreation readily calls forth visual images. We may think of grotesque mutations, combinations of unrelated species or improperly formed beings with the wrong placement or number of limbs. We may even conjure up a familiar object, distorted with regard to its internal proportional relationships— a chair with legs of four different lengths. Such images challenge conventional definitions and are inherently both frightening and comical; our specific emotional response will depend upon the context in which we encounter these bizarre constructions that confuse our rational order.

Images that may threaten are often transformed into ones that provide humor through the art of caricature. The foreign warmonger looks funny and harmless in the political cartoon. Alternatively, caricature may exaggerate a form so that its largely hidden impropriety stands revealed. Caricature both employs and exposes miscreation. Thus, in order to investigate the relation of a modern critic to a work of art— an adversary relationship where creation may appear as miscreation—we shall study examples of caricature as well as art which lends itself to caricature. But first we must understand what makes the modern critic specifically "modern"; we must consider his tendency to subject his evaluation of creativity to a judgment of originality. When originality is at stake, questions of creation become especially difficult.

*Richard Shiff is Associate Professor of Art at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is presently completing a book on Cézanne, impressionism, and the issue of originality in art.*

## Part I

"To create something means to make it non-technically, but yet consciously and voluntarily." Such was R. G. Collingwood's definition of artistic creation made in 1938. In his concern to distinguish artistic activity from technical procedure, or, more simply, to distinguish art from craft, Collingwood was typical of his time, and even of our time. He argued that, although human creation was distinct from divine creation, it was yet a pure bringing into being, not a mere transformation of preexisting material. Works of art, Collingwood writes,

> are not made as means to an end; they are not made according to any preconceived plan; and they are not made by imposing a new form upon a given matter. Yet they are made deliberately and responsibly, by people who know what they are doing, even though they do not know in advance what is going to come of it.
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> The creation which theologians ascribe to God is peculiar in one way and only one. [The peculiarity] is that in the case of his act there lacks not only a prerequisite in the shape of a matter to be transformed, but any prerequisite of any kind whatsoever. [In contrast,] in order that a work of art should be created, the prospective artist...must have in him certain unexpressed emotions, and must also have the wherewithal to express them....
>
> The artistic experience is not generated out of nothing. [1938:128—130, 273][1]

Still, for Collingwood, works of human art may be "original," like God's creations, despite their contingency and the need for an artistic medium or language. He writes that

> Every genuine [artistic] expression must be an original one....The artistic activity does not "use" a "ready-made language", it "creates" language as it goes along. [1938:275][2]

Collingwood takes pains to argue that artistic expression is not restricted by preexisting expressive patterns. In effect, he seeks to deny any fully determining role to the world of discourse and technical procedure in which the artist is situated, although this situation is surely a major aspect of what he calls the "circumstances" that facilitate creation, circumstances to which God is not held. Collingwood is cognizant of the importance of the medium when he writes that "there is no way of expressing the same feeling in two different media" and that a conscious (or imaginative) "idea is had as an idea only in so far as it is expressed [in a medium]." But the defining force of the medium itself seems to dissipate as Collingwood approaches the logical extreme of his own

position—"every word [i.e., every objectified artistic
expression] as it actually occurs in discourse, occurs
once and once only" (1938:245, 249, 256).[3]
Artistic language does not await its use in repetition;
man "creates" language as he "goes along." Every
expression is original.

For Collingwood, then, artistic translation must
always be problematic. In the broader view, what
can be expressed in French cannot be conveyed in
English; in the finer aspect, what can be said with one
word at one time cannot be said with another, or even
with the same, at another time. To use the same words
self-consciously to mean the same thing a second
time, is, for Collingwood, to deny expression and to
convert art to cliché (1938:245, 275—276). In a recent
publication, Northrop Frye points similarly to the degree
of "re-creative" translation in any proper appreciation
of another's artistic expression, or indeed in any
appreciation of God's creation (1980: 64 ff). Human
creation, for both Collingwood and Frye, thus cannot
be confined to imitative *representation* but involves
an original *expression* (Collingwood) or an original
*re-creation* (Frye). Curiously, the accounts of both
Collingwood and Frye indicate that mere representa-
tion, if it were desired, would be no simple matter.
Representation would fail because of the impossibility
of any perfected translation. Something, if only the
intangible sincerity of expression of which Collingwood
speaks, would be altered. Hence, even mere represen-
tations, in differing from their "originals," would be
unique and original to some degree, however accidental
this originality might seem. Do Collingwood and Frye
(along with many others) confer privilege on genuine
artistic creation by ascribing to it an originality that is
*consciously* generated?[4] The unique aspect of any
human creation might result equally well from the
inevitable failure of language or mediated communi-
cation as from a heroic struggle to gain knowledge of
one's self and others.

Although he remains undaunted, Collingwood does
not speak to this issue with his customary certitude.
He admits, in fact he willingly asserts, that

> community of language is not [prior to its use]. One does
> not first acquire a language and then use it. To possess
> it and to use it are the same. We only come to possess it
> by repeatedly and progressively attempting to use it.
>
> The reader may object that if what is here maintained
> were true there could never be any absolute assurance,
> either for the hearer or the speaker, that the one had
> understood the other. That is so; but in fact there is no
> such assurance. The only assurance we possess is an
> empirical and relative assurance, becoming progressively
> stronger as conversation proceeds, and based on the fact
> that neither party seems to the other to be talking non-
> sense. The question whether they understand each other
> *solvitur interloquendo* [is settled in the talking]. If they

understand each other well enough to go on talking, they
understand each other as well as they need; and there
is no better kind of understanding which they can regret
not having attained. [1938:250—251; cf. 309]

But, we might argue, there is, indeed, a better kind
of understanding—a silence, an end to the talking.
Continuing communication, continuing attempts at
communication, may indicate a continuing doubt or
misunderstanding. Conversation remains subject to
the refractions of mediation or translation; only silence
is unmediated. Does silence, not conversation, indicate
agreement? Or is it merely lack of communication?
Collingwood does not explore this problem, for he
associates human language and human creation with
a life of change and growth, a continuing creation
(like Frye's process of re-creation), which is not limited
by time, but defines it. Only silence escapes time and
the question of origin; true silence, unlike a mere pause
in conversation, is immeasurably repetitious, lacking
even the differentiation of temporal displacement. An
end to the talking, to the linguistic exchange, would
signify an end to Collingwood's emotional expression,
or, alternatively, the final convergence and identity of
Frye's re-creation with its antecedent (and ultimately
divine) creation. Continuous silence would signify either
a stasis of death or of an eternal life, but not the
changing, transient human condition we know.[5]

Collingwood's sense of originality involves much
more than the uniqueness of displacement, difference,
or alterity.[6] It establishes a primacy and a subsequent
hierarchical process of communication in which con-
scious meaningful expression is privileged. Technical
procedures evident in acts of human creativity are
subordinated to the demanding presence of emotional
experience, the living origin. The meaning of a work
of art comes into being by means of an artistic language
which is somehow guided by human will to embody
meaning. Although artistic meaning does not exist
prior to artistic creation, it seems the essential core
toward which any conscious act of will is directed.
Hence, exchanges of meaning, conversations, have
for Collingwood more than arbitrary or accidental sig-
nificance; genuine discovery, communication, and
sharing of meaning occur. For post-Structuralist critics,
such as Jacques Derrida, this hierarchical relationship
might call for "deconstruction" (1977, esp. 195).
One might wish to investigate the hidden consequences
of privileging originality and unique, even "discovered,"
meaning as essential qualities of artistic creation.

Collingwood must indeed admit that human creation,
unlike divine creation, involves some technical pro-
cedure, a specific process of making that may be
known to many. In general, human creative activity is
conceived as mediated, having an internal logic and
running a finite course through time—such are its
"circumstances."[7] An example of a "creative" activity

Collingwood would *not* consider art serves to demonstrate the importance of our awareness of this mediation, despite its secondary role in Collingwood's system. When a magician waves his arm and a rabbit appears, the adults in the audience assume some special technique has been employed; the rabbit is not created immediately and out of nothing, but as a result of a process which may have escaped the notice of both adults and children. One assumes that the magician knows full well that the rabbit will appear. Because the magician has preconceived the end of his "art," his activity is not art in Collingwood's terms, but craft. Yet, without an allowance for the technical procedure *that was not observed,* one would have to admit to having witnessed some genuine transcendent "art" rather than the performance of an ultimately material skill or "craft." This mere magic, denigrated by Collingwood, would become a truly magical art. The rabbit would become an unforeseen and original expression, the expression of a most powerful being who can bring forth not only living language, but life itself. Humans, however, should not create, or even procreate, rabbits. We may laugh at the miscreation of the magic act because we know it results from mere clever craft. But would the comical act of miscreation evoke fright, rather, if its magic were perceived as "real?" How extreme a case of creation—extreme in its independence from craft—can we tolerate?

Despite our need to assume the mediation of technical procedure in the case of the magician's creation, modern critics have freely associated *artistic* creativity with genius and originality; these qualities, like magical appearances of the most mysterious sort, seem disjunctive and independent of any known generative or mediating process. In the case of art, in other words, we willingly expose ourselves to potential miscreation of the sort we refuse to acknowledge in magic. We may grant that Collingwood's sense of artistic language seems to allow for both mediation and originality, so that art can maintain a footing in both rational expression and free discovery—this is the appeal of Collingwood's theory. Still, such an open concept of artistic means precludes certain kinds of judgments, or at least makes them impractical. Given the innovative nature of artistic language itself, we are led to establish fixed categories, corresponding to modes of activity, in order to contain that language in its proper place. As a result, we cannot judge magicians as we would artists, simply regarding the consequences of their immediate actions without necessarily applying a standard of craft. We seem to expect a standardization in magicians' acts that we do not expect from "artists'." One act of creating a rabbit is regarded like any other, but one act of painting is not like the others before it nor the others to come. If we do not expect paintings to be alike, how then can we know who is a true artist? Is anyone who makes

any painting an artist? Do we judge simply by distinguishing the medium employed, the means of creation? If so, one conclusion is indeed simple: those who produce rabbits are practicing magic, while those who produce paintings are practicing art.

Paintings, as works of art, are original; yet each may result from the same general creative technique. The procedures of artistic creation are shared like the magician's tricks, while the distinguishing artistic originality, supposedly lacking in magic acts, seems to arise "out of nothing." Despite the fact that we frequently use the terms "original" and "creative" as near equals in everyday speech, they have the potential to diverge, just as "art" differentiates itself from repetitive magical performance. Creativity seems more naturally linked to technical procedure than does originality. Magic acts do not have to be original to be good.

In general, judgments of creative technique seem capable of standing on a more rational foundation than do judgments of originality. According to the shared conventions of the medium, one can investigate whether a work has been made properly, efficiently, or elegantly. The judgment of originality, in contrast, is bound to the living person of the artist as a source of expression; the sincerely searching failure may thus appear more praiseworthy than the facile technical success. When the critic considers originality of primary importance in the act of creation, defining creation (as Collingwood does, for example) in terms of originality, judgments of creativity cannot depend upon an evaluation of technical excellence. Good magic may result from a good hand, but such skillful manipulation will not guarantee good art. Whenever creativity is associated with originality, the factor of rational making becomes secondary. The value of craftsmanship is cast into doubt, and questions of technique become confused. Miscreations arise from this critical chaos.

## Part II

"Miscreation" is a word rarely used today; it is an evasive term, yet part of the family of the more familiar "creation." Its difficulty does not lie in the prefix "mis-" that calls our attention to deviance. We all make mistakes, misinterpret, and even misbehave. We are often misinformed, suffer mishaps, and at times may feel misanthropic. Few of us, however, are likely to be called "miscreant," a strongly pejorative term that bears upon "miscreation" when we consider the practice of criticism.

Possibly, "miscreant" and "miscreation" share a remote linguistic origin. The rare words "creant" and "miscreance" have a double existence, deriving in their first sense (believing/misbelief) from the Latin *credere,* and in their second (creating/misgrowth, misshaping,

miscreation) from the Latin *creare*. Whether or not the two forms of "miscreance" relate to a single distant source, "miscreant" and "miscreation" seem to converge semantically in some sense of education or development, entailing both belief (or principle) and growth. I wish to argue that the judgment of an act of creation/miscreation, when associated with originality, does, indeed, bear strongly upon, and can be correlated with, a judgment of the belief (or heresy) of the creator. A modern sense of creation, in other words, with its focus upon originality, brings issues of belief and social value into question. Furthermore, I will argue that the evaluating judge or critic must play a negative role, revealing fraud but never (save by indirection) "creative genius." Finally, I will relate miscreation to the interpretive strategies of the critic and art historian.
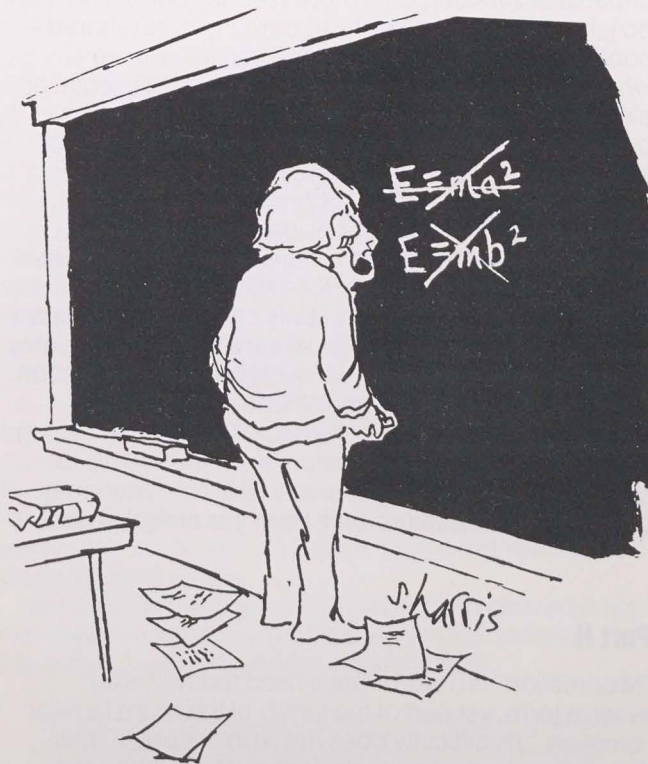


**Figure 1**    Sidney Harris. Cartoon for *American Scientist*, reprinted in *Time*, CXIII, 8 (Feb. 19, 1979): 75.

## Part III

As I have noted, caricature both employs and exposes miscreation. In addition, caricature plays upon our sense of conventional wisdom or shared, received opinion; it reveals the gap between what is readily accepted and what challenges belief. So we begin our study of images of creation and created images with two humorous drawings that comment on works of "creative genius," that is, works which might claim both creative (technical) excellence and originality. These drawings are potentially destructive of the dignity of their subjects. Both suggest the relationship between creation and miscreation. The first deals with Albert Einstein and the realm of science, and the second with Edouard Manet and the realm of art. We leave open for the moment the question of whether scientific and artistic creativity are generally evaluated in the same manner.

Sidney Harris economically represents Einstein with the familiar pipe and baggy clothing and the distinctive amorphous tussled hair—the product of "neglect," as Einstein himself put it (Figure 1). Harris renders Einstein's personal eccentricity distinctly; he is not the neatly groomed Niels Bohr, another "genius," but one who never attracted the same public attention to his physical presence. Einstein's environment seems as disorderly as does his person: papers are scattered about. There is surely no great sense of authority here, yet we recognize the figure's special identity, in particular because of the immanent presence of the formula $E=mc^2$. The correlation of energy with mass by means of the factor of "the speed of light" has generated useful physical models as well as powerful imaginative fictions. Yet Einstein, the author of the equation that inspired both scientists and artists, remains undignified, his activity in a certain disorder, or rather in an improper order. His mathematical, theoretical speculation seems as given to chance ("neglect") as is his physical appearance. He works systematically, but his system is one of nonsense. He tries out $E=ma^2$; it doesn't go. $E=mb^2$ is no better. Lucky Einstein, we laugh, he got it on the third try; if the symbol for the speed of light had been as anonymous and antepenultimate as "x," he would have been up late into the night.

Einstein's accomplishment, the creation of the formula $E=mc^2$, is here shown to be a product of chance, and hence created, as it were, out of nothing, through no consciously meaningful procedure. Whether this amounts to an admirable act of genius or perspicacity, as opposed to a mere lucky break, will depend upon the viewer's ultimate identification of Einstein as "one of them" or "one of us." Is he one of an alien class of distinct geniuses? Or is all apparent genius contingent upon chance occurrence, so that some day we might all have our own moments of great

discovery? In either case, genius, in popular commentary, is depicted as disjunctive, independent of rational procedure. As Roland Barthes has pointed out, direct *"photographs* of Einstein show him standing next to a blackboard covered with mathematical signs of obvious complexity; but *cartoons* of Einstein (the sign that he has become a legend) show him chalk still in hand, and having just written on an empty blackboard, as if without preparation, the magic formula of the world" (1972:69).[8] Einstein is well known to have denied a role to chance, both in the physical universe and in his own creative process (Wertheimer 1959:69). Yet the evidence of cartoon and caricature indicates that in the popular mind *his scientific creations appeared as works of art,* as original as could be, discovered like (in Barthes' words) "a basic element, a principial substance," independent of any complex, rational generative procedure.

If the Harris caricature makes Einstein seem more like one of us, subject to our own chance discoveries, his *personal* achievement is thus belittled. Still, Einstein's theory of relativity is seen very much as his own creation; we wonder whether this scientific "fact" could have been observed by another mind. It seems as if Einstein has—in god-like fashion and, paradoxically, perhaps in spite of himself—created something out of nothing. Although college freshmen can be taught to perform Einstein's mathematical proof, the essence of the creative act does not seem to lie in this acquired mathematical skill. As Polanyi and Prosch notes, "Once a scientist has made a discovery or an engineer has produced a new mechanism, the possession of these things by others requires little effort of the imagination" (1978:85). Perhaps there was, indeed, some luck involved in the difficult original discovery; perhaps Einstein was, at that moment, as confused or as astounded as his caricaturists might imply.

Einstein's creation may appear threateningly foreign to his audience; and in caricature, it might even frighten the scientist himself. The popularized version of the Frankenstein story reveals that when chance is introduced into scientific procedure, the result can be monstrous, an obvious case of miscreation. Although not a living monster, $E=mc^2$ may yet be a very imposing figure, not only because of its ultimate incomprehensibility, its disconnection from simpler common knowledge, but because it is formed from the "foreign" symbolic language of higher mathematics. Significantly, the caricaturist chooses to identify Einstein with this seemingly opaque language, still further removed from our everyday reality than is the strangely awkward man himself. The special language facilitates the scientist's thought, yet will seem to deflect our own

attempts at penetration. And so it is the language itself, the scientist's means of expression and discovery, that may suffer at the interpretive hands of the trivializing caricaturist—the generating principle of Einstein's symbolically coded message becomes nothing more than the sequence of the alphabet. He merely proceeds from *a* to *b* to *c*.

Because "original" creation appears as the making of something out of nothing or the production of something greater than the sum of its parts—the creation of new value or significance—the caricaturist, reintroducing common sense, shows that, in fact, out of nothing will come nothing and out of something, nothing more. Let us consider our second example of caricature, this one from the realm of artistic creativity. As in our scientific case, the creative means of expression, the artistic symbolism, comes most directly under attack. Cham's humorous representation of Manet's *Incident in the Bull Ring* (Figures 2 and 3) exaggerates to absurdity the technical features for which the artist was known.[9] Manet's painting exhibited only a limited range of modeling; he would employ two or three tones within a given area of local color where five or six might be demanded by conventional practice. Cham represents Manet's painting as an image of the crudest silhouettes; there is no modeling at all, no sense of gradation from dark to light, merely black on white in its barren flatness. To his caricature, Cham added the following caption: "Having had to complain of his paint supplier, Manet resolves henceforth to employ only his inkwell."

Cham succeeds in impugning both Manet's technique and the artistic intention which informed it. For Émile Zola, Manet's public spokesman, this artist wished merely to express himself and his own environment; simply put, he wished only to paint what he actually saw in his own individual experience. His task necessarily became a heroic one, radically creative, as soon as he realized that he could not depend upon inherited artistic convention but must draw forth his technical means from an intelligent use of materials directed by his own immediate vision. In other words, according to Zola, Manet subordinated his creativity to his originality. Zola and other sympathetic critics argued that Manet's "summary" system of modeling could adequately express the artist and his special world particularly because this attenuated modeling ultimately was independent of convention.[10] Zola's recognition, however, could come as a challenge to those less concerned with individuality who would accept a mode of vision already established. Wary of fraud, the caricaturist Cham thus proceeds to accuse Manet of ignoble intention or trivial concern, attributing his reduced modeling not to the authenticity of his vision, but, in the end, to a lack of rapport with his

paint seller. In Cham's representation, this suspect modeling becomes not merely diminished, but unrecognizable as any valid variation of standard practice. We see only flat, cut-out forms gesturing with a resultant lack of expressive refinement. Manet sought to create a powerful art with limited means; Cham represents this limitation as extreme deprivation that can generate no richness, but only an impoverished expression. Manet, according to Cham, rejects a valid technique of painting, replacing it by far inferior means from which he can bring forth no more than the given —from something very slight comes nothing grander. Manet's attempt at creation fails; it is, in terms of the artistic achievements of its day, misconceived, misinformed, and misformed—a miscreation.

## Part IV

At this point our caricatures call forth a potential similarity in valid scientific and artistic procedure, for we see that Cham seems to suggest that the visual artist, like the scientist, might deserve more personal credit if his achievement were attributable to a directed application of technique. Perhaps the artist has no more cause than the scientist to respond solely to immediate feeling. Just as Harris could challenge Einstein's "genius" by showing his discovery to be the product of chance, so Cham seems to make Manet's choice of technique depend upon an extraneous condition—Manet, angered at his paint merchant, has been led to use only black ink rather than a range of colored pigments. Thus, Manet's reduction of modeling is portrayed not as the product of reason but of a situation outside his complete control and unrelated to the artistic problem at hand. Traditionally, however, acts of both artistic and scientific genius have been held to be directed by uncontrolled inspiration or impulses that may indeed originate outside the world of reason—Plato, we know, referred to "divine madness."[11] But there is nothing of the divine in either Cham's presentation of Manet or Harris's depiction of Einstein. Cham's caricature displaces Manet's putative lofty inspiration so that his external motivating force becomes an otherwise trivial aspect of the material situation in which he finds himself. Similarly, Harris humanizes the ethereal Einstein to the point where



**Figure 2**    Cham. Manet's *Incident in the Bull Ring* (1864), from *Charivari*, May 22, 1864.

**Figure 3**    Edouard Manet. *The Dead Toreador* (1864). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Widener Collection.

the common man may identify with his simple-minded determination; it takes no divine force to make one's way through the order of the alphabet. Nor is Einstein's discovery attributable to the great power of his reason. How then do we evaluate it?

At issue here is a problem that arises in the evaluation of all types of creative invention: from the point of view of the outside observer or critical interpreter (the caricaturist in our two specific cases), the creation must appear the product of rational procedure if it is indeed to be judged rationally. The humor in caricatures of creation derives not only from the accusatory posture that the caricaturing public takes toward the threatening foreign object, exposing its miscreation, but also from the implied attempt to find rational foundation where there can be none. Creation, conceived as original invention, can remain within no conventional system of rational order. As Barthes noted, it is perceived as genuine magic—in this case the "rabbit" appears *without* our assumption of its dependence on technical procedure.

The issue can be stated somewhat differently: all "original" creation is likely to be regarded as miscreation, and indeed all such creation *is* miscreation. During a period when creativity is generally identified with originality, "miscreation" becomes an unnecessary term, a redundancy, and we are not surprised to have observed, at the start, that it is an obsolete word, only rarely used during our own age. "Miscreation" does not stand to "creation" as "misbelief" to "belief"

or "misbehavior" to "behavior." Systems of belief and patterns of behavior are established socially and shared among individuals. False beliefs and improper behavior are usually easily recognized and held up in contrast to the norm. In the case of the most radical creation, there seems to be no norm, for something new appears that is not merely a variation on the old. Such creation in any area must appear deviant from what reason would lead us to expect; and if any norm is to be applied, the creation will appear to be miscreation. All "original" creation is deviant. All such creation is miscreation.
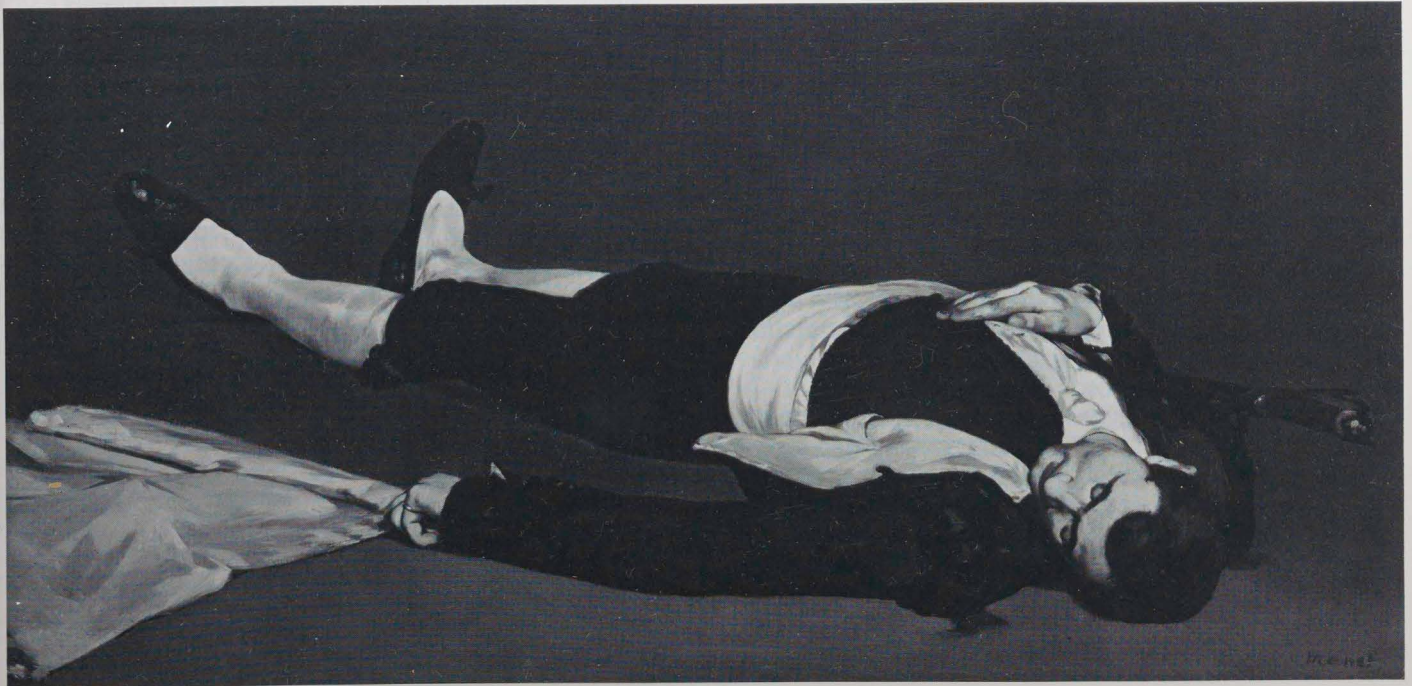
## Part V

Much in our experience must be associated with the individual, yet evaluated socially. Social judgments imposed upon individuals do not deny individuality but frame it, restrict it to the realm of the assimilable. In attempting to preserve our values, we tend to be more troubled by deviance than by outright negation. One who holds a belief that seems a false variant of the prevailing belief becomes more of an immediate problem than one who holds no belief or whose values are so displaced that he seems simply insane. And those who misbehave are much more disturbing than those who do not behave at all.[12] A behavioral void signifies an annihilation, a physical death, or perhaps a total failure of will. While the prospect of annihilation, negative creation, normally seems remote, we must continually *live* with flawed creation, miscreation. Annihilation, even if it should occur, will either appear as a clearly distinct and very special phenomenon or will escape our notice, just as the fact that conversations end in silence seems to have escaped Collingwood's full attention (1938: 250-251). In other words, the loss of an object through annihilation, or the end of artistic expression in silence, may be mistaken for a mere misplacement or a misunderstanding. Although death or complete insanity (negation) may be feared, unlawful behavior (deviation) is the more immediate presence in our lives and thus the greater concern and threat to society.

Miscreation, then, is like misbelief—it threatens *not because it lacks or negates value, but because it introduces false value;* it does not appear worthless, but fraudulent, a representation that misrepresents. And the fear of fraud which always accompanies the socialized experience of the work of art makes us all, even as critics or art historians, into caricaturists. When we perform as critics, judging acts of creation, we may not exercise the wit of Harris or Cham, but we nevertheless must trivialize, recognizing any crea-tion which serves originality, by denying its claim to reason. We insist on revealing the deception.

I will attempt momentarily to develop my argument concerning criticism, but I must first reinforce a sense of creation that may not yet have come fully alive in my logic. I have argued that the relationship of miscreation to creation is not that of misbelief to belief; and I have also stated that miscreation is like misbelief. This argu-ment suggests that creation as well as miscreation may be linked to misbelief; thus the potential identification of creation with miscreation can be sustained. Such is the result, again, of the association of creativity with originality; for any *original* making seems to express a dissatisfaction with the prevailing order of things. The creative act, if it must be original, becomes the act of misbelief, the act of the heretic, the expression of false or deviant values. The modern creator doubts; he

challenges his society's institutions and seeks a deviant truth. The creative act belongs, then, to the miscreant, who may appear not only heretical, but villainous, a danger to his society. The miscreant artist does not have full faith in accepted laws and procedures; to a significant extent he works outside formulation and convention; he seems to assume a godlike, or even satanic, stance. He may, moreover, seem the destructive wildman; for he upsets order, causes confusion, and, in general, introduces the unpredictable. He seems to deny our rational sciences.

Now the critical interpreter always assumes a rational stance; he must do so in order to attain a level of public discourse giving form, or rather formulation, to the creation in question. This responsibility to reason cannot be obviated by the use of indirect or evocative critical description; for such language, if effective criticism, will still follow conventional patterns and suggest relevant comparisons. For example, one of Manet's distinguished critics, Théophile Thoré, had this to say in response to his viewing the *Incident in the Bull Ring*: "M. Manet has the qualities of a magician, effects of luminosity, flamboyant coloration, which pastiche Velasquez and Goya, his chosen masters" (1893: Vol. III, p. 99; my translation). In dealing with the radical nature of Manet's painting, Thoré invokes the figure of the magician, who like a remarkable artist can manipulate his technique to produce startling effects. Through his own creative analogy, Thoré manages to traverse his critical field with a rational dodge—that is, he makes a move that appeals to our reasonable expectations. Attributing "magic" to Manet, Thoré seems to explain unconventional effects in a con-ventional manner; and he reinforces his reasoned argument by comparing Manet to two earlier masters, equally innovative perhaps, but of a past age, and hence assimilated within the critical canon.

I do not wish to deny that criticism may (or even must) have an artistic component, nor that it may lead to further creative discovery—caricature itself is a revealing art. The critic cannot, however, allow his art to dominate his rational science, for he would himself then lose the distinction between creativity and origi-nality, producing his own original art rather than a clearly defined criticism. Unabashedly artistic criticism might itself appear fraudulent; it would not test its object against any rigid standard. To the extent that criticism serves to maintain or reinforce desirable standards, it must hold a rational line against the release of dis-ruptive forces. It must question innovation, rather than merely accept or extend it, to maintain authority and guard against the fraudulent. If, to return to our first example, the truth of Einstein's $E=mc^2$ is not imme-diately apparent, Einstein's critic must demand a rational explanation.

We know, however, that radical creation lies beyond identification by typing, comparison, or simple deduction from the given; it should be as free of its origins as $E=mc^2$ seemed free of its scientific context *before* it was creatively discovered.[13] A creation, in other words, demonstrates originality when its specific origins cannot be found, when it seems to have no sources of its own, but becomes the source for other, lesser creations. Although $E=mc^2$ may be deducible from preexisting mathematical laws, it did not seem predicted by them; it appeared the product of an individual intuition, not a mechanical mathemical operation available to any investigator. Its generation, appearing as spontaneous to the popular mind, presented a powerful challenge to belief.

The critical interpreter is a believer, and one who wishes to bring the deviant creation back within *his* system of belief. If the creation presents difficulties, he will not hesitate to see it as miscreation, ridiculing it in the process. In fact, the most radical creations most readily become miscreations when re-formed by their critics. The critic must distort creation, making it miscreation, re-forming and rehabilitating it, as if to expose the miscreance, or at least prevent more damage from being done to society, that is, the society of both artist and critic. As a re-former, the critic may save the miscreant artist from his own acts of creation and seek to confine the deviant truth within accepted bounds. Thus, critics often suggest, in advance, the path an artist's creative activity should take.

A creance is a line used to hold a hawk in training at bay or in check; it is a line defining belief and limiting behavior. Miscreance or misbelief introduces wildness into a society. When the critic cannot find rational explanation, when he cannot assimilate creation, he can either yield his critical stance, accepting, at face value, the new truth of creation, or he can seek to expose the act of miscreance. The committed critic's aggressively skeptical attitude toward creation reveals not irreverence, but belief, a healthy attitude toward the reality of his (our) own world. He would prefer not to allow the release of untrustworthy hawks and must choose to caricature, to exhibit any original creation as miscreation.[14]

## Part VI

Have I gone too far in making critics and creative artists (and creative scientists) adversaries? Can there be no critical cooperation, perhaps a completion of the work of art by means of a body of critical commentary? The creation or work of art considered as an external object seems capable of bearing endless (but not any) interpretation; it is an undeniable fact in the world, a truth to be perceived. But the association of creativity with originality leads to questions of artistic genesis rather than of final artistic form. Where does the work come from? How does it develop? When the meaning or truth of creation is verified not in objectively defined (yet not necessarily permanent) properties of the work, but demonstrated rather in its genesis, the problematic nature of the critique of creation emerges. Often we speak of creation intensified by the term "radical" to designate its genetic originality — radical creation has no simpler antecedent form; it is a root from which other forms grow. Its own parentage and kinship relations are not known with certainty; it may thus evade our categories and comparisons.

Our two caricaturists have demonstrated indirectly that radical, "original" human creation can be the product neither of simple reason nor of mere chance. Like Collingwood, they do not wish to confine genuine creativity to questions of craft, nor do they wish to eliminate the sense of a directing human will. Harris and Cham both chose to reduce creation to the comical by making the creative act appear outside human control, with the success or failure of the creation only ironically related to the conditions of its generation. They might both have succeeded equally well, however, had they chosen to expose some truly rational procedure to account for the productions of Einstein and Manet. This, too, would serve to discredit any claim to radical creativity. In this alternative situation, Harris and Cham would not as readily appear as caricaturists, but rather as hard-headed detectives uncovering acts of fraud or charlatanism. They would show that the creations under investigation were something less than we (or their creators) might presume. The creation would appear as if prefigured in its assumed preconditions. In this viewing, any obscurity in its apparent generative procedure could be attributed to either one of two failings — to an inelegant presentation, that is, an act of technical ineptitide, or to an intentional deception, some pretense of sincerity. The latter failure, one of character rather than of skill, would amount to a conscious act of making the easy look difficult, so that originality might seem to arise from some radical technical discontinuity. I will come to argue that the art historian (as opposed to the art critic) characteristically demands, and finds, a rationally structured context, however well hidden, out of which the creation under investigation may logically arise. But first we

must consider the critic's evaluative task of distinguishing what is technically easy, or only deceptively difficult, from what is genuinely difficult or "original."

Albert Aurier, the early champion of Van Gogh's artistic originality and sincerity, admitted that this evaluative project could not be completed by applying any objective critical standards (1893: 260). The critic who encounters Manet, Van Gogh, or any other creator whose technique seems deviant, lacks the means to judge whether the departure from convention (or from evidently rational procedure) is an indication of a mere avoidance of difficulty or a consequence of its necessary acceptance. For, if technical deviation were associated unquestioningly with radical creativity, then fraud might become rampant; any "artist" might readily master the technique of originality by exhibiting a faulty craft which the critic would take to be a sign of creative authority, genuine creative deviance. The miscreation would seem the most genuine creation.

In approaching this unsatisfactory solution, we seem to have slipped into speaking of creation as located in a fixed created thing, an end product of craft, subject to (or resisting) analysis. But we had already suggested that the genuineness of "original" creation would be best determined by an investigation of the act itself, not its resulting object. Harris and Cham seem to have speculated as to what acts or situations could have generated $E=mc^2$ and the *Incident in the Bull Ring*; their interest lay in the creative process. The related desire to make the most empirically founded judgments of creative acts has led others to photograph Picasso and Matisse working out successive stages of their paintings and to record before the camera a performance of Jackson Pollock, pouring one of his "drip" paintings upon a sheet of glass seen from below. Nevertheless, firm evidence of any principle linking specific technical patterns to authentic creativity has remained elusive. The committed skepticism of Harris and Cham seems justified.

Charles Baudelaire, who spoke in defense of Manet's creative powers, sought to solve the problem of the critic by allowing him neither the easy shortcuts of complete acceptance or complete rejection of creation, nor the diversion of his own self-indulgent creative activity. There remained a firm distinction between critical and artistic conduct for Baudelaire, and (as a critic) he maintained his distance from works of art. Yet he recognized a dual nature in artistic creation itself. Of Delacroix he wrote:

It is clear that, in his eyes, imagination was the most precious gift, the most important faculty, but that this faculty remained powerless and sterile if it did not have at its command a swift technical skill (une habilité rapide), capable of following the great despotic faculty in its impatient flights of fancy. There was certainly no need for him to stoke up the fires of his imagination, constantly at white heat; but he always found the day too short for the study of the technical means of expression (les moyens d'expression). [1972:363]

Baudelaire never regarded the study of technical means and conventional devices as unworthy of the attention of the artistic imagination, the source of creation. If something new was to come into our world, it could do so only with the active cooperation of an artistic medium or language subject to reasoned analysis. According to Baudelaire's standard, the works of Einstein and Manet, if technically malformed as Harris and Cham depicted them, would indeed be suspect. For Baudelaire, "a great painter [or any creator] is of necessity a good painter [i.e., technically skilled], because a universal imagination comprises the understanding of all technical means and the desire to acquire them" (1972:306). The artist must be master of both his immediate passions and his mediating science or technique.[15]

Baudelaire as critic sought a means of preserving the sense of mastery in the work of art. His was at times a passive criticism, yet a productive one. As critic, Baudelaire often seemed himself to assume the "animal-like stare" of curiosity, wonder, absorption, and even ecstasy that he associated with the childlike element in the modern artist (1972:398). And Baudelaire willingly gave up the critic's greatest defense against disruption—not his reason, for he kept that, but his belief. Baudelaire associated belief and principle with systems, schools, and academies. The Universal Exhibition of 1855, which included products of many foreign cultures, seemed to provide him with a field of experience that no system of belief could encompass; his world was at once radically expanded and multiplied. He recognized the opportunity for his own education and growth before an abundance of products of the imagination serving to call his attention to the power of any single such product. In the foreign, the incompatible, he discovered a vital beauty: "Anything that is not slightly misshapen has an air of insensibility…irregularity is *the* characteristic of beauty…*le beau est toujours bizarre*" (1975:161-162; 1962:215). In associating the beautiful with the bizarre, even the "ugly," Baudelaire realized, in effect, the identity of creation and miscreation and the need to suppress his own belief, his own prejudgment. He wrote in the theoretical preface to his review of the Universal Exhibition:

Like all my friends I have tried more than once to lock myself inside a system, so as to be able to pontificate as I liked. But a system is a kind of damnation that condemns us to perpetual backsliding; we are always having to invent another, and this form of fatigue is a cruel punishment… And every time, some spontaneous unexpected product of universal vitality would come and give the lie to my puerile and old-fashioned wisdom…Under the threat of being constantly humiliated by another conversion, I took a big decision…I became content to feel; I came back and bought sanctuary in impeccable naiveté. I humbly beg pardon of academics of every kind…at least I can now declare, in so far as a man can answer for his virtues, that my mind now enjoys a more abundant impartiality. [1972:117-118]

Without abandoning his powers of reason (he has much lucid commentary to apply to Ingres and Delacroix), Baudelaire allows himself to deviate in his belief, to submit himself to the products of artistic miscreance. This is to say that Baudelaire comes to hold a different kind of belief, perhaps a misbelief, one more compatible with the full concept of creation, whether linked to originality or not. He comes to believe in or value change and growth in the individual. He expects to benefit from a changing rather than a stable world, and he locates the source of creative change in human imagination. Still, his concern is for the growth of the world of his society as well as of the individual; and such social or collaborative change is best conceived as *continuous* rather than radically *disjunctive*. In the absence of any ultimate all-powerful artistic experience that would obviate the function of rational critical discourse and lead to silence, Baudelaire depends upon the reasoned mediation of artistic technique and critical language to establish a community of shared creative experience. When he speaks, for example, of the painter's use of color, he refers both to clear rational principles—"the bigger the picture, the broader must be the touches of color"—and to artistic achievement founded upon such principles, yet extending beyond his own reason's firm grasp—the colorist's "most delicate operations are the result of a sentiment which long practice has brought to a degree of sureness that defeats description." At the point of such technical facility, imagination is liberated. The creative process develops through a rational application of technique to a point where it may *seem* to transcend that background—this is artistic mastery. Artistic media are "no more than the most humble handmaids of a unique and superior faculty. If a very neat execution is necessary, that is so that the language of dreams may be very clearly translated" (1972:304-305).

Believing in both reason and the dream, but not in fixed beliefs, and identifying artistic creation with apparent deviance, Baudelaire could, as an individual case demanded, defend an artist he admired by demonstrating either his capacity for rational science or for imaginative art. He could seek to negate the effects of caricature by claiming that his artist was indeed rational—or indeed imaginative. In the case of Manet he found it necessary to do both.

Baudelaire defended the very creation we have seen Cham ridicule, the *Incident in the Bull Ring.* This painting, aside from being attacked for exhibiting a misapplication of technique, came to be seen as revealing a lack of originality. This amounted to a most serious charge against the artist, since genuine artistic imagination, in Baudelaire's own words, "creates a new world" (1972:299). If Manet's art could be shown to reveal nothing original, to reduce to a pastiche of "sources"— familiar images and stylistic devices merely recombined so that the new work amounted to no more than the sum of its well-known parts—then Manet would appear a fraudulent artist, misrepresenting old forms as a new creation. Cham's caricature of Manet was reinforced by some remarks made by Théophile Thoré, to which we have already referred. Unlike Cham, Thoré found something favorable to say of Manet, noting that, although his style was unconventional, and perhaps extremely so, it was forceful. Thoré nevertheless raised the problem of artistic originality by speaking of "sources," asserting that the dead toreador in the *Incident of the Bull Ring* had been copied after a figure by Velasquez and that the general style of the painting was dependent upon both Velasquez and Goya (1893:Vol. III, pp. 98-100).[16] (The "source" of the figure of the dead toreador given by Thoré, a painting at that time in the Pourtalès Collection, is no longer attributed to Velasquez.) Although Thoré might expect to find a complex of resemblances, even in works of the most original artists, Baudelaire took the challenge of his remarks very seriously.[17]

Having previously made Thoré's acquaintance, Baudelaire sent a friendly reply to his critique of Manet. He insisted that Manet was both rational and creatively original. With respect to the first point, Baudelaire wrote: "M. Manet, who is regarded wild and insane, is simply an ordinary straightforward man, doing everything he can to be reasonable (raisonnable), but unfortunately touched with romanticism since birth." For Baudelaire "romanticism" was associated with individuality and passionate feeling; yet Manet, like Delacroix, exhibited as much reason and science as could be applied to this imaginative force. Baudelaire thus implied that Manet's technique was appropriate to his artistic enterprise. Moreover, Manet was an original, for whose work the term "pastiche" could not be employed—Baudelaire stated flatly that Manet had not

been influenced by the Spanish masters; there were no "sources" for his creation; any resemblance was a "mysterious coincidence" (1948: Vol. IV, pp. 275-277).[18]

Arguing in this manner, Baudelaire sought to restore to Manet's painting the two qualities which caricaturists would have removed: a sense of the rational, meaningful application of technique and a sense of originality, the creation of something genuinely new. Art historians, as opposed to critics, tend to concentrate on the second factor, originality. Thoré himself was a pioneer of art history, adept at relating works of art to historical contexts, both social environments and pictorial traditions. In speaking of Manet, he was facing the task of evaluating a contemporary, not an established historical figure. Baudelaire thanked Thoré for rendering Manet at least some justice in regarding his work as a serious contribution. Baudelaire knew well that the denial of originality was a more advanced stage in the process of critical acceptance than either a lack of critical commentary or critical ridicule.

Historians especially are likely to be silent before radical creation. This is silence as Collingwood might interpret it, the silence of incomprehension. Faced with the task of "explaining" or providing a historical context for a work that resembles little of the familiar, they may act as if the work did not exist; resisting interpretation, the work seems unworthy of any interpretation at all and remains unassimilated. To point out its flaws, to describe it as fraudulent creation, is to accept its presence, however grudgingly. At this stage caricature is most apparent and the work may be compared unfavorably with accepted members of the tradition; clearly it is miscreation. Usually, however, art historians begin to discover sources for the work, a context eventually so well defined that the character of the new work seems inevitably determined. Assuming Manet's experience of Goya and Velasquez, for example, one argues that he is led to produce the *Incident in the Bull Ring* by way of a reasoned use of an imitative technique. Simply conceived, such completion or perfection of explication seems the ideal of art history, especially of an art history regarded as a rational "science." Unfortunately, once the art historian's work is completed, the artistic creation seems—perhaps not miscreation—but rather no "original" creation at all; it is merely the sum of its parts, lacking any mystery, devoid of any personalized element that can resist public understanding. Now a dead issue for the critic, it becomes dead art. An insistence upon originality may lead to a standard that cannot be met; the able historian will eventually construct an amalgam of antecedents to substitute for any work he considers worthy of his study.

My position on the historian's role risks oversimplification, yet I think this view fundamentally accurate in its focus. The historian, like the critic, can perform his task too well, can believe too strongly in the rational order of things; he can overdetermine the creative work so that it appears a product solely of reason and familiar technique rather than of a higher Baudelairean imagination. Nevertheless, as Baudelaire knew, in the face of creation one still does not abandon reason. Art history can become caricature when it retains too much of the mystery of creation just as when it seeks to eliminate all such mystery. The art historian's appeal to the unarticulated evidence of the visual can produce an explication, couched in rational language, having no firm foundation in reason. In the alternative to the search for clearly identified sources and other elements of a structured historical context, the art historian can appeal too strongly to a nonrational sense of individual artistic identity and the "look" of the objective evidence he presents.

My choice of illustration for this point—Herbert Cook's brief and generally forgotten "Note on Spanzotti, the Master of Sodoma" (1918:208)—will seem so extreme that it might be considered a caricature of art history itself, an example of miscreated criticism. The resemblance to other more successful art historical presentations should, however, be evident, as well as should the unsatisfactorily indeterminate nature of any appeal by a critic-historian to his reader's own critical vision. Spanzotti, an Italian Renaissance painter, was, as Cook admits, "hardly of the first, or even second, rank as an artist." Cook's purpose is to attribute to the oeuvre of Spanzotti, reconstituted only in the publication on this artist by Conte Alessandro Baudi di Vesme, one more painting, a *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, previously attributed to the school of Foppa. Cook notes that the *Madonna* bears a monogram found also on a painting given by Conte di Vesme to Spanzotti's hand. To this circumstantial evidence, Cook adds what he takes to be more conclusive:

> The general style of the Madonna tallies with other works of the kind [attributed to Spanzotti] (all published in [Conte di Vesme's] book), to which the reader must be referred. Suffice it to say that Conte di Vesme concurs in the addition of this picture to the list of Spanzotti's works, although he only knows of it from a photograph.

Cook has given his argument a form that allows him to evade any rational analysis of the work itself; he meets creation with his own creative insight and he reaches a decision without establishing any clear grounds for doing so. The reader is referred to photographs of Spanzotti's works (and secondarily to Conte di Vesme's authority), but never to analytical descriptions of the photographs; and he must thus reach *his* own creative intuition regarding the question of attri-

bution—he will either "see" to agreeing with Cook or he will not. Ironically, Cook's "Note on Spanzotti" was followed by this bracketed comment from his editor:

> Owing to the difficulty of procuring photographs, we are precluded from the possibility of supplying illustrations of the pictures which, as Mr. Cook points out, strengthen an attribution which *prima facie* seems not fully convincing.

The editor here refers to those illustrations which would, according to Cook, establish "links" between the admitted "extremes of style" exhibited by his two primary objects of study, the two paintings bearing the same monogram, but presumably differing in date of execution. In sum, Cook's "argument" depended upon the simple presentation of a certain number of Spanzotti's works (as photographs), but the works could not be present—consequently Cook was left with no argument and his reader, or viewer, could experience no conviction. Had Cook's editor attained only slightly more ironic distance from his own journal, he might have asked whether the mere *presence* of photographs could ever have settled a question formulated around concepts of historical context and stylistic attribution. If the works reveal "extremes of style," what concept of style is sufficient to bridge the logical gap between them? How many mediating images must exist to give us a sense of orderly technical evolution?

Cook's mode of art history and criticism might be very creative in its association of images linked by stylistic qualities that remain ineffable. If, however, art history is to be considered not a "creative" art, but an academic study, rational like a "science," Cook, as scientist, would seem to open himself to the same caricaturing criticism that Einstein suffered. If indeed no stylistic link among Spanzotti's works can be articulated, then perhaps Cook has operated under no meaningful principle and has discovered the contents of his artist's oeuvre merely by chance, as Einstein, according to Harris's humorous account, may have fallen into discovering $E=mc^2$. We have seen that, on the one hand, the art historical study of sources may attenuate or even defeat the power of creation by moving toward a final denial of originality. But, on the other hand, the appeal to a sympathetic critical "vision" may render creation meaningless, subject to the endless vagaries of individual sensibility. The refusal to use any clearly articulated standard of appraisal serves the ends of criticism no more than does the reduction of a work to a conventional pattern.

Now if indeed we were *all* to be equally convinced of some truth by the mere presentation of a visual image for our inspection, without our being able to speak rationally of the cause of our agreement, might we not feel that our critical enterprise of interpretation had succeeded? Would this be a silence of complete understanding? I must argue that such a result is not one of an ideal criticism, but of some ideal art. The critic must assume that such universal agreement will not be reached; there must always be further investigation and debate with regard to the work of art. The critic must not remain passive indefinitely before the work; he must retain his will, a kind of belief. He expresses his will, his resistance, even his stubborn misunderstanding, by means of his reason. He assumes, as Baudelaire did, that both the artist's return to the creative, imaginative vision of childhood and the critic's own assumption of a childlike naïveté are to some extent *voluntary*. He assumes that although art strives for perfection, this state is never attained; beauty must be transient. If the unexpected act of fully "original" creation should occur, the critic would seem to face a divine rather than human creator, one not to be questioned. In this case, any critical commentary would surely be an act of irreverent miscreance. In order to be both critic and believer, the critic must assume that artists only pretend to divinity; their miscreations must be unmasked. In this manner, the ideal of individual and social growth can be maintained amidst the continuing encounter with creations, none of which will effect complete or final change; each will be seen as flawed or misformed to an extent sufficient to call forth further creation. Creation becomes possible only in a world of miscreation, a world not completely formed.

## Part VII

In my own play upon words, as I linked miscreation to the miscreant, there was perhaps an element of caricature involved; for the "reason" in my argument might have seemed to derive from the chance alphabetical placement of "miscreation" following upon "miscreant." Perhaps it appeared that I had no more reason to associate the concepts of misbelief and misgrowth (or misshaping) than did Harris's Einstein to move from $E=ma^2$ to $E=mb^2$ to a final miscreated solution. I played briefly with etymology, too, speculating upon the possibility of a core of meaning subsuming both belief or principle and creation or growth, a concept such as education or development. If at the end of all this speculation any belief can be reached, it must be in the relevance of the notion of education or human growth to both artistic and critical enterprises.

Creation is a change from which we learn. In its *most* radical form it would force an entirely new system of belief, a new set of principles, upon us; growth would follow from a new root. It seems, however, that the "radical" creation we normally encounter is only of a *relatively* radical nature—the creations, for example, of Manet and Einstein, allowing room for doubt, remain subject to caricaturing criticism. We learn from such criticism so long as it does not continue to demand insistently what creation cannot provide, a final rational explanation for its own presence. "In the realm of poetry and art," Baudelaire wrote, "the great discoverers rarely have precursors. Every flowering is spontaneous, individual." And, just as the artist must to some extent be cut off from models or sources, so the scholar or critic must embody the creative imagination in his work: "What does opinion say of a scholar without imagination? That he has learned all that can be learned, because it has been taught, but he will never discover laws as yet unsuspected of existing" (1972:122, 300). The critic must be receptive to a new truth.

Yet not passively receptive. Whoever performs the critical act must assume that the truth of a work of art is not self-evident; the artist may have intended to falsify or he may simply have been deluded. The problematic area to be investigated is not originality, but creativity in the narrower sense. One must consider the artist's means of expression, for technique conveys the artistic communication that we must presume to have failed; it fails to attain immediate universality, to convince, or to silence. As he remains unconvinced, the critic is free to disassociate creativity from originality, to expose any pretense to full artistic originality. As he applies reason to resistant creation, the critic seeks neither the identification of a complete set of "sources" nor the reception of a final message. Instead he concentrates on the language of creation, the structured source of communication and community. He remains silent on proper usage and points of agreement, but must speak out on seeing any irregularity or discontinuity. To take such an evaluative stance, to become active in response to the work and to defend oneself against it, is already to have considered the communication flawed and to have posited a greater art to come. The present creation begins to appear subject to caricature and *we,* in turn, seem able to transcend that which seemed itself to escape the world of our own past. With some irony, the critic must see all who claim the special status of artist as miscreants and all their creation as miscreation; but such vision makes continuing education and growth—indeed life itself—possible.

## Notes

1 When Collingwood speaks of deliberate and responsible making that is yet not predetermined (1938:236-238), he has in mind a distinction between automatism and self-consciousness in the use of an expressive medium.

2 See also Collingwood (1938:43) where the author distinguishes, as a falsification of artistic originality, any uniqueness or novelty planned and achieved for its own sake.

3 Cf. Polanyi and Prosch (1978:98): "the *meaning* of a poem comes into existence *only with its words*." (Original emphasis.)

4 Cf. Collingwood (1938:273): "The activity which generates an artistic experience is the activity of consciousness...[art's] origin lies...in [man's] nature as a thinking being."

5 I have explored the relationship of art to life in an essay entitled "Art and Life: A Metaphorical Relationship" (1978a).

6 But it need not involve extreme individuality; original artistic expression may be, indeed normally is, collaborative. See Collingwood (1938:315-324).

7 Cf. Collingwood (1938:130, 291). In postmedieval Christian theology, divine creation is usually conceived as *ex nihilo* (as it is in Collingwood's theory of art). Nevertheless, the Biblical account of creation need not be regarded primarily as an account of origins but rather as a statement of the relation of man to God (man's creator); and the notion of a "continuing" or immanent creation also competes with that of creation as a first cause or historical origin. To speak of an original act of divine creation in terms of a working of preexisting matter (as in pagan myth) seems a metaphorical inversion—that is, the act of God is, to some extent, demystified or dedifferentiated by being described in terms of a familiar human procedure. (On this point, cf. Frye [1980:4]: for some the "notion of a creating God is a projection from the fact that man makes things, and for them a divine creator has only the reality of a shadow thrown by ourselves.") If creation, as a kind of crafting or fabricating, is to be distinguished in its mundane and divine modes, divine creation is, indeed, best associated with the notion of creation *ex nihilo*.

8 Original emphasis. The translator renders Barthes' "Einstein *dessiné*" as "*cartoons* of Einstein." Barthes is contrasting the photograph to what he regards as a more interpretive and distorted class of images, all artistic drawings or renderings, whether self-consciously caricatural or not.

9  Cham was the pseudonym of Amédée de Noé (1819 – 1879). The translation of the caption to his caricature (following in the text) is my own. The *Incident in the Bull Ring*, that Cham represents schematically, no longer exists in its entirety. Manet, himself, dismembered it, and two fragments are known today: the *Dead Toreador* in the National Gallery, Washington (Figure 3), and the *Bullfight* in the Frick Collection, New York (illustrated as Plate 8a in Hamilton 1954). For general discussions of the critical response to the painting and its history, see Hamilton (1954:51-64) and Hanson (1977:82-85). On the problem of Manet's cut canvases, see Hanson (1970:158-166).

10  In 1867 Zola remarked (1970:108) that the fragment of the *Incident in the Bull Ring*, the *Dead Toreador*, was nevertheless relatively "detailed" and "tightly" modeled; the public would prefer it to some of Manet's other works. Apparently, however, the public (Cham) had previously found Manet's *entire* painting incoherent. The perspective was considered faulty, as well as the modeling, and Cham's drawing seems to ridicule both these technical features—but his caption calls our attention to the modeling especially.

11  Erwin Panofsky argues (1962:121-182, esp. 172-173) that the modern association of either artistic or scientific genius with inspiration, "divine madness," and related notions originates in the Renaissance.

12  There may, indeed, be situations in which negation becomes more threatening than deviance, but creative activity (as here conceived) is not among them. The problematic nature of the individual who lacks belief, will, patterns of behavior, or "preference" is presented by Herman Melville in his "Bartleby the Scrivener." In this short story, the characters Turkey and Nippers may be described as deviant, and therefore troublesome, but finally assimilated comfortably within their society. Bartleby, on the other hand, seems the negation of all that society serves to establish—he does not express improper desires, but no desires at all—and it is Bartleby, not Turkey or Nippers, who must be institutionalized in the end. Franz Kafka, too, raises the problem of negation in, to choose one example, his parable "An Old Manuscript." In this brief tale, Kafka describes villagers who *mistake* as deviance, or the desire for the unacceptable, the negativeness of their nomadic intruders—the nomads' inexpressiveness, the absolute unpredictability of their behavior. See Shiff (1978b) for a discussion of the Kafka parable.

13  On this issue, cf. Polanyi (1958:117-131).

14  I have argued (1978b) that the critic (or audience) must impose rational standards upon art even while he maintains that true art must always evade such judgments.

15  Similarly, Collingwood locates art in an imagination conceived as mediating between unarticulated desires and rational intellectual constructs (1938:195, 213, 221-224, 281-282).

16  Michael Fried, who argues from within a more specific historical context than that of the present essay (1969:28-82, esp. 67-68), provides the deepest understanding of the comments that Thoré brought to bear upon Manet's art, relating them to notions of national character and realism which Thoré had previously developed. Fried's essay is an unusually rich account of the *significance* of an artist's use of specific sources and transcends many art historical difficulties to which I wish to call attention in my account of the exchange between Thoré and Baudelaire. Cf. Fried's distinction between "sanction" and "influence" (1969:fn. 47, p. 70).

17  On Thoré's habit of noting resemblances, see, for example, the passage on Diaz's originality, written in 1846 (1893:Vol. I, pp. 290-291).

18  Letter to Théophile Thoré, c. 20 June 1864, reprinted in Baudelaire (1948:Vol. IV, pp. 275-277; my translation). Baudelaire, in 1846, had defended Delacroix in very similar fashion, arguing that this painter was a master of rational technique, in whose works chance played no part whatsoever, and that he was one of those "who retain their originality even after having borrowed from all the genuine sources" (1972:65). Thoré replied to Baudelaire's objections in what has become a familiar art historical manner: conceding to Baudelaire's claim that Manet had not seen the Velasquez in question, Thoré simply argued that the artist must have encountered some intermediary image, perhaps a photograph of the work or some graphic study or reproduction (1893:Vol. III, pp. 137-138).

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# Reviews and Discussion

## John Berger as Critic

**A Review Essay by**
**Mark Roskill**
University of Massachusetts
and
**David Carrier**
Carnegie-Mellon University

### An Introduction to Two Essays on Berger's Work

In the past several decades, John Berger has produced a large body of art criticism, and numerous novels and TV and film scripts. Working within an English tradition of radicalism, with such antecedents as the 1930s journalism of Anthony Blunt[1] and the work of such Marxists as Frederick Antal and Max Raphael, his work remains important for some British critics.[2] Berger has never been well known in this country.[3] If his style of "engaged criticism" is now often emulated, his highly critical estimate of that painting, abstract expressionism—usually seen as a "triumph" of American culture—is entirely opposed to the now orthodox view of that art. Berger, we feel, is a critic worth serious attention. When most criticism, especially—ironically—"leftist criticism," increasingly adopts a Frenchified mandarin style, his films and writing offer an important alternative, a model of sophisticated work which is genuinely accessible to a popular audience. What other critic could describe the failure of the revolutions of 1968 in terms of an account of his two visits to the Gruenewald Altar-piece at Colmar, or use a single photograph ("A Red Hussar Leaving, June 1919, Budapest," by André Kertesz) to discuss the relation of photography to modern conceptions of time and history?[4]

Mark Roskill's article discusses how Berger's move from being a writer of criticism to producing TV scripts led Berger to challenge some of the accepted conventions of that medium. David Carrier's article discusses the theory of one part of the material presented in those programs, published in Berger's *Ways of Seeing:* "A Feminist Theory of Art History."[5]

### Notes

1  See Anthony Blunt, "From Bloomsbury to Marxism," *Art Monthly* 32(1979-1980):12-17, and the articles on the history of his early criticism by Lynda Morris in issues 35 and 36 of the same journal.

2  Though Antal, like Arnold Hauser and Max Raphael, were, of course, figures in the German art history world forced to flee by Hitler, what concerns us here is how their style of criticism influenced Berger.

3  Peter Fuller's numerous articles recently published in *Art Monthly,* and his "Fine Art after Modernism," *New Left Review* 119 (1980):42-59, show Berger's continuing influence in England. Critical accounts of Berger interesting both for their own sake and in light of the subsequent careers of these writers are Michael Fried, "Marxism and Criticism," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 4(1962):70-72; and Richard Wollheim, "The Sectarian Imagination," *Encounter* 6(1961):47-53. Nikos Stangos offers a spirited defense of Berger in his introduction to Berger's *Selected Essays and Articles* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: 1972), pp. 11-15. The "art-language" group has produced an unintentionally funny critique, *Art-Language* 4, no. 3 (1978):55-66, which, though very hard to follow, has some remarks on Berger on the nude. Finally, there is a recent useful popular account by Carrie Rickey, "John Berger Is a Big Deal," *The Village Voice* (1980):1.

4  John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 127-133; John Berger, "In Opposition to History, In Defiance of Time,"*The Village Voice,* October 8-14(1980):88-89.

5  Though Mark Roskill is the author of the first article, and David Carrier the author of the second article and this Introduction, we have worked together on this enterprise, and each of us is indebted to the other for many suggestions about style and substance.

## Berger: Film and Counterculture

In order to present John Berger as a countercultural critic, it will be necessary to set out, first of all, what is meant by the term "counterculture" and why it should apply here. It will then be used in reference to one phase only of Berger's career: the period of the early 1970s during which his TV series "Ways of Seeing" was shown on BBC Television in Great Britain, and then given general distribution as a set of films for independent showing; and during which he also collaborated with the Swiss director Alain Tanner on the making of three feature films, all of which were released in this country in the early to middle 1970s. Berger's authority, as a spokesman for feminist viewpoints and a commentator on the popular media, particularly photography and advertising, and his larger reputation as a countercultural figure derive from these films, especially "Ways of Seeing," rather than from his earlier and later writings: art criticism, novels, and essays of various kinds. Reference to the latter, though it brings up interesting anticipations and parallels, is therefore not germane to the present context; and even the book *Ways of Seeing* based on the films, which eliminates some elements of both text and image and substitutes others, will be used only for token reference.[1]

Basic points underlying this limitation of scope are that Berger's career has always, seemingly by conscious choice on his part as well as for conceptual reasons, been divided into distinctive phases (as in his decision of 5 years ago to live in a small village in the Haute-Savoie, which coincided with, as well as enforced, the end of his period of filmmaking that had had its start in the late 1950s in programs made for the BBC Monitor series); and that his position as a countercultural critic depends crucially and centrally on devices of visual presentation which are not duplicable in textual form but rather are specifically keyed to the "democratic" media of film and television and to the interrelationships of image and spoken commentary which those media have built into their intrinsic nature, or ontology.

The term "counterculture," as used by sociologists and anthropologists—for the Californian scene of the later 1960s, especially the campus riots, but also more generally, in reference to other groups, coalitions, and lifestyles of youth and to corresponding developments in Western Europe—denotes, to quote one definition in its entirety, "norms and patterns of behavior, emerging institutions and beliefs and artistic traditions that have coalesced to provide an alternative to the cultural templates of the main culture."[2] In historical retrospect, it has become clearer than it was at the time that the widespread disaffection and disaffiliation from the dominant patterns of culture that prevailed among middle-class youth in the 1960s linked up toward the end of the decade with the more openly political forces of student protest and community action, only to become progressively fragmented, after 1970, into separate strands and subgroups (some Utopian, some activist).[3] This is a relevant point, in regard to timing as well as subject matter and approach, for the period in which the films to be discussed were made and gained recognition, especially among the young and on campuses.

As for the crystallization within the counterculture of a distinctive aesthetic stance and of a related set of attitudes toward the arts, it appears crucial for this purpose that two features should be present and at work simultaneously. One of these is the prevalence of a relationship between the art form and its audience that serves to express symbolic forms of linkage between the participants (as in the rock festivals of the 1960s or in guerilla theater); the other, that there should be, within the culture as a whole, certain figures who serve as paradigms or, in a larger sense, as social and moral exemplars. These two features together provide for the counterculture what the anthropologist Victor Turner has termed an "antistructure," together with an appeal to *communitas.*[4] The antistructure functions in evident and self-regulating contrast to the prevailing norms of order and restraint within society: which is to say, in the case of the arts, to the prevailing canons of composition and aesthetic decorum. At the same time, the paradigmatic figures of the counterculture are ones who use their ideas and writings to bring the contradictions of contemporary society and its workings out into the open. Typical figures who fulfilled such a role for the youthful and campus-oriented counterculture of the later 1960s were Herbert Marcuse, for social and political thought; Allan Ginsberg, for poetry; and Jonas Mekas, for "underground" (experimental and cooperatively distributed) film. Berger himself, in his criticism and in the films to be discussed, uses in similar fashion the writings of Gramsci and Walter Benjamin alongside those of Marx and his twentieth-century followers; but it is important for his purpose that, in order to make such figures serve as paradigms for the discussion of the visual arts, their ideas be articulated visually in reference to specific works (or a sequence of them) rather than simply quoted or paraphrased. The example of Ginsberg also brings out how the appeal to *communitas,* which affirms symbolic forms of linkage among viewers or listeners, may be expressed in forms of self-dramatization—as for example in those kinds of performance art which use the body for subject— as well as in ritual performances such as the Happenings of Allan Kaprow, which were orchestrated to allow for a full measure of participatory intervention on the part of the audience.

That John Berger should himself have become such a figure in the early to mid-1970s appears to depend, against this background, on at least three interlocking factors. First of all, he used for the purposes referred to two visual media — TV and film — with a particular potential now for reaching a widespread audience and establishing a sense of rapport in that audience: ones that, for the presentation of social and cultural subject matter, could give the appearance of coming across in easy and familiar fashion, registering their points either directly or without (from the countercultural standpoint) any of the distancing effects belonging to the lecture hall, the traditional proscenium theater, or the documentary film about artists and art. The first segment of "Ways of Seeing" in fact includes a direct attack on what familiar theatricalizing devices, such as music or an accompanying caption, can do to the presentation and promotion of works of art (Berger's example is van Gogh's supposed "last painting," *Crows over a Wheatfield*), by the kind of false insinuation that they succeed in creating.[5] This problem of cultural affect was one that neither commercial cinema nor commercial TV in the 1960s, even at their most successful, was able to overcome. Basically, what had tended to happen was that either the audience became polarized according to levels of cultural sophistication or the demands of a conventionalized format, from program to program, became quite rapidly seen as being imaginatively restrictive.[6] But it was not simply the freedom given by the BBC for the making of "Ways of Seeing" or Alain Tanner's independent status as filmmaker that counted in this regard; there was in both cases a larger conception of the ways in which the use of these particular media could open up audience response.

Second, Berger used as a springboard, for discussion and argued presentation in visual form, key issues of the time which, as questionings of conventional or inherited attitudes, were gathering cultural force. These key issues included, in the films made with Tanner, the exploitation by capitalist industry of the female work force and of cheap immigrant labor; and in "Ways of Seeing" the presentation of the female body in Western art, which was a topic of growing feminist concern, and the way in which modern museums and other organizations representing the art establishment treated the work of art as a consumer item to be packaged, in its display and presentation, for the supposed educational benefit of an unprivileged audience. All of these topics could be readily understood as hallmarks of a social as well as cultural dissent from the way in which those in positions of power and ownership inherently considered works of art and made them function to the enhancement of their own entrenched standing

in society. Again, this questioning becomes the subject of one specific segment in "Ways of Seeing": the one that deals with oil paintings (still life, some forms of landscape with figures) as an implicit assertion of the ownership of property.[7]

Finally, there is and always has been the interest and attractiveness to Berger — for here one is dealing with a general theme in his criticism — of those who may be called "fringe radicals" of the art scene, and those artists who deliberately present themselves as somehow "primitive" in sensibility, compared to the ruling conventions of art and system of art production in any particular period.[8] In Berger's most recent volume of collected essays, *About Looking* (1980), this double focus of interest extends to include a later-nineteenth-century Turkish follower of Courbet, Seker Ahmet; Lowry, a British painter of the Industrial North; and, in an essay titled "The Primitive and the Professional," the Douanier Rousseau.[9] The work of such artists is interpreted, broadly, either as a reflection of their underlying cultural displacement (Ahmet) or as embodying nostalgia for a period of time that has long since vanished into history (Lowry). Their situation is, therefore, akin in principle to the plight of some of the key characters in the three Tanner films: "marginal" figures in society or in relation to the work force, in whom isolation can equally serve as a source of potential strength;[10] and it stands in symbolic opposition to the situation of successful modern "impresarios" of the art scene, most typically Picasso, whom Berger had earlier (1965) used as a complete case history to this effect.[11] In "Ways of Seeing" attention is turned comparably to the "exceptional nudes" in the history of Western painting (such as those of Rubens and Rembrandt)[12] — as if this exceptionality could be immediately and directly recognized, simply from the character of the visual image itself. Berger's linking of exceptionality in art to an anti-conventional quality of social perception evades the need for his selective treatment of particular themes in art (nudes, still lifes) to be given any developmental outcome in the twentieth century.[13] It is also a strategy that allows socially and economically successful figures in the establishment view of twentieth-century art, such as Picasso and Matisse, to be left out, as if they belonged to a totally other world than the one that concerns him.

To turn now to the three films co-authored by Berger in collaboration with Alain Tanner, *La Salamandre* (1970), *Le Milieu du Monde* (1974), and *Jonas Qui Aura 25 Ans en L'An 2000* (1975),[14] the countercultural aspects of these films reside in forms of visual structure and devices of presentation adopted as much as in the subject matter itself.

This is in accord with the role given already in the first of these films to voice-over commentary—Berger's contribution there to an existing story line—as a way of putting into fuller perspective the happenings of the film and serving, in so doing, as an "interlocutory" bridge between these happenings and the film's audience.[15] It is also in accord with the way in which, in the second of the three films, Berger worked even more closely with Tanner to deepen the motivations of the characters and to develop techniques of narration that would set into a larger explanatory framework both the interrelationships of the characters and the ordering of events.[16] The same can be presumed also of the third film, which takes the events of 1968 in Western Europe as its thematic starting point. Here only special or typically representative aspects of the three films will be taken up.

The story of *The Salamander* (to give the films their English titles from now on) has to do with two young journalists and their attempt to discover the truth about an incident in which a young woman, Rosamonde, may or may not have shot her uncle, which in turn is to be the basis for a fictional TV drama. The way in which the string of episodes which begins from this point then develops goes against all the standard assumptions that an audience is likely to have about narrative unfolding and final resolution in the structure of a film. The journalists, whether relying on direct interviewing or on their imagination, do not learn anything that they hoped and expected to learn—except perhaps that they gain some understanding of the nature of the young woman's menial and mechanical job, in a sausage factory, and of her character from the brief sexual involvement that each of them has with her. At one point she herself even denies what the audience knows to be true from an inset scene at the beginning of the film; namely; that she was present in the room when the gun went off. The countercultural aspect of the film thus lies in its denial, by means of both plot and commentary, of there being any interconnective web of "truth" to the actual nature and extent of the young woman's involvement in the shooting, or even any underlying principle of a moral sort in her subjective comprehension of what took place. The audience is invited to participate, both emotionally and on the basis of personal experience, in the reconstruction of what might have been the case, rather than having the outcome and the paths to that outcome dictated to it by predetermined fiat on the director's part (in what Tanner calls a "relationship of domination");[17] and this in turn becomes a bond of sympathy toward the young woman and against the intruding journalists, as the extent of the gap between them and her, in self-image and in morality, begins to be perceived as such.

*The Center of the Earth,* the second of the three films in order of release, has as its subject the love affair of a young Italian woman, who, because of lack of work in her own country, has taken a job as a café waitress in Switzerland, and an engineer whom she meets there, who is running for political office at the time and finds himself discredited when this involvement is used against him by his opponents. The title refers both to the part of Switzerland where the action takes place— so known in local parlance, from its chance geographical situation—and in a secondary pun which the woman herself introduces, when she first invites the man to make love to her ("Take me home and I will show you the center of the earth"), and to the sexuality of a woman's body as a source of a personal and deep-seated consciousness. The structure of the film's unfolding, again with voice-over commentary, is geared to the conditions and chronology of an affair spread over a period of 112 days in all: a passage of time which is both specifically counted out in blocks or units and explicatively used, as the relationship between the two develops (she in her café serving customers' needs, he campaigning and also coming over the mountain to see her) and then veers toward its close, which is marked by her decision to return to Italy. The most crucial antistructural aspect here—the one that most strikingly runs counter to accepted cinematic practice—is a visual matter, of what the viewer is given to look at, during chronological breaks or passages which put the action into context, and how the camera treats or actualizes its subject matter in those cases. There are, for instance, segments in which the camera holds in view for a considerable length of time a horizontal stretch of plowed field—presumably one in that part of the world, but with little intrinsic interest except for its being seen in different seasonal states of verdancy or bareness at different junctures in the film. As for the appeal to symbolic forms of linkage, this comes across particularly in the contrasting typology of the man's and the woman's activities, the ultimate reason for her decision to go home, which at the end of the film—as she sits waiting with a fellow waitress for her train—she feels no call to justify further.

For *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000,* it may have been primarily a decision of Tanner's, before joint work on the scenario, that the cast of characters should amount to a virtual lexicon of the attitudes and behavior patterns of young people who, after the disturbances of 1968 to 1972, found themselves displaced or in transitional positions in relation to normative society. The outlooks on life and forms of affirmation that the film depicts include

opposition to consumption for its own sake and to materialism; the cult of freedom and libertarian impulses; and the transcending of roles, breaking of gender distinctions, and upholding of fraternal individualism. The behavior patterns put on view are ones that devolve around an ethic of "leaderlessness" and of "participation"; and the acting out situates itself in a context of work-as-play, life-as-art, commune-as-enclave, and "free school."[18] More important, however, to the structure of the film is the fact that these attitudes and forms of behavior are seen realizing themselves or finding an outlet in ways that are visually presented as zany, bizarre, unpredictable, and at the same time appealing in their directness and humor, a characteristic example being the scene in which the schoolteacher punctuates and illustrates his lesson about the nature of history with the chopping of a sausage. As the different sets of characters come into one another's purview, their behavior patterns are seen by the viewer as expanded by this contact and as converging into ritualized forms which, as in the mudbath sequence (probably a fantasy, since it is inset in black-and-white), affirm the unity and cohesion of the group. The questions raised in this way—of what it means to teach history in the classroom or to interact in a truly physical sense with friends and associates—pose themselves visually in opposition to the norms of routine and of decorum; and the claim made for the group is that of a transcending possibility, or moment, in their relations, whatever else may succeed it as the film winds down.

The comparable features of presentation and structure in "Ways of Seeing" can be brought into focus by way of a contrast with Lord Clark's TV series of the later 1960s, "Civilisation," a series which was extremely successful and internationally distributed as a cultural offering of a traditionally British and humanistic kind.[19] Berger's own aliveness to the total difference of tenor between his films and "Civilisation" is in fact more than a hypothesis, for in his early novel *A Painter of Our Time* (1958) there is a chapter in which the central character of the novel, a Hungarian refugee artist, is taken to visit a collector and aesthete in the south of England who is clearly modeled after Sir Kenneth (as he then was) Clark. He accidentally breaks a valuable Chinese vase while being shown around, and is then forced into expressing his disgust by the way in which the collector treats the loss, as if it were nothing and he did not particularly care for or value the vase.

In the "Civilisation" series Clark impresses the viewer with his cultural as well as his geographical mobility; with the sense of intimacy he conveys with the worlds of both art and intellect, constantly linking the two together; and with his quiet politeness and discretion of tone—even when standing in the broiling sun, in a double-breasted suit and tie, in front of the Pyramids—which, like the tone attributed to the collector in the novel, has *grand-seigneurial* implications. He appears, in the way in which the films are put together and his presence is used, as capable of freely shifting, without strain, from one artistic locale to another and of entering into the domains of art and artistic creation, whether in their public or their most private forms, on equal terms with them. In addition, he offers an essentially pessimistic view of the forces of industrialization and modernization (Manhattan becomes a vision of hell), on the basis of a gloomy acknowledgment that, come what may, "the poor will be always with us." From Berger's point of view, therefore, the use of the powers of television in this series to make the reception of art seem congenially pleasant and effortless is loaded, visually as well as socially, with reactionary overtones.

Berger's relationship with his audience, in contrast, when he appears on the screen in "Ways of Seeing," is marked by directness, and even button-holing in character. This is emphasized visually by the flat and plain blue background, pushing his body forward and placing him as close as possible to the viewer, almost as if he were leaning out. Strongly marked hand gestures and eye movements, also directed outward, go along with a use of the voice that is equally opposed to decorum in its thrusts and emphases. Also as a matter of principle, Berger does not intervene into our relationship with the image, by interposing himself between it and us or by appearing in the same space with it. Rather he alternates between voice-over commentary setting out the terms in which to understand what happens, in our experience of visual images, and putting the implications that he draws from this up front, and segments of direct address which split up the temporal sequencing—in opposition, as in the films, to the sense of an ongoing flow—and affirm a standpoint at once both programmatic and personal.

As to the pressures imposed by the modern world on the experience and creation of art, these Berger accepts, but he is in no way condemning and allows for a regenerative kind of artistic insight. In the TV version of "Ways of Seeing" certain elements specific to the presentation, not reproducible in book form, make a vital contribution here. The effects of multiplication as visually shown, in the segment dealing with the reproduction of works of

art, and the juxtapositions of billboard and street in the final part, on the fantasy wishes catered to by glamor photography and publicity advertising, combine an appeal to the communities of shared experience with the general aim of "demystifying" culture, in ways which make the more historically oriented parts, on the nude and on subjects implying possession, seem less successful by comparison.[20] But it is Berger's use of his own persona throughout, both as a link between visual expositions and as "interlocutor" (the term used by Tanner for the films), that finally carries the most weight. Frank and direct, often irritating or too crudely assertive, it is this aspect of Berger as critic that serves, counterculturally, as the linchpin of the series.

## Notes

1 Published in Britain in 1972, by the BBC in cooperation with Penguin Books, and reprinted almost annually since; first published in the United States by Viking Press in 1973 and then as a Penguin paperback in 1977.

2 Michael Lerner, "Anarchism and the American Counter-Culture," *Government and Opposition* 5, no. 4 (1970):433. The concept was first introduced by Theodore Roszak, *The Making of Counter Culture,* New York (1969). See also Victor Turner's writings, note 4 below; Milton J. Younger, "Countraculture and Subculture," *American Sociological Review* 25 (1960):635-638, repr. in *The Sociology of Subcultures,* D. D. Arnold, ed. (Berkeley, Calif · 1970); and Joseph Berke, ed., *Counter Culture* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), which includes an essay on the cinema, discussing filmmakers' cooperatives in New York and London. I am grateful to Michel Oren for helping me with these and other references.

3 John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview," *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain,* S. Hall and T. Jefferson, eds. (London: Hutchinson, 1976), pp. 57-71. For an attempt to use the term for a much earlier period, see Robert O'Kell, "The Victorian Counter-Culture: An Interdisciplinary Conference" (held at Univ. of Southern Florida, February-March 1974), *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 4 (1974):431-435, with comments on the looseness and malleability with which the term was applied there.

4 Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: 1969), and *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 1974), with some extension of the argument in later writings of his. See also Barbara C. Meyerhoff, "The Revolution as Trip: Symbol and Paradox," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 395 (May 1971; Student Protest Issue):105-116; Sherry R. Turkel, "Symbol and Festival in the French Student Uprising" (May-June 1968), in *Symbols and Politics in Communal Ideology; Cases and Questions,* Sally Falk Moore and Barbara C. Meyerhoff, eds. (Ithaca, N.Y.: 1975), pp. 68-100; and Dick Hebdidge, *Subculture; The Meaning of Style* (London, Methuen: 1969).

5 *Ways of Seeing,* 27f.

6 Familiar examples to consider here would be *Easy Rider* (as compared to the early films of Godard) and the comedy program "Laugh-In." The problems of what to show on educational TV devolve, in the late 1960s and 1970s, within a similar framework.

7 Part II of the film version includes discussion with a group of women of different ages, and Part I uses the National Gallery in London as its opening focus. Neither element is duplicated in book form.

8 A comparable figure of the early nineteenth century would be Blake—before the term counterculture becomes appropriate for such figures; see Martin Green, *Cities of Light and Sons of the Morning* (Boston-Toronto: 1972), Chap. 3, in support of this.

9 *About Looking* (New York: 1980); (1979), pp. 79-86; (1966), pp. 87-95; and (1976), p. 67.

10 Cf. here Berger's *A Seventh Man* (Penguin Books: 1975), a collaboration with the photographer Jean Mohr.

11 *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (Penguin Books: 1965), the best known of Berger's critical writings, which seems to have fundamentally affected the critical estimate of the later Picasso.

12 *Ways of Seeing,* pp. 57f., 66f.

13 *Ibid.,* Parts 2-3, 4-5.

14 Released in the United States in 1972, 1974, and 1976, respectively.

15 Berger's narrative for *A City at Chandigarh* (1966) had been the very first collaboration, in which Berger had interwoven his commentary with literary quotations. See further here Michael Tarantino, "Tanner and Berger: The Voice Off-Screen," *Film Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Winter 1979-1980):32-49, which draws on Tanner's words as published in *Cinema, mort ou vif* (Zurich, Film-collective: 1977), and on the script of *La Salamandre,* published by L'Avant-Scene Cinema, no. 125 (May 1972), including an interview with Tanner.

16 Michel Boujut, "*Le Milieu du Monde* ou le cinema selon Tanner," (Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1974), pp. 29-31, and see also Tarantino, 38f.

17 See Note 15.

18 See Clark, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts, p. 70: a table listing all of these countercultural attributes and the middle- or lower-class values to which they oppose themselves.

19 Published by the BBC as a book in 1969.

20 See *Ways of Seeing,* pp. 23-26 (for reproduction) and p. 142 (for billboard and street).

## Berger on the Female Nude

John Berger's account of the female nude in Chapter
3 of his *Ways of Seeing* both exhibits his position
as a counterculture figure and raises a number of
issues of interest for their own sake. Though this
may not have been Berger's original intent, his analysis
can be nicely placed in opposition to Lord Clark's
magisterial Mellon lectures, published as *The Nude*.
As in the TV series of these two men, the contrast
here is both one of personal style and, more deeply,
of opposing views of the uses of art in society.
Clark, a great scholar, traces elegantly the history
of different forms of the nude. Only very tangentially
does he mention issues which become central for
Berger: that (female) nudes are in our culture almost
always made by men for men to see, and that this
cultural "bias"—if that word can be used first in
just a descriptive sense—has important implications
for how we see the nude. To say Berger's account
is a popular or even journalistic one is not to suggest
it is simple. Rather, in his brief and very condensed
remarks Berger uses a number of interconnected
ideas which need unpacking. Though a number of
feminist writers have used these remarks as their
own starting point,[1] what is lacking, still, is a proper
historical placement of this argument.

Following Berger's own characteristic procedure, in
which a particular artwork directly expresses or
"shows" a certain view of the world, consider one
painting of a woman which illustrates his view of the
depiction of women. In a picture of a woman trying
on a hat, Meyer Schapiro argues, Degas (Figure 1)
crops the picture so that

> two distinct acts of seeing are projected here: one of
> a viewer inside the picture, the second of an implied
> outer viewer—the first without the object she sees, the
> other no less actual than the first through the near
> perspective of the depicted objects of his glance.[2]

What Schapiro calls a "simile of the aesthetic…
selfconsciousness" is, for Berger, a revelation of the
woman's consciousness. She can only see herself
indirectly, as she imagines herself to appear to a (male)
other. In general, but most especially in erotic
contexts, women are, according to Berger, treated
as passive, as things. Alienated from themselves,
and treated as if they were objects on display for
the active (male) viewer, they can see themselves
only in this indirect fashion. It's interesting to see
how a contemporary erotic artist like Balthus uses
this idea (in, for example, *Nude in Front of a
Mantel,* Figure 2), frequently showing his depicted
women absorbed in themselves in mirrors.

**Figure 1**    Edgar Degas. *At the Milliner's* (1882).
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



An immediate problem with this analysis lies in
the way Berger produces what he takes to be
evidence that this is how, notwithstanding some
special exceptions, Western painting has characteris-
tically treated women. Comparing a detail of an
Ingres *Odalisque* with a photograph from a popular
magazine or seeing Bronzino's *Allegory of Time and
Love* in a way such that

> the complicated symbolism which lies behind this painting
> need not concern us now because it does not affect
> its sexual appeal—at the first degree,[3]

may seem puzzling. For this discussion comes
immediately after an account of Walter Benjamin's
"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Repro-
duction," where description of the differences between
photographs and paintings suggests that such a
direct comparison of photographs and paintings is
a dangerously ahistorical procedure. And, in his book
on Picasso, Berger[4] objects to that artist treating
the subject matter of a picture indifferently:

**Figure 2** Balthasar Balthus. *Nude in Front of a Mantel* (1955). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
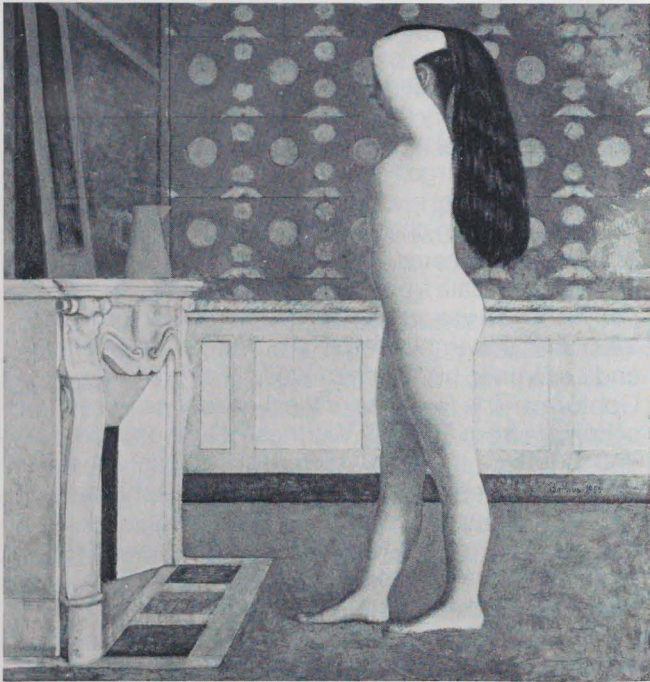


**Figure 3** Paolo Veronese. *Mars and Venus United by Love* (ca. 1576-1584). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
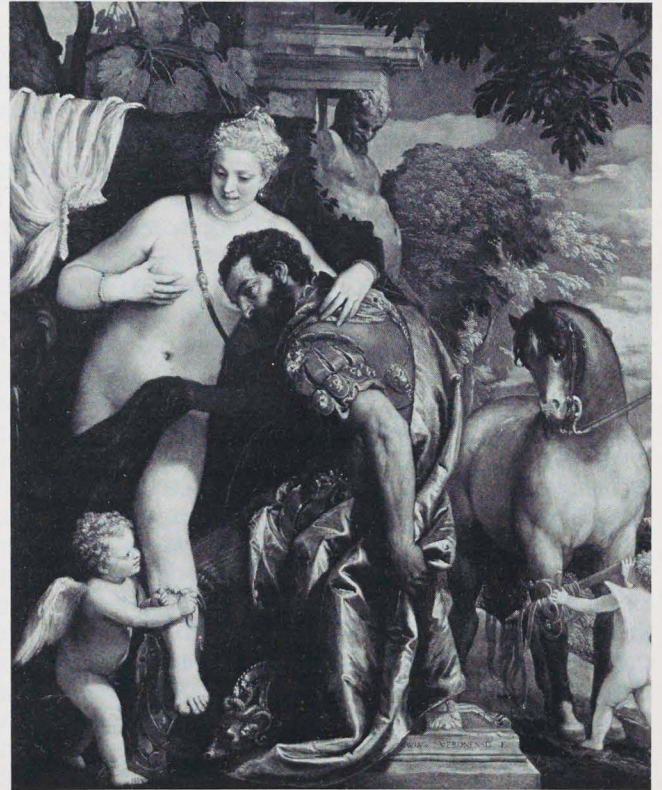


> The meaning of a Venus and Cupid…is totally different from that of a Virgin and Child, even when the latter is secular and has lost its religious conviction. The two subjects depend on an utterly different agreement being imagined between painter and spectator.

Consider one painting which has, for us, a direct and obvious erotic appeal. Botticelli's *Primavera* was conceived by the Neo-Platonist Ficino as a picture *of* the importance of virtue:

> One cannot describe how much more easily the sight of Beauty inspires love than words can do. If…we could present the wonderful aspect of Virtue itself to the eyes of men there would no longer be any need for our art of persuasion….[5]

The painting, by its immediate appeal to the eye, is more effective than an intellectual or verbal argument. For us, surely, for whom this intellectual world is very remote, seeing the painting in these terms is difficult. But is it not arguable that to treat the picture merely in terms of its erotic appeal is to lose sight of the larger part of its original significance? If so, then how can an analysis of *Primavera*-as-a-

pinup actually tell us anything about the history of European beliefs about the female nude?

When, for example, we see a picture like Paolo Veronese's *Mars and Venus United by Love* (Figure 3), we can recognize it both as a work with a directly erotic power and as a painting which can be understood only when placed in its context of traditional mythology.[5] We need to ask: How are these two kinds of ways of viewing it related? For example, is it like seeing the famous rabbit-duck figure which we see first as a rabbit only and then as a duck? Or do these two ways of seeing the picture combine into one unified visual experience?

Here Berger's account needs some development. I want to consider three points—idealization, the status of the model herself, and the relation of imagination to erotic picturing, all discussed in his account—and suggest that they can be linked together by drawing on Gombrich's account of representation. What Gombrich's account offers, I will argue, is a way of understanding the history of the development of the nude, which is precisely the aspect of Berger's account that needs working out.

According to Renaissance art critics, particular individuals are only imperfect realizations of ideal or perfect forms.[6] When depicting a particular person, artists idealize that person, not showing them, pimples and all, as they actually appear. This account is, paradoxically, an application of a Platonic theory of forms to art. (Paradoxically because for Plato the forms are supersensible; for him the theory of forms shows that art cannot be truthful.) Now, applied to the nude, such seeing of individuals as imperfect versions of some ideal shows, for Berger, "a remarkable indifference to who any one person really was."[7] A consideration of *Playboy* centerfold types of erotic art suggests how this account could be used to make an explicitly feminist point. The aim of centerfolds is to be arousing, and so they show what presumably are ideals of desirable women. Only quite young women, of a certain relatively narrowly defined body type, are shown. Insofar as such pictures perform a role of cultural conditioning—and we hardly need Gay Talese to tell us that—they influence how men think of their desire for actual women and how women think of themselves. The connection with Berger's general view, that women tend to see themselves as men see them, is clear. For in a great deal of both popular and feminist literature the way that many women are obsessively unhappy about their own bodies is described. For example:

Most of us tend to feel there are just two kinds of breasts—our own, which are too tiny, too big, too low, too high...too whatever...and "those perfect ones" that belong to other women.[8]

If we consider, in addition, that such idealized depictions can be generated only by carefully doctoring photographs, then the irony of this procedure should be clear. *Playboy* starts with

a real form, the nude female body, and manufacture(s) an ideal. It is something real, dressed up to be an ideal; it is a lie....Because it is a photograph...the lie is believed as truth, and men proceed...to seek the ideal, nonexistent body.[9]

It isn't surprising that some early, unidealized photographs were mistrusted by artists. "The inevitable vulgarities of real life—the inelegances, the misproportions, the coarse blemishes—ludicrously asserted themselves."[10] Photographs of the nude only looked truthful when they looked like paintings of the nude. Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* traces very thoroughly, and with many pictorial examples, the ways women are depicted in photographs as being, typically, passive and subordinate to men. Following Berger, what might be added to Goffman's account is that most of the poses he describes can be found in many paintings as well.

Gombrich's account in *Art and Illusion* of what he calls schemata provides a different approach to understanding idealization. In one sense of "schema" the schemata are the starting point for the making of a particular picture, a repertoire of given visual forms which an artist can modify to suit a particular situation.[11] Thus, what are described in the various chapters of Clark's *The Nude* are the various schemata for the nude as they evolve historically. By the period from the late eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth century this traditional use of schemata undergoes a crisis. (Saying this is one way of describing the larger crisis in painting when the traditional subject matter—grand history painting, art of religion and mythology—is abandoned in favor of an "art of contemporary life.") When Reynolds quotes schemata from Michelangelo in his portrait, *Lady Cockburn and her Children;*[12] or Benjamin West uses schemata from Rembrandt, Van Dyck, and Le Brun in his *Death of Wolfe;*[13] or Thomas Couture in *The Romans of the Decadence* uses schemata from Tiepolo, Veronese, Rubens, Poussin, and Ingres[14]—then the way, traditionally, schemata have been used seems to change. Now schemata are used in inappropriate or strained ways, and recognizing them becomes a test of the viewer's erudition. (As many recent critical accounts of Manet have observed, it is this use of quotations from the old masters which often makes both the meaning and the pictorial composition of his art problematic.) Using such schemata becomes a bit like quoting from Latin or Greek in one's personal correspondence. When these languages cease to be the instruments of intellectual intercourse, such erudition comes to seem a bit affected.

But if we think of idealization in these ways suggested by Gombrich, then we may reach quite a different view of idealization from Berger. The function of idealizing schemata is not so much to leave us indifferent to particular individuals as to diffuse or partially neutralize the erotic power of paintings. In Lord Clark's words: we are distanced from "the obsessive, unreasonable nature of physical desire" by using schemata, "a form by which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial."[15] To treat a Bronzino Venus as if she were a desirable-looking woman, with a perfect (i.e., ideal) body, is to short-circuit the intended purpose of that idealization. She *is* Venus, not a pretty model posing as Venus. This point might be reinforced with reference to Gombrich's general account of representation. (I merely note briefly here a point he elaborates in his "Meditations on a Hobby Horse,"[16] which I will discuss at length in another essay.) Originally, the function of a representation was to be a substitute for, and in that sense "to be," the desired object.

Pygmalion, making a sculpture of a woman and desiring a woman, found that his sculpture *became* the woman he desired. At this level, the distinction between *making a representation* or replica of a thing and *making that thing* disappears. And even now, in erotic fantasies, or aggressive attacks on representations—as when we poke pins through the eyes in a photograph—the representation is thought of, in one corner of our mind, as simply being what it represents. But in the development of culture, this biological foundation of representation is sublimated, or distanced, by giving representations other sorts of significance. A Venus is, then, both a sexy picture of a desirable woman and a goddess whose form suggests the ineffable Form, Beauty. To treat her as just an attractive woman is only to consider one dimension of the picture.

This point can be elaborated by considering the function of the artist's model. Manet's *Olympia,* it has often been noted, has a different status from the Titian *Venus* which serves as its schema.[17] The Manet figure is clearly a contemporary woman playing a role. Even if we imagine—any such account is, of course, only a useful simplification—both Titian and Manet painting from a model, their procedures would still in this respect be essentially different. Titian uses a model to paint a depiction of Venus, a picture in which we see the model. (A similar point could be made about Manet's Christ. If, as many contemporaries thought, it seems irreligious, that is because what we see is not "Christ depicted," but rather "the depiction of a model portrayed as Christ.") This argument is, I think, compatible with the point made with great force in Anne Hollander's discussion of the nude in her *Seeing Through Clothes:* that the style of the nude has changed historically in relation to changing styles of dress. For, allowing that Titian and Manet show different "body types," the further point is that with Titian but not Manet we see the depicted figure as something more than just a model.

This contrast between seeing a depicted woman as Venus and seeing her as a model posing as Venus might be given more clarity by seeing the changing ways in which nineteenth-century artists themselves thought of the model. One interesting example is the curious paintings, by Ingres and others, of Raphael and his mistress.[18] The implication of such pictures—as when she is shown sitting on his lap, with her depiction as a Madonna in the painting behind her—is that Raphael's Madonnas are depictions of the actual woman he loved. (In his essay on the Raphael *Madonna della Sedia* Gombrich quotes further examples of such stories.[19]) Aside from the break with traditional ideas of decorum, what's suggestive here is the fantasy that the idealized depicted woman is in fact a straightforward copy of some actual, ideal woman.

In sixteenth-century art theorizing, by contrast—and as Raphael himself is reported to have said—the idealized depiction does not show any actual individual.

This nineteenth-century interpretation of the artist's relation to his model corresponds, then, to a very literal understanding of the use of schemata. So, when nineteenth-century artists use schemata from the old masters, the effect seems inappropriate just because the context of art has changed so much. The English gentlewoman depicted by Reynolds cannot, without considerable strain, be assimilated to a Michelangelo figure. And Couture's scene of the decadent Romans' attempts to work within a tradition of grand history painting which is no longer viable. It's interesting that copying old master works, a prominent part of art school training of this period, was thought of as "a form of sympathetic magic," a way of making contact at a distance, through time, with a past whose standards were very different from those of the present. To say that after 1800 we have a split between "the anaemic, smooth and frigid beauty of classicism and…a cult of the ugly, the forceful, and the demythicized,"[20] as Hetzer does, is too simple. Rather, the masters as well as the academic artists of this period sought this return to the past. But a Degas, unlike Couture, could seek this magical contact in ways that are both ironically playful and serious. Thus, he parodies Ingres's *Apotheosis of Homer* in a photograph[21] but then turns to judge the composition of that photograph in terms of the original painting. And he sketches a Giorgione, but adding a contemporary couple "who appear to look at the Giorgione, so that the spatially neutral page is converted into an illusion of a wall in the Louvre." And when he and others, especially Manet and Cézanne, depict paintings or sculptures within their paintings, they sometimes relate a contemporary scene to the old master art shown, while at other times asserting their independence from, or distance from, the past.

Berger's account of the nude can be approached in a third way—also related to Gombrich's account of representation—by considering the role of imagination in viewing erotic pictures. Berger deals with this question in an essay in *The Moment of Cubism* when he compares a nude photograph with Rubens' portrait of his second wife.[22] His three criteria for the "superiority" of the Rubens—that it transcends the moment shown, admits the spectator's subjectivity, and does not simply treat the viewer as a voyeur— all relate closely to the role of imagination. Here, again, Berger's very brief account needs unpacking.

In his essay "Psychoanalysis and the History of Art"[23] Gombrich suggests that erotic content in paintings is made more acceptable by being counterbalanced by a certain difficulty in seeing what is
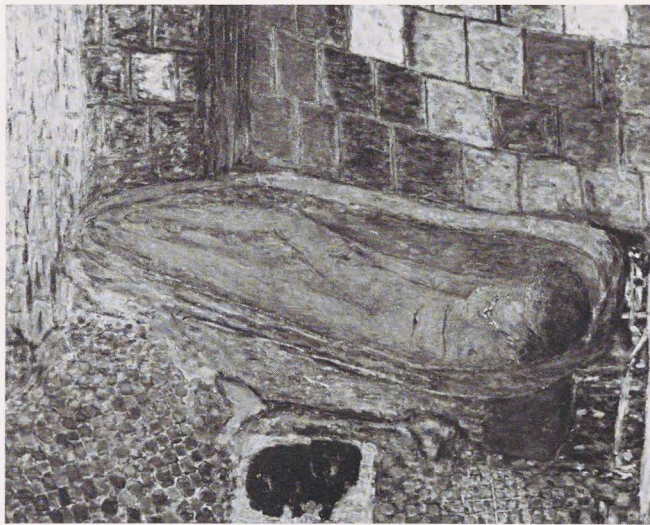
**Figure 4**     Pierre Bonnard. *Nude in Bathtub* (ca. 1938-1941).
Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

depicted. "An increase in such active participation…
may be accompanied by an easing of conventional
taboos." To return to his point about "the hobby
horse," the quality of an erotic artwork as a
substitute gratification is sublimated. Otherwise the
picture is judged unaesthetic, "too literal," Michael
Podro remarks, "in its appeal for us to gain any
satisfaction other than the satisfaction we want from
reality."[24] Podro offers a further example, a Bonnard
nude (*Nude in a Bathtub,* Figure 4):

> What is fascinating is to watch Bonnard eliminating
> visual cues and stepping up the overall pattern and
> so loosening our grasp of the girl's body…by producing
> this greater uncertainty, the element of sexual projection
> is stimulated enormously.[25]

Evidence for this argument can be found in
nineteenth-century French debates about the relative
merits of the sketch and the finished work. Though
sketching played an important role in academic
training—in ways Boime's useful *The Academy and
French Painting in the 19th Century* describes in
detail—sketchiness in a finished work was judged
to be undesirable.[26] What was radical about Manet
and the Impressionists was not their interest in sketchi-
ness but their insistence that a finished work could
be sketchy.

To put this point in the terms of Gombrich's account,
the relative sketchiness of Impressionist and post-
Impressionist nudes allows us to find such works
satisfying, while a Bougereau is embarrassingly, and

so unerotically, literal. Saying this is not to deny
that even academic artists were aware of such
issues. Art school students first drew from casts,
so that when they got to live models they were
"conditioned to see…the poses of the live model
generally resembled those of antique statues…the
live model appeared as a kind of living statue."
This shows, as I noted earlier, the importance of
schemata. The additional claim I am now making
is that the projection required to see a sketchy
or painterly picture achieves the same effect as
the schemata, but in a different way. By requiring
effort on the viewer's part, sketchy pictures again
assert the importance of an "aesthetic distance."
Sketchiness, like the use of schemata, is a way
of insisting that what we see is not just a lifelike
woman standing before us, but a depiction, difficult
for the eye to read and categorized in terms of
traditional types of nudes.

Berger's account of the Rubens portrait of Hélène
Fourment suggests how this point about the erotic
use of imagination can be generalized.[27] What
distances us, and gives us pleasure, is the (perceptual)
difficulty in getting the picture in focus. Showing
the model sketchily depicted, or turning her body,
engages our eye while distancing us from her *qua*
individual. Our erotic response, we might say, is
not straightforwardly to what we look through the
picture surface to see as much as to the picture
itself. In pinups, the model is made to look erotic;
in a Bonnard or Rubens, it is the painting itself
which is erotic. More recent erotic photographs might
be analyzed in these terms. In contrast to more
traditional pinups with pose indirectly derived from
traditional painting, the goal now seems to be to
make a direct appeal to exhibitionism and voyeurism.
Thus, where Ingres or Courbet could engage our
imagination by using waterspouts as metaphors for
hidden genitals, now we have very unsublimated
depictions. The effect, if Gombrich's account is
correct, is to reduce nudes to their more primitive
function of what he calls "releasors," or substitutes
for the thing they depict. It is not accidental, in
this view, that such an abolition of aesthetic distance
is connected with the obvious and often grotesque
misogyny found in such pictures.

Having now unpacked Berger's account of idealiza-
tion, the status of the model, and imagination in
depictions of the nude, what now can be said about
the validity of his original account? Two points might
be made. First, what Berger takes to be the charac-
teristics of traditional Western nudes which exhibit
the alienation of woman—idealization, the use of
stereotyped poses—in fact function within that tradition
in a somewhat different way. By insisting that the
depiction is not *of* some actual person, these devices
maintain an aesthetic distance of the spectator from

the artwork. Though stimulated by what the work depicts, the spectator is also reminded that it is only a depiction. And, as many feminist critiques of pornography have noted, the breakdown of this aesthetic distance may have quite problematic consequences. If we follow Gombrich in believing that the aim of civilization is to control our aggressive instincts[28] — and here his work needs placement in relation to Freud, Nietzsche, and perhaps also the character of Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* — then breaking down such controls may be far from liberating. Second, Berger is entirely correct to see how such erotic imagery, today taken out of its original historical context, now functions. And given that the pictorial traditions which "upheld" that erotic distance are no longer viable, and can be now seen as "working" only at the price of some self-deception — "The so-called grand manner," even Lord Clark writes, "deadened our sense of truth, even our sense of moral responsibility"[29] — what is to be done? One need not agree with Berger's discussions of such problems in every detail, or even less his "politics" and proposed solution to the problems, to admire him for raising issues which the conventional "art lovers" he so often criticizes fail even to be aware of.

Ironically, what I have said about the differences between the historical view of the nude and the way we view it today is a point perhaps made, implicitly at least, in another part of Berger's own work. In his novel *G.* he retells the story of Don Juan, presenting him as a feminist *avant la lettre* who, by treating women as unique individuals rather than the property of a man, gives these women the possibility of acting freely. The character G. himself can do this, we are to understand, because his own atypical, and in that sense "privileged," upbringing has failed to make him internalize bourgeois moral standards. Here Berger does what I have described painters as doing; he takes an inherited schema — the Don Juan myth — and attempts to modify it to apply it to early-twentieth-century life. Parts of what he says in the book about the relation between a general account — a picture or verbal description — of an experience and that particular experience are important, I think, for understanding our response to the erotic art he discusses in *Ways of Seeing*. Thus, he writes: "At the center of sexual experience, the object — because it is exclusively desired — is transformed and becomes universal."[30] The relatively few "satisfactory" European paintings of nudes, Berger has claimed earlier, show an individual, and so perhaps make it possible for an observer to feel such a desire. The less effective nudes reduce women to types, as if anyone with a certain appearance is enough to arouse the (male) viewer's desire.

But have we only just learned that this is how desire functions? Commenting on Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* Kierkegaard wrote:

The first stage desired the one ideally, the second stage desired the particular under the qualification of the manifold; the third stage is a synthesis of these two. Desire has its absolute object in the particular, it desires the particular absolutely.[31]

It is precisely, I have tried to suggest, because such a presentation of desire is so powerful that we need to try to keep — as long as we remain in the realm of art, not "life" — aesthetic distance. Interpreting that last phrase quite literally, Kierkegaard's suggestion that he can better understand the music when he is not too physically close to it is suggestive:

I have sat close up, I have sat further and further back...the farther I was away from it, not from coldness, but from love (the better I understand it). [ibid.]

Of course, being nostalgic for art of earlier times which achieved such a distance in ways perhaps unavailable to us today will not solve the problems to which Berger calls attention. And he, unlike Lord Clark, is hardly the sort of person to be nostalgic about the past. But what we can learn from studying such earlier art, I have tried here to suggest, is how to amplify and in some ways modify Berger's account of the contemporary female nude.

### Notes

1 For example, see Lisa Tickner's very interesting "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970," *Art History* 1, 2, June 1978, 236. Rosetta Brooks' "Woman Visible: Women Invisible," *Studio International* 193, no. 3(1977):208-212, seems to draw on similar ideas.

2 Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: 1978), pp. 239-240.

3 *Ways of Seeing*, pp. 54-55.

4 *The Success and Failure of Picasso*, 141; also see 157.

5 *a* Quoted in E. H. Gombrich's "Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle," in his *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: 1972), pp. 44-45.
 *b* These two ways of seeing the picture are interestingly related in Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Avon, 1980), p. 181.

6 The standard discussions here are Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* (London: 1962), and Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (New York: 1968).

7 *Ways of Seeing*, p. 62.

8 Quoted from *Cosmopolitan,* October 1975:205.

9 Honey Truewoman (!), "Realism in Drag," reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Super Realism* (New York: 1975), p. 229.

10 Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Baltimore: 1969), p. 101.

11 E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: 1961), Chap. 5.

**12** See Edgar Wind, "Charity: The Case History of a Pattern,"
*The Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1 (1937-1938):322-330.

**13** See Charles Mitchell, "Benjamin West's 'Death of General Wolfe'
and the Popular History Piece," *The Journal of the Warburg
and Courtauld Institutes* 7(1944):20-33.

**14** See Jean Seznec, " 'The Romans of the Decadence' and
Their Historical Significance," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* XXIV
(1943):221.

**15** Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (Garden City, N.Y.:1956). p. 109.

**16** The title essay in his *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (London:
1965), pp. 1-11.

**17** Interestingly discussed in Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the
Modern Tradition* (New Haven and London: 1977).

**18** See Robert Rosenblum, *Ingres* (New York, n.d.), pp. 98-99.

**19** See Gombrich's "Raphael's 'Madonna della Sedia,'" in his
*Norm and Form* (London: 1966), pp. 64-80.

**20** Theodore Hetzer, "Francisco Goya and the Crisis in Art around
1800," reprinted in Fred Licht, ed., *Goya in Perspective* (Englewood
Cliffs, N.J.:1973), p. 99.

**21** These examples discussed in Theodore Reff, *Degas: The Artist's
Mind* (New York: 1976), pp. 52-53 and 92-93.

**22** John Berger, "Nude in a Fur Coat, *Rubens*" (1966), *The Moment
of Cubism* (London: 1969), pp. 72-74; see also *Ways of Seeing*,
pp. 60-61.

**23** In his *Meditations on a Hobby Horse,* p. 36.

**24** In "Art and Freud's Displacement of Aesthetics," in Jonathan
Miller, ed., *Freud* (Boston: 1972), p. 133.

**25** A comment made in a discussion with David Sylvester and
Andrew Forge, "A Kind of Informality," *Studio International*
171 (1966):55. See also Philip Rawson, *Drawing* (London: 1969),
p. 266.

**26** London, 1971; quotations from pp. 98, 31.

**27** This subject is treated more generally in a number of essays
in Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin, eds., *Woman as Sex
Object* (New York: 1972), and in a fascinating polemical article
by Carol Duncan, "The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic
Art," *Heresies* 1(1977):46-50.

**28** Here the interpretation of Freud in his "Freud's Aesthetics,"
*Encounter* XXXVI, no. 1 (1966):30-40, and the essays now
collected in his *Ideals and Idols* (Oxford: 1979) are helpful.

**29** Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (New York: 1969),
p. 133.

**30** Berger, *G.* (New York: 1972), p. 111.

**31** Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or,* vol. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: 1959),
pp. 83, 119. Thanks to a letter from John Berger to Mark
Roskill, I can now add that he, Berger, explicitly had this text
in mind while composing *G.*

**Frank D. Russell.**   Picasso's Guernica: The Laby-
rinth of Narrative and Vision. Montclair, N.J.:
Allanheld & Schram, 1980. 334 pp., 215 illus-
trations. $35.00.

## Review Essay by Rudolf Arnheim
University of Michigan

One would be hard put to find another painting in the
history of art that has been analyzed in such detail and
by so many writers as Picasso's mural *Guernica.* Its
content, meaning, evolution, and derivation have been
scrutinized, and the end is not in sight. Professor
Russell's recent book is the most comprehensive
monograph so far. Where his forerunners have a
remark, he has a chapter; and he can be said to be
summing up what is left of earlier research. The path
of more than 40 years of *Guernica* studies is strewn
with the remains of attempts to meet the challenge of
this enigmatic work of art. Those of us who survive
have no reason to complain of being neglected by
Mr. Russell. He spends thirty-seven pages of Notes in
small print on quoting and critically discussing earlier
interpretations.

But the work continues. The best essay I have ever
read on *Guernica* was published by Reinhold Hohl
(1978) in Germany. In our own country Mary Mathews
Gedo (1979), in an article in *Art Quarterly* and now
in a book (1980, which I have not yet seen), offers a
psychoanalytic interpretation of the painting's subject
matter. Still another book on the preliminary sketches
and the "postscripts" is announced by Meyer Schapiro
(1981); and were it not for the name of an author who
has never failed to surprise us with new insights, one
would wonder what is left to say on the subject.

One reason for this continued interest is the fact that
*Guernica* is uncontested as the most significant paint-
ing of our century, mostly because of the way it deals
with one of those historical episodes in which public
opinion finds a passion-arousing symbol of the human
experience. Nobody has yet analyzed the particular
qualities that raise an event above the daily chronicles
of heroism, suffering, and violence. Sometimes it is the
mere size of a crime, as in the mass murder of the Jews
under Hitler. Sometimes it is, on the contrary, the limited
number of the victims, which allows for individual
identification, as in the case of the American hostages
in Iran and the paradigmatic nature of the outrage
committed. The bombing of the small Spanish town of
Guernica in 1937 shook the conscience of Europe as
the earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 had moved thinkers
of that time to question the wisdom of God. The strike
of the Fascists at the traditional sanctuary of civic free-

dom in the Basque country sharpened the symbolic significance of the onslaught and intensified the spirit of the crusade that had mobilized the young intellectuals of Europe. Add to this that the most famous painter of the century, himself a Spaniard, undertook to create the official image of that destruction, suffering, and resistance, and you have the main cause of the painting's distinction.

But this distinction alone does not explain why the commentators and analysts have singled out *Guernica* so persistently, in preference to perhaps equally good works by a Matisse, Klee, or Henry Moore. Further, Picasso has left us an unprecedented record of forty-five preparatory sketches and additional studies, which, together with photographs of the canvas taken while the work was in progress, display a unique reflection of the genesis of a work of art. Russell, in the second part of his book, emulates earlier attempts to trace the development of Picasso's conception through a step-by-step analysis of the chronological sequence.

Equally important is the realization that *Guernica* epitomizes the specifically modern discord between universal validity and individual vision. The function of the painting, commissioned by the Spanish Government-in-Exile for its pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris, required that it act as a collective statement on an objective fact of general concern. But a glance back at the closest example of a similar undertaking, Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), shows how much less modulated by the personal attitude and problems of the artist was that earlier work, even though it was not produced as an official commission. Frank Russell, in a remarkable epilogue, quite moving as the upshot of so exhaustive a labor of love, wonders whether *Guernica* truly lives up to its calling. "Why," he asks, "must the picture be eternally argued, searched? Why is there not, we ask when all is said, that unquestioned, that unquestioned quality we find in some earlier tragic expressions, expressions addressed, like the Guernica, in grand programmatic terms to a general public—Bach Passions, Giotto?" The answer, of course, depends first of all on whether the painting has, in a viewer's judgment, that definitive validity which Russell hesitates to concede to it. At that level, arguing is fruitless. But one can try to examine with some concreteness to what extent extrinsic influences such as personal traumas, recollections, and yearnings or the effects of religious tradition, political ideology, or pictorial models interfered with the requirements of the statement Picasso had been asked to deliver.

In the most general sense, any direct examination of the development of a person or a work tends to make the final product appear as the more or less arbitrary freezing of a process of complex forces—forces that were acting upon one another in the course of time and would have continued to do so, had they not been stopped. Development frowns upon completion. I think that, to some extent, Russell falls victim to that perspective. He calls *Guernica* "a torture chamber of wrenching contradictions"; but the formal differences he has in mind—"the lightbearer's fluidity vs. the burning woman's angularity"—do not seem to support that judgment. They are justified by the different character of the two figures and, to my eye, fit the style of the whole work. Russell compares *Guernica* to a ship that "proceeds uneasily, rears up, strains...." *Fluctuat nec mergitur*. To some of us the picture looks more stable than that (Arnheim 1980).

Admittedly the composition is of staggering complexity, but Russell himself succeeds in reducing the dazzle of the surface to a skeleton of stable architectural patterns. To call the painting a labyrinth is tempting, if only because of the presence of the bull, close enough to the Minotaur who inhabited the original maze in the palace of Minos and haunted so many of Picasso's earlier inventions. But Russell goes further and points to the triangular pediment in which the central group is organized and which, together with the lateral scenes, conforms to the traditional plan of a triptych. He also mentions the resemblance of that scheme to the façades of medieval churches. Such references help to reveal an order that assigns its logical place to each of the painting's many details.

Every work of art is the product of many confluences, and the final success depends on how well they all integrate in a meaningful whole. Russell adopts the observation that the sacrificial slaughter scene of *Guernica* is intimately related to the religious theme of the crucifixion, which Picasso had extensively explored some years before. He follows earlier interpreters also in citing another permanent feature of Picasso's imagination, namely, the bullfight. Well documented, his survey extends the range of the relevant imagery to give us a more thorough understanding of what our eyes see in the picture. He establishes the symbolical meaning of the wounded horse and traces the origin of puzzling details, such as the Roman helmet and sword of the warrior, who goes back to the centurion of the calvary scenes. All this is illuminating. I get restless, however, when the spear of Longinus is compared with the brushes of painters who apply the *coup de grâce* to the scenes they depict, or when the ladder leaning against the cross is symbolically related to the ladder Picasso used in his studio. Those, alas, are the professional hazards of interpretation.

In the search for the sources of a work it is necessary to distinguish between references that help to clarify what the artist has chosen to include in his picture and others that serve the psychologist, the art historian, or the social scientist but burden the image with irrelevant associations. Thus Mary Gedo in her recent article suggests that the turmoil of *Guernica* is a reawakening of a childhood experience of the artist, who at the age of

3 was frightened by an earthquake in Málaga and by the birth of his sister Lola, which he may have witnessed at the same time. Such an observation, if valid, is of interest for the psychology of the creative process but may not add to our understanding of the painting. Nor are we necessarily enlightened by an inquiry into which mistress's features show up in the faces of the light-bearing woman or the bull.

Forays into the artist's personal disposition are of considerable interest, however, when they help to clarify aspects of the work that do not derive from the objective requirements of the subject. The ambivalence in the attitude of Picasso's bull has concerned many interpreters of *Guernica* and receives careful attention by Frank Russell. If the bull signifies the spirit of resistance and survival, to which the other characters of the cast appeal, he behaves peculiarly by turning his head away from the scene he faces with his body. Even his eyes express an uncertainty as to whether or not to engage in the central event. Since there is ample evidence that Picasso identified himself with the proud and savage animal, his own ambivalence toward the happenings in his home country is likely to be revealed in the stance of the bull. The self-centered privacy of the artist in conflict with the demands of national and political solidarity leaves an imprint that is no mere private projection. It highlights more generally the problem of the individual in an atomized society. But are the two functions of the bull reconcilable? The equation that attempts to parallel the spirit of Spain's survival with the dissonances in the artist's mind leaves a disturbing remainder.

Are we, then, to diagnose a crack in the structure of *Guernica* and call it a partial failure? Or are we dealing with a feature inherent in the way of life in our century and therefore legitimately present in a portrayal of our time? Is the inconsistency of the statement perhaps a necessary consequence of its truthfulness?

Any ambiguity in a work of art tends to raise the question that has been a nightmare in recent epistemology and the philosophy of communication: Does an aesthetic experience refer to an objective equivalent or are all responses purely subjective and therefore devoid of general validity? A fashionable relativism denies the possibility of communication and collectivity. But the destructive anarchism of such assertions loses ground when one looks at concrete instances. To be sure, the range of contradictory interpretations to which *Guernica* has been subjected may seem to prove that not one of them is objectively binding. But the very fact that the controversy continues indicates that there *is* something to be in disagreement about. Some of the readings have fallen by the wayside; others are questioned and modified by concrete references to the visual data. The image emerges ever more precisely.

This does not exclude ambivalences. Ambivalence can be objectively present, as the smile of Mona Lisa demonstrated long ago. It is possible also to define types of mistakes that make for misinterpretations. I will exemplify here two such types because they have not been sufficiently recognized. One is misplaced differentiation, the other, the naturalistic fallacy. Both come about when a statement, artistic or otherwise, is confused with its collateral, i.e., with a fact of reality.

When Russell discusses the figure of the mother with the dead child, he seems to sense that it is futile to ask: "What precisely, for example, is the mother's appeal— does she beseech the bull, does she rail against it? Does she utter an aimless curse—is she, in any ordinary sense, aware of the presence of the bull?" If we were looking at a real woman, the correct answers to these questions would have to exist; but to ask them about a picture is to commit displaced differentiation. The artist has used his privilege to stop his statement at a level of abstraction at which those alternatives do not exist. The questions cannot be asked. Nor should such abstractness be mistaken for vagueness.

The naturalistic fallacy is the more vulgar mistake of treating the style qualities of a work as though they belonged to the real thing. Throughout Picasso's work, many of his figures have been taken for monstrous, sadistic deformations. Picasso's own assertion "Deformations simply do not exist" is surely one-sided but closer to the truth. Russell observes sensibly that certain horror-readings of *Guernica* ignore "the nature of Picasso's visual language, which we see adapted with no less 'mutilation' to the patently affectionate rendering of girls skipping rope or sketching. To call the Guernica a picture of mutilation because of its swollen fingers is not altogether different from calling a Cufic inscription the same because its letters are not Roman." It is astonishing, therefore, to see him display the same lack of discrimination by calling the bull "primly fastidious" or "too witless or phlegmatic to pick up his hooves," not to mention the dreadful sentence on page 161 where the bull is called "foolish, like a committee chairman who does not know one end of his gavel from the other." Cheap jokes on the language of modern art should be left to others.

In addition, of course, interpreters commit straight misreadings of the perceptual data. On the whole, Frank Russell, trained as an artist and art historian, is an excellent guide. A few slips are all the more spectacular. Foremost among them is his insistence on describing the running woman as a kneeling woman. Deceived by the detail of an enlarged knee that touches the ground, he ignores the compelling dynamics of the diagonal which propels the runner into the central group. This error has the grave consequence of depriving the bull's stable immobility of its uniqueness. If the woman on the right is considered equally immobile, the entire basic theme of the composition

**Figure 1**  Pablo Picasso. *Guernica* (1937). On extended loan to The Museum of Modern Art, New York, from the artist's estate.

is destroyed: an inappropriate symmetry replaces the joint rush of the central figures toward the towering monument on the left. Less crucial although surprising is the misreading of the important first sketch, where the raised legs of the dead horse are reinterpreted as the animal's neck and head, and that of a painting in which a dagger in the chest of a baby is called an erect penis.

I mentioned that Russell's survey of *Guernica* is remarkably complete. He does fail, however, to consider the function of Picasso's mural as an official manifesto of the Spanish Government-in-Exile and its physical place in the Paris Pavilion. Here Reinhold Hohl's essay offers a welcome complement. Hohl points out that the setting of *Guernica* resembles a theater stage because the pavilion did in fact contain a stage where plays and folk dances were performed and documentary war films shown. Picasso fitted his presentation to this environment. He also considered the spatial location of the mural. Visitors entering the pavilion approached the picture from the right and thereby went with the surge of the composition toward the bull, to which I just referred. Hohl also shows convincingly that the immediate impulse for Picasso's active start on the work was not only the bombing of Guernica in itself but the attempt of Nazi propaganda to convince the world that the Spanish towns had been destroyed by the Republican defenders themselves. The official rejection of these lies was published in the newspapers on May 1 — the day on which Picasso drew his first sketches. Hohl's contention that the painting's principal theme is the revelation of the truth about the crime of the aggressors explains the dominant role of the light-bearing woman, who is present in the artist's conception from the very first sketch.

Two remarks on Frank Russell's technique as an author will conclude this review. As he combines fine verbal equipment with acute observation, he offers formulations we will not forget, for example, when he

calls *Guernica* "a picture about voice" and concludes: "The upward path of these voices and staring eyes is blocked and countered by what I might call the downward disaster of Guernica." His talent for felicitous wording, however, is not kept in check by the equally necessary restraint of the professional writer. There is too much seasoning in almost every sentence. Beginning with the subtitle of the book, the text is burdened with succulent imagery. We are told about "Picasso's great triangular seismograph of mayhem," and one of the chapters begins: "In keeping with their bridging of old and new, the Guernica and its Studies with their twentieth-century splinterings were chopped into place under the mellow beams of a seventeenth-century Paris house — a studio of sufficient size for the picture, discovered by Picasso's mistress Dora Maar." Meet this sort of thing on every page, and you feel that it overheats the very mood of the conception Russell wishes to convey.

Unmitigated praise is deserved by the interplay of text and illustrations in the book — an achievement for which author and publisher should receive some official award. More than 200 photographs and drawings of varying sizes are freely distributed over the pages, with bits of text placed wherever they belong. As a true *auteur,* ruling over script and visuals, Russell gives us the closest substitute for a live demonstration.

Picasso would have been pleased to see the discussion of his art continue without letup. He viewed his paintings, drawings, and sculptures as inextricable elements of the flow of his life, and he disliked and feared all termination. It is in this spirit of continuity that we watch Frank Russell's monograph move beyond past efforts and take its place as an outstanding contribution to the work in progress.

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**Robert Klein.**   Form and Meaning: Essays on the Renaissance and Modern Art. New York: Viking, 1979. 263 pp. $19.95.

## Reviewed by Peter Burke
Emmanuel College

Robert Klein, a Romanian in exile in France, was a "grey eminence" in Renaissance studies (the role of Richelieu being taken by Professor André Chastel). When he died in 1967, at the age of 48, he left behind him little more than a handful of essays. Twenty-five of his essays and reviews were published in 1970 under the title *La forme et l'intelligible;* thirteen of them have now appeared in a not altogether satisfactory English translation.

The selection includes four essays on modern art and literature—witty, elegant, but somewhat light-weight discussions of "the end of the image," "the eclipse of the work of art," and the relationship between modern painting and phenomenology. In the last case Klein was able to make good use of his philosophical training. The strength of the volume, however, lies in what he has to say about the Renaissance. Some of his essays are rather technical and difficult as well as important, notably the two studies on perspective and the discussion of the painter G. P. Lomazzo's use, in his treatise on art, of the astrological ideas of the magician H. C. Agrippa.

For a reader who is not a specialist in the art history of Renaissance Italy, Klein's caliber is most clearly revealed in three essays in this collection, each of which takes on a leading scholar in the field and criticizes him in an acute, precise, and constructive manner. "Burckhardt's *Civilisation of the Renaissance* Today" is unusual in its combination of scrupulous fairness and penetrating criticism. Having

noted the serious omissions in this apparently general survey (there is virtually nothing on the economy, technology, and philosophy of Renaissance Italy, and curiously little about its art), Klein does not fail to stress the book's enduring value, more than a century after its publication, in helping us relate Renaissance art to the rest of Renaissance culture.

"The Theory of Figurative Expression in Italian Treatises on the *Impresa*" suggests, contrary to Sir Ernst Gombrich, who argued the importance of Neo-Platonism in justifying Renaissance symbolic images, that the many treatises on these personal devices depend more on Aristotle (in whose psychology every act was the expression of an idea) than on Plato.

"Thoughts on Iconography" takes issue with the late Erwin Panofsky's essay "Iconography and Iconology," with its celebrated distinction between the primary, secondary, and tertiary meanings (or natural, conventional, and symbolic content) of a work of art, noting the difficulty of sustaining these distinctions owing to the "range of indeterminate or intermediary significations" of paintings. Among other examples, Klein cites the case of laughter being "mimed...by the painted characters, and not represented directly by forms and colours on the canvas." Klein had a remarkable gift for making subtle distinctions of this kind. Perhaps this very gift made it difficult for him to write books rather than essays. At any rate, this collection is both an appropriate (if belated) monument to him and a useful tool for his successors.

**Léo Bronstein.** Kaballah and Art.
Distributed for Brandeis University Press by the
University Press of New England, Box 979, Hanover,
N.H. 03755, 1980. 144 pp., 49 illustrations (one in
color). $20.00 (cloth).

## Reviewed by Laurin Raiken
New York University School of the Arts and the Gallatin
Division

> ...as ibn Latif, the Spanish poet-Kabbalist of the early
> thirteenth century saw it, [Kabbalah is] will and thought
> joined together, in a poet's prayer, "like a kiss." [p. 52]

On rare occasions a visitor to a museum or gallery will
report an unusual or unexpected experience. While
standing before an object created at an earlier time in
human history, the force or essence of the aura of that
object appears to be becoming so intense that the thing
itself seems to take on the quality of a being. In an earlier
work Léo Bronstein wrote:

> And what was given to me was that from things I could
> learn about beings themselves. So that not only could the
> life of a mountain, a road, a sky, a tree, a face, a window, a
> picture, or any other astonishing and always new thing of
> sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste become a guide for
> my understanding of the life of human beings...but also
> these things were revealed as living and working beings.
> [Bronstein 1953:ix-x]
> ...beyond or beneath any object emerging sudden and
> erotic I might seize a metaphysical certitude....A myth; the
> prophetic, primordial and childish beyond of things!...
> I learned from my childhood...how beings live beyond
> things and how things are made of beings. [ibid.:xi]

In the process of "surrender" to the art object, there
is a profound empathy with the known or unknown
human being who created the object. Through a
visceral understanding of the creative process as seen
in what Léo Bronstein called the "what of the how
level," there is a new experience of identification with
the human subject who created the work.

This same process can occur with the experience of
history itself for those who read the books of Léo
Bronstein. Since World War II, scholars as diverse as
Hannah Arendt and Theodor W. Adorno have spoken
of the increasing inaccessibility of history, the reduction
of usable, graspable history to the realm of fragments.
Bronstein helps us to regain these fragments, regrasp
access to history itself. In our time, the value and nature
of the historical imagination are so rare. Historical imagi-
nation has become lost or nonexistent for so many. Léo
Bronstein's work serves as a vehicle of tender reentry
to history; his writing, a pathway to a new set of doors
into a living, visual history of ideas.

*Kabbalah and Art* is an achievement of Léo Bron-
stein's maturity. Earlier he had written:

> Maturity is the discovery of childhood's prophecy. History is
> the discovery of prehistory's prophecy. Freedom or integrity
> of expression in maturity depends upon the degree of
> loyalty to this prophecy. [ibid.:ix]

*Kabbalah and Art* begins with Léo Bronstein's invit-
ing the reader to recognize that our rare meetings with
"an object of life and creation" are our meeting with
friendship. Such an encounter is "the meeting with
your spirituality" (p. 3). Bronstein evokes a continuum
of friendship, prophecy, and spirituality. The first
example of this continuum is "the Giaconda-like erect
half-figure of St. John the Baptist...painted with magic
intentions...by the sixteenth-century Ferrarese, Dosso
Dossi." The meeting with this artist brings forth from
Bronstein "Degas' convinced and obsessive motto:
Le Beau est un mystère" (p. 5). Dosso Dossi's mystery
is seen as music and the being of Woman *via* music.

In explicating the mystery of Dosso Dossi's paintings,
Léo Bronstein acknowledges the problem of com-
munication with words, the limitations and insufficiency
of words, even poetry. Can there be a use of words that
can plunge a reader directly "into the plenitude of touch-
smell-taste-vision-sound-gesture-idea, *The Total
Word?"* (p. 10). Here Léo Bronstein explores the Hindu
and Kabbalist understanding of the affinity between the
beginning of the word, of sound, and of the genesis of
creation. This search for a sufficient mode of verbal
communication brings him to a close scrutiny of
Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's discussion of the
complex limitations of language is emphasized by
Bertrand Russell, who writes:

> ...every language has a structure concerning which in the
> language, nothing can be said...but there may be another
> language dealing with the structure of the first language,
> and having itself a new structure, and...to this hierarchy of
> languages there may be no limit. [Wittgenstein 1922:23]

From Wittgenstein and Russell, Bronstein draws an
understanding that there are hierarchies and plenitudes
of languages with each inter-transferable. The lan-
guages emerging from the different senses are inter-
transferable and inter-translatable among themselves
and with the languages of the tongue. For Bronstein,
mystery is the secret of a secret, and the nature of a
hierarchy of languages helps him to understand the
mystery of painting.

The secret of Dosso Dossi's painting is the word
*music* "via" the word *Man* "via" the word *Woman.*

There is an inter-translatability of languages and forms of life through the visual imagination. Through a meditation on the limitations of words and language, Bronstein finds an unfolding of a new hope for the power of languages. This enables him to find the being in the thing, the nature of Woman in the creation of the Dosso Dossi paintings.

Through a review of Woman's multiple meanings in history—"giving and bearing of life…plenitude, continuity; the White Goddess, male's existential plenitude, Faustian descent into the Mother's abode, Goethe's Helen, Woman liberated…"—Leo Bronstein arrives at another understanding of Woman through Kabbalah—"the Metaphysical Woman—the Secret Woman: this most concealed word in the concealed Jewish language-game: the *Shekhinah.* To her is dedicated what follows, to the end" (p.13).

In Chapter 2, "Shekhinah or the Road of Purity," Léo Bronstein takes the reader on a long walk through the song and space of Hindu and Buddhist myths. Describing the changing relationships between male and female, Bronstein develops his sociology of art, what he called "the history of ideas through the visual," in which human action in culture, human perception, and the making of forms are homologous. He writes:

> …the way great human historical collectives or tiny human-creative-individuals com-pose their productive and distributive deeds, their exchanges and changes—their life—is the very way they com-pose their way of seeing, hearing, touching, creating things—their art? [pp. 15-26]

Through a brief, sparkling history of the art of India, Bronstein demonstrates the dialectic of his visual history of ideas concerning the Woman as "the multiple Oneness, plenitude, continuum, the Woman-*via*-Man, the Man-*via*-Woman." He sees the salvation of creation, portrayed in the art and myth of India, as a result of these powers of metamorphoses between man and woman (p. 26).

An image of a rose takes the reader through the geography of the author's many wanderings from India to Spain, to America's New England, to "unhappy Poland-Lithuania of the early nineteenth century" (p. 30). In a "purity or loyalty to the origins of man's never tarnished, never exhausted or made banal nostalgia of lost paradise!" (ibid.), the author is returned to the humble *Shtieble*, "the home of a Hassidic community leader, which was also a house of study, of prayer, and of assembly" (p. 107, footnote 5). Here Bronstein begins a penetrating inquiry into Kabbalah and its potential understanding of art. This journey can be characterized by the author's own earlier words:

> …what is started is what belongs to the end…what is achieved is what is to be started. [Bronstein 1953:ix]

Through the words of the prophet Jeremiah, "God is in the things farther from him" (31:2), spoken by Rabbi Nachman of Bratislaw, the author brings us into the universe of the Hassidim. The joy of the Hassid was in following the Law through their everyday actions and through that which was seizable: the dance! "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing" (Ps. 100:2).

For Léo Bronstein the Kabbalah is the discovery of "the certitude of infinity" as the "stage of the Secret Woman. The plenitude, the return, the rebirth, the redemption *Without-redeemer,* the Woman" (p. 34). From Síva-Sákti of India to Kabbalah's Shekhinah of the *Zohar: Sefer Ha Zohar: The Book of Radiance, or of Splendor* to Pablo Picasso's drawing of "cosmic creation," *La danse des banderilles,* to the story of Portugal's Dom Pedro I and his love of Inés de Castro, Léo Bronstein discovers "the man-*via*-woman, the woman-*via*-man, supreme, supernal mother-father-daughter, Light, Light of the Presence, Shekhinah" (p. 35).

In the *Zohar* man is said to be unified when male and female are unity. Sanctification can occur only during such unity.

At the close of Chapter 2, Léo Bronstein describes the first secret meeting between the Besht, Baal Shem Tov, and his wife-to-be, Hannah, who sensed in him the ancient, majestic feeling:

> the presence of Tenderness.…Tenderness in which the poignant solitude of being and man is united with the poignant solidarity of being and man. The Secret Woman present at the origins of creation; the solitude/solidarity united as one at the creation. Tenderness.…
> Tenderness: Solitude-Solidarity: Shekhinah. [p. 38]

Chapter 3, "The Road of Meditation," begins with Paul Klee's (1953:53) notion of the spiral as a "question of life and death." Bronstein reemphasizes the position of the Shekhinah—the Secret Woman in Jewish thought. Kabbalah renewed the ancient creed of the "descent on behalf of the ascent," while Hassidism is described as "the healing, saving-without-saviour…creed of salvation *via* correction. A healing creed in its in-depth purpose, it was also…the self-liberating creed" (pp. 39-40).

Léo Bronstein summarizes:

> Kabbalah's doctrine of the mystery of "the descent on behalf of the ascent" *via* the Presence-the Shekhinah-the Light, the Secret, Metaphysical Woman, a doctrine made one with Kabbalah's still more mysterious doctrine of the cosmic initial Error caused by the severity and rigor of "pure" Father-judgement, the Error corrected—redeemed by the "fiat" of the Secret Woman's Mother—mercy—this is what in-depth expression and in-depth diffusion the *Shtetle* gave us. [p. 41]

At this point Bronstein notes a parallel between Kabbalah's "passionate belief in the concreteness, the *fleshiness* of abstraction" and the art of the twentieth century, the "visual-manual thought" and the art of Picasso, Miro, and Klee in which cosmos and mind are equated as "pure" creation, as the unexpected and new, the first and therefore the "monstrous"; without "respectability."

> This thought and this art were joined by the thought and art that equated soul with male-and-female, with judgement-and-mercy...the thought and art of Jewish twentieth-century soul laborers, Chaim Soutine, Max Weber, Levine, Ben Shahn, Chagall, Lipschitz, Epstein and so many others.... [pp. 41-42]

On the road of meditation "speculative thought or *interrogation about reality is made one with reality itself*" (p. 42). In examining the creative processes through which Picasso and Matisse bring a drawing into existence, in finding what is common to both as visual artists, Léo Bronstein finds the same principle at work in the thought of Jewish Kabbalah: "*Avodak be Gashmiyar*—worship through corporeality" (p. 46). Throughout this entire work, Bronstein understands Kabbalah as "the transfer of the world of medieval sacral cosmogonies into our world of profane episte-mologies" (p. 49).

The great absolute of Kabbalah, its *Eyn-Sof,* its unseizable infinity undergoes an act of self-contraction. The act of infinity's self-reduction and self-contraction to an infinitesimal point of corporeal finity is called *zimzum.* This daring vision of substitution is the central vision of the mature Lurianic Kabballah. *Eyn-Sof* (no end, the infinite, nothingness) manifests itself as self-contraction and self-concealment. This is *zimzum*. And *zimzum* is an act of both substitution and correspondence. In Kabbalah, correspondence and its opposite, substitution, are made one. This is the Lurianic Kabbalah's vision of Creation. Infinity *(Eyn-Sof)* self-manifests and withdraws into itself through *zimzum* (the act of concealment and contraction). The Lurianic doctrine also posits a daring understanding of

> the Primeval Error...and error in the very act of creation to be corrected and redeemed.
>    And this Error is Adam Kadmon's, the Primeval Man's, the Ancient One's Error of not yet being male-and-female, male-*via*-female, female-*via*-male, still being judgement *(din)* and mercy *(rahamim)* and not judgement-*via*-mercy, mercy-*via*-judgement. [pp. 48-49]

This is a Primeval Error, not an Original Sin. Bronstein understands that for the Kabbalah, the Primeval Error was brought about through the separation from each other, the discontinuity, splitting, and interruption of the ten *Sefirot,* the powers of the Divine. The *Sefirot* culminate in the Presence, Shekhinah.

Within Kabbalah, "the descent on behalf of the ascent" is "The Redemption of the Error." Each *Sefirah* descends "into itself as concealed infinity (nothing-ness)...as self-reflection of creation's first act:...a dynamic continuum." The plenitude of Redemption is already present in the *zimzum.* This plenitude is to be achieved through loyalty to the Presence within the Shekhinah, the "Secret Woman's Presence" (p. 50).

Léo Bronstein holds that the Kabbalah reveals the interior processes whereby the Universe conceals and manifests itself. In the same way, Kaballah reveals and conceals the aspects of human mind. In the individuality of our simple sensations lie the childhood and origins "of all universal concepts or ideas" (Bronstein 1953:ix). Kaballah explains "the birth of a sensation, of a perception, of an idea" (p. 55).

In Kaballah, the profound Error, and perhaps even sin, is *interruption,* the splitting of two-oneness. In the "great maternal sea" of Kabbalah, *din*—judgment—is not separated from, but is united with the "redeeming, restituting, restoring" *rahamim*—mercy. Shekhinah's very being is mercy and "the Judaic passion of Justice,..."

> *din-rahamin,* finity-infinity,
> man-woman, the Presence. [pp. 56-57]

The vision of Justice in Kabbalah presents idea and action as an identity. Idea and action are also one with sensation and the workings of the human mind (p. 57). From the Judaic "justice-beyond-justice" there is a continuum to idea, action, sensation, and mind. In an earlier book, Léo Bronstein had understood that:

> The sensation-blue and the idea-blue are reversible in the depth of our visual labour. The entire poetry of our world, visible and invisible as yet...is there; all the meaning of beauty, therefore, of history, of thought and meditation is there. [Bronstein 1969:189]

Thus the continuum between the meditation of Kabbalah, Bronstein's visual history of ideas and art itself.

Kabballah contains a primeval tension that covers two opposing directions that are nevertheless internally connected. One direction was the expansion of the *Sefirot* into a perfect circle of stability. The other direction was the explosion of the *Sefirot* into multiple manifestations. Bronstein comments:

> And so, exactly so, are mind's two ways of penetration and search: the way that leads to the *immediacy of touch,* and the way to the *mediacy of concept*....Nothing in a man is one, everything is two from the start to the end. Man is two-oneness. [p. 59]

Man's "normalcy" results from the "creative opposition" and "creative interlace" going on uninterrupted between these two human ways of understanding and communicating. One way is characterized by intuition, relationship, and concept; the other, by immediacy, *"a presence of adherence,"* a sense of image and touch. Léo Bronstein ponders these two ways in both cognition and creation. We have a "visionary" or visual mode of human consciousness that is image-based, and we have a mode of thought based on concepts and symbols. In Western history, the latter has called itself "normal" and has tended to brand the former "abnormal."

In our knowing, we receive the image first. Its presence is immediate and possesses our consciousness. While the image comes first in our experience, it is quickly replaced by the form and schemata of verbal meaning. The abstraction and schemata of the image are substituted for the image itself. Normalcy and sanity are the verbal possession of form and abstraction. The image is visually given to us. We do not create the image. The mind immediately acts upon the directly given image-imposing form, schemata and lucidity. This "schema-lucidity" is what we see in the art of Picasso, Klee, Miro, Giacometti, and Dubuffet. It is also the perception of Kabbalah (p. 61).

We can now partially understand why mysticism has so often been rejected and denied. Mysticism is based upon image and visual experience. It is visionary. The verbal world finds it threatening, if not insane. The world that is based upon verbal order "normally uses the help of imagination, of visions narrated, but not actually embodied" (Bronstein 1969:40).

In Kabbalah, the relationship between image, concept, and touch is a fusion. It is Judgment via Mercy *"Din-via-rahamim, rahamim-via-din,* man-*via*-woman, woman-*via*-man, Shekhinah, the Presence of Righteousness." This applies to the nature of sensations and perceptions as well as to the human community; and to all levels of human experience and creativity. This "moral imperative" is present in Torah, in creation, in the human mind, and in any object or artifact created by a human being (p. 62).

In both the words of his diaries and the corporeality of his art, Paul Klee knows what Kabbalah knows. Paul Klee's art is one with Kabbalah in "infinity's withdrawal into itself—the no-thingness—and the memory of the 'pure' Presence there—the first spark, the Shekhinah!" The road of Kabbalah and the road of Paul Klee are "both the perfect finite circle (man's solitude in the cosmos) and the never final multidirected line (man's solidarity in the cosmos)" (p. 68).

Léo Bronstein, the journeyer, enters upon the sharp turn of a new road in Chapter 4, "The Road of Companions." He has Rabbi Nachman of Bratislaw recapitulate the journey up to that point:

> The Lord, blessed be He, has created the world as an absolute solitude and the man in it as an absolute solitude. And He created this solitude of the world as an absolute solidarity, and the solitude of man as an absolute solidarity. And he gave to this absolute, the only absolute, and to this union, the only union, a name. He called it Tenderness. For tenderness is solitude-solidarity....
>
> He made Tenderness the last, the tenth *Sefirah*,...the Secret Woman's, the Shekhinah's home....the secret, metaphysical Tenderness...is the primeval force, the "root of roots"...that made the pre-creation's "judgement alone" bend toward "mercy alone" and bind them together, judgement-*via*-mercy, mercy-*via*-judgement now....
>
> Tenderness is the primeval divine Error already-to-be-redeemed by itself. For Tenderness is the solitude-solidarity, the plenitude-vagueness in and of the world, in and of the man, that made the incorporeal judgement-*via* mercy, mercy-*via* judgement to be the corporeality—the body—of the man-*via*-woman of the woman-*via*-man.
>
> Righteousness, thus ended the zaddik Nachman, is Tenderness: the "moral imperative," the spirit made body—the Shekhinah. [p. 70]

In Jewish meditation, Justice, the "moral imperative," is at "the very root of the 'beginning of being.'" The "moral imperative" is the "non-mysterious mystery" of the Torah; it is in the creations of mind and in any artifact or object created by a human being *ex nihilo* (pp. 70-71). This book, *Kabbalah and Art,* explicates what Léo Bronstein had written over two decades earlier, "Art is the shelter of justice" (Bronstein 1953:52). The point and the spark of Kabbalah's meditation, the circle and the line of art's genesis are "one and the same 'root of roots.'"

Art is the secret metaphysical Woman, the Shekhinah; the Shekhinah, the secret metaphysical Woman is art: "...a frail, delicate, distant erect and tenacious argument..." (p. 71).

At this moment of fulfilled insight-vision on The Road of Companions, Léo Bronstein meets the fifteenth-century Sienese painter Giovanni di Paolo. They enter into a dialogue along the Road. Giovanni di Paolo describes the formation of his vision and art through processes similar to the understanding achieved by Kabbalah. The tension, explosion, and contraction of the unseizable results in the seizable "unity and finality of a crystal" (ibid.). Bronstein

senses Giovanni di Paolo's discussion of the crystal-lization of the gemstone to be the "beginning of being" of *zimzum*. He had written earlier that "a painter paints what he does not paint" (Bronstein 1953:133) and "that what a painting wants to say — precisely that what is the beautiful is at once what is the true and what is the good — is not expressed in and by its line's conduct, its colour's structure, its composition's promise, but in the very line itself, in the composition itself" (pp. 72-75).

Giovanni di Paolo painted the "beginning of being... Creation's divine Error — of tension and confusion... and...redemption-correction: tension's release and liberation, the crystal-clear gem....in pious, tormented icons" (p. 76). In painting the creation of the crystal, Giovanni di Paolo painted the release and redemption of the tormented original Error. The testimony of the gemstone is the birth of Tenderness and in this, the "tragic sense of history" (p. 81).

For Giovanni di Paolo, the gemstone in its finiteness was the substituted fragment of the "thingless infinity-nothingness." For Léo Bronstein and Giovanni di Paolo, there is a shared obsession for "the Secret Presence," the "metaphysical tenderness," the "Secret Woman *Shekhinah*" (p. 90). Bronstein recovers this in himself and in the artist:

> In everyone's creation *ex nihilo* — the secret of poetry: this precise, concrete witness-thing of child's unforgettable unrepeatable experience, an object-idea, an object-feeling, the ripe grape, its translucid, juicy taste and smell, the obsession-substitution in Rubens; the birth of a dark pearl in Rembrandt; the miraculous birth of a porcelain in the earlier Goya; the rainbow in Renoir, the birth of the white in a Winslow Homer, of the red in an Eakins; the simple, "banal" and ponderous weight, Cézanne's secret of corre-spondence-substitution; your precious gemstone Giovanni; the birth of sonority, of music in Dosso Dossi. [ibid.]

Each language remains mute in its ability to explain the inherent meaning in its own very structure. But each language is transferable to another language through which we understand and experience what we could not in the first. There is a process whereby each language metamorphoses into another through a seizable fragment substituted for the unseizable whole. As forms of verbal and visual language transfer and metamorphose, so we human beings, in contact with art, undergo metamorphosis.

Then, "among Kabbalah's road companions" Léo Bronstein hears "*L'Art ne s'elargit pas, il se résume* — art is not expansion, it is reduction" (p. 91). It is the voice of Edgar Degas, who, in his scenes of Paris life "was the painter of the secret, silent, invisible Presence," despite his hatred of Jews. Degas concealed and revealed this Presence in a "moral irradiation, Torah's 'moral imperative,' aureoling a person's action." For Degas the will was secret, oblique, and moral. Degas painted the witness of the oblique, concealed-revealed Presence (ibid.).

> Monsieur Degas, you, the Jew-hater, you were the painter of the Jewish mystical vision of the creation *ex-nihilo* — the creation through the act of Reduction supreme — the mystery of *zimzum*, the mystery of all creation on all levels of existence...you painted...the primal divine Error and its redemption-correction by the all-containing will of Tender-ness, your secret tenderness, your secret, metaphysical Woman, Monsieur Degas. [p. 93]

Léo Bronstein knew "all the secret, ancient tender-ness" in the heart of Degas and in the "Paris of greatest and smallest intimacy, Paris at dusk, luminescent pearl, dissolved" (p. 103). Léo invites Degas to join him along the road, to rest and wait for the next artist-companion to pass and greet. *Kabbalah and Art* ends with Léo's telling us, "I will wait...."

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**Anne Hollander.**   Seeing Through Clothes.
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**Reviewed by David Kunzle**
University of California, Los Angeles

As a means of visual communication, the living,
corporal, unique one of clothing has been subject to
innumerable descriptive historical essays and many dif-
ferent interpretive systems—social-historical, sociolog-
ical, psychoanalytic. The history of costume has also
been linked to the evalution of styles in art, architecture,
and domestic decor. Details of costume are used as a
tool for the precise dating of paintings, and drapery folds
identify a period style and even individual artists. But
dress has never, until now, been treated as an artistic
language in itself, couched within but operating to a
degree independently of the great art-historical tradition.
     Hollander presents audaciously and seductively the
theory that:

> The aesthetic alterations within fashion have a visual auton-
> omy that is granted by that of art itself, which in turn is
> generally granted—despite all its connections with religion,
> politics, and the wealth of princes or nations. The history
> of dress or the study of clothes has no real substance other
> than in *images* of clothes, in which their visual reality truly
> lives, naturalized, as it were, by the persuasive eye of art.

The persuasive eye of art—and the persuasive art of
language. Hollander's language is very persuasive, but
her theory rests upon a fundamental disregard of the
historical nature of the "language of art." Art is not
autonomous, but the product of historical forces. Art-
history itself, that most conservative of disciplines, is
beginning at last to abandon the theory of artistic
autonomy and deal with the very historical questions
Hollander deems extraneous.
     Let us begin, in the traditional manner of art-historical
criticism, by looking at the form and style of this book,
before we consider its ideological implications.
Hollander's language is rich, evocative, and beautifully
crafted, with hints now and then of the baroque
metaphorical swag, but always under intellectual con-
trol. Descriptions of drapery and nudes are both
opulent and nuanced:

> In the hands of Rubens, the bodies of women came alive
> in eddies and whirlpools of nacreous paint. Nameless
> anatomical bubbles and unidentifiable waves agitated the
> formerly quiescent adipose tissue under the mobile hides
> of nymphs and goddesses as they simultaneously agitated
> the satin sleeves and skirts of the newly fashionable free-
> flowing clothes. [p. 106]

Rubens was always the muse of art-historical lyricism.
The originality of Hollander, however, lies in her
exfoliation of the adage: like clothes, like flesh (and
vice versa). Here are the nudes of Boucher and
Fragonard, who "wear their skin and flesh fashioned
into a delicious union suit, made half out of juicy, childish
innocence and half out of self-conscious sexuality. The
somewhat narrow shoulders, the round heads, and
the short legs give them the infantine look they share
with their attendant cupids" (p. 116). A pity only that
the concepts "infantine" and "baby-flesh" are not
developed, and that the difference from Rubens' ideal
adult (but comparatively geriescent) female form is not
enlarged upon to encompass the historical change of
a century.
     Hollander's style, with its periodic swings into rapture,
recalls the great tradition of art-critical emotionalism
that stretches back to Ruskin and Diderot. The adjec-
tives are stitched into place with the precision and
delicacy of a lace trimming; the book as a whole is
structured with the formal assurance of abstract archi-
tecture, the social purpose of which we do not inquire
into.
     Some of the best parts of this book are about the
reciprocity of relationship of body to clothes, and vice
versa. The conjunction, which Hollander treats as
resulting in an autonomous visual language, is made up
of parts each of which have been treated as autono-
mous. But both body and clothes are function as well
as form. Art and art history have regarded the human
body as the primary vehicle of aesthetic values—as an
end in itself. This vision, which is little less than an
ideology, has been attained by detaching the body from
the concept of economically productive physical labor,
which has been its primordial function throughout
history. But art and art history, serving a ruling class that
prefers ruling to working—training for the former rules
out capacity for the latter—prefers to see the body as
form rather than function. Work is sublimated in ruling
class art as well as in life, with the male body illustrated
in war, and the female body in  sex and passive
domesticity
     How have art and clothing expressed and indeed
enacted this sublimation? They have disguised the
primary uses of the body as a machine built for the pur-
pose of performing physical labor. In the female, the
appearance of hard bone and muscle has been sup-
pressed in favor of smooth skin and round flesh. The
physical mobility necessitated by most traditional forms
of labor has been literally repressed by bulk and tight-
ness of garments. As her labor-association value has
been reduced, woman's sexual (and aesthetic) value
has been enhanced. Even—or especially—the idealized
nude or naked female form reveals this process of
sexual enhancement, and the signs by which clothing
"works" symbolically but actively upon the body to
dissociate it from ideas of physical labor. Hollander

makes fine formal analyses of examples of this process from various facets of post-Renaissance art, although she avoids developing them along the lines indicated here.

Her perception that the unclothed body tends to bear the marks of clothes discarded, her insistence that the artist cannot escape the recognition of the "natural" state as the dressed, not nude, should make us all—especially art historians who talk loosely and broadly about "classical nudity" in the abstract and absolute—read afresh and more carefully the physiognomics of body contours, poses, gestures, with reference to physically absent clothing. The nude body is usually coded with the social specifics of dress. "All nudes in art since modern fashion began are wearing the ghosts of absent clothes, sometimes highly visible ghosts.... People without clothes are still likely to behave as if they wore them." This statement should be heeded by all who treat the process of idealization as if it were a linear progression away from reality. In fact, it is often the case that the more idealized the nude figure, the more demonstrably "fashionable" is its shaping—Goya's *Maja Desnuda* is an example succinctly analyzed by Hollander.

It is, according to Hollander, the peculiarity of Western art and costume to compel an integrated vision of clothes and body. She thereby sets herself against the current doctrine of dualism, to be found in such writers as Broby-Johansen (*Body and Clothes*) and Rudofsky (*The Unfashionable Human Body*), which views body and clothes if not as actually antagonistic (Rudofsky), then as complementary and separable entities. Hollander correctly terms the relation of body and clothes, and the resultant erotic charge, a *dialectic*; but she does not deal with the concept of contradiction that such a term summons up. Historical analysis will prove that clothing expresses resolves and hides contradictions not only in the aesthetic (e.g., loose/stiff) and moral (e.g., revealing/concealing) but also social realms. The "quirks of fashion" (its formal extremes, its changeability) are symptoms of the social flux. According to the particular social circumstances of time and place, clothing can serve as an attempt to stabilize this flux, to control it in the interests of a particular social class, to fend off an invasion from another class (laterally as well as vertically), and to announce such an invasion. Sumptuary laws were designed specifically to repel the invasion of aristocratic preserves of upwardly mobile middle sectors.

Under capitalism, clothing has served the social and commercial struggle. The complexity of fashion differentiation is related to the complexity of the forms this struggle has taken. The critical tradition, of which Hollander's book is a consummation, which insists on seeing clothing primarily as a form of aesthetic pleasure, as an autonomous artistic language, as a "self-perpetuating visual fiction" functions, whether consciously or not, to conceal not only the nature but the very existence of the class conflict, of the social struggle that is the stuff of history. While one can honor any attempt to raise dress, so often relegated to the status of "minor art" and "superior craft," to the status of Art, one cannot welcome its total excision from the historical process.

Now, Hollander does not deny the existence of social and economic forces in determining the form of dress and the flow of fashion. Indeed, one suspects she knows a great deal about them. She makes glancing references to the economic staple of northern Europe, the wool trade, as a major determinant of all those eloquent "cloth gestures and drapery phrases" in northern Gothic and Renaissance art. But she is evidently more comfortable with other kinds of connections, those of art to art. She speaks evocatively about the idealization of cloth at a time when comparable idealization of the human body (Italian Renaissance style) was not possible. "The beauty of precious cloth came to nourish imaginative lives, but the riches of the body's beauty were not seen in the same light." Drapery not only hid but replaced the body, in those "angels buoyed up not by wings, but gloriously wrought masses of bunched skirt, which do not clothe but appear to replace unangelic and awkward limbs." A fine visual observation; but does this not suggest that the patrons of these pictures were moving away from belief in the supernatural, and religious or magical thinking, toward a rationalism based on the acquisition and exchange of material goods: the spiritual riches of the angel could only be conveyed by the material riches of his drapery? And why drapery rather than jewelry? Why, at this same time, is it becoming improper, or unnecessary, to put real jewels, to use real gold in pictures? How does it come about that the pictures themselves eventually acquire an exchange value more potent than that of jewelry? Costume history as much as art history needs to explore economic factors. One must watch the swing in the price of wool, as Hollander follows the swing in the folds of wool.

The behavior of wool may be followed through various stages of production, distribution, and consumption (or assumption). All the stages are surely connected and may be shown so. Economic history tells us about its commercial behavior; art history about its aesthetic behavior; social history, or the history of manners and costume, about the way it behaved in real life, in specific social situations. What evidence do we have, apart from that conventionalized in pictures, that a woman in 1434 commonly stood holding drapery like the bride of Giovanni Arnolfini—a cloth merchant, be it noted—in the famous Van Eyck painting? How far is the gesture ritual, how far is it a practical necessity?

Were skirts commonly so arranged? Or only for impor-
tant ceremonies? Or only in pictures? To answer such
questions, one turns to literary texts.

In the later period, potential sources such as memoirs,
novels, and etiquette books abound. Hollander ignores
them not because she does not appreciate their poten-
tial. Her culling of texts as diverse as Shakespeare,
Austen, and Goethe within a few pages in the chapter
on mirrors, for instance, points to the resources at the
command of a writer whose breadth of learning cannot
be in doubt. She does so as a matter of strategy, to
preserve her terms of reference largely within the sup-
posedly "autonomous artistic language" of clothes-in-
painting. Exceptionally, she considers at one point the
evidence for pubic depilation in real life: it is recom-
mended by Porta's *Natural Magic,* 1558 ff. The question
of whether it was normal in 1830 for young women of
the lower as well as upper classes to shave armpit hair
becomes of some moment when we consider the hos-
tile reaction to Delacroix' *Liberty Leading the People*
(Liberty is visibly unshaven).

It is Hollander's thesis that what might be experienced
as ugly and socially unacceptable in reality alone
becomes beautiful when transmuted in painting, and
thence admired in reality. Changes in social attitudes
and behavior are secondary: "The tight-laced waist, the
periwigged head, and the neck collared in a millstone
ruff...have all been comfortable, beautiful, and natural
in their time, more by the alchemy of visual representa-
tion than by the force of social change" (p. xiii). The first
part of this sentence implies the need for a historical
explanation of past styles rather than one couched in
modern aesthetic prejudice; the second part denies
the necessity or primacy of that historical explanation.
Are we to conclude that the tight-laced waist was
approved in its time because the wearer herself and
those who looked at her imagined her as a painting?

Can we believe that this practice, which according to
its numerous critics was not only unnatural and per-
nicious but also wicked, could simply be "visually
alchemized" into the comfortable, beautiful, and
natural? This is to put the cart before the horse. Life
never actually imitates art, although it may sometimes
appear—and be felt—to do so. Reality comes first; art
reflects, interprets, mediates, and masks it.

Artists represented ladies with slender waists
because such waists were admired in reality—not for
aesthetic (or sexual) reasons alone. The example of
the corset, which shows art—and technology—as
reshaping reality *in* the reality, is particularly illuminating,
for it can be demonstrated that its use always, and
especially in its exaggerated form (tight-lacing), corres-
ponded to a historical nexus of social competition,
sexual repression, sex-role redefinition, and even
economic and political anxieties, rather than some
a priori aesthetic preference. The hostility expressed
toward tight-lacing by artists as well as physicians and
clerical reformers was always moral and social before
it was aesthetic. The "alchemy" that rendered tight-
lacing admirable—actually, stimulating rather than com-
fortable, interesting rather than beautiful and natural—
was made up primarily of moral, psychological, and
social components. Aesthetic rationalizations were
invented afterward. The alchemy is not that of visual
representation alone or primarily, but that of the fusion
of all kinds of historical variables.

It is commonly recognized that dress in the West has
been an extraordinarily sensitive barometer of historical
change. That attempts to read the infinite calibrations
of that barometer have remained rudimentary, incom-
plete, and unsatisfactory does not mean we should
give up trying—the very opposite. Nor does it mean we
should not take the next step, that of considering dress
as a historical cause as well as effect.

Hollander's insistence on the pharmacy of clothes
as an art-form and art-language may be viewed as
undercutting the historical interpretation. But, given the
book's self-proclaimed bias, it will, let us hope, act
also as a stimulant toward historical interpretation by
encouraging us to take clothes more seriously—as
seriously as we take Art and Sex. Dress not only
bridges these two great domains of historical investiga-
tion, it actively partakes of both. And just as the language
of art and the language of sex are historically deter-
mined, so is the language of dress.