

appears to itself through the refractions of the symbolic fields in which it communicates expressively and realizes through its expressions its personality. I suppose we need the self *an sich* only in order to be tormented by the question of what would I have been had I been a different self in a different field of symbolic transformations!

art after the
end of art

5

Alfred
Dante

THERE IS A PASSAGE IN THE WRITINGS of Karl Marx which is as fateful as it is famous, and indeed its fatefulness is not unconnected with its fame: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world historical facts and events occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as a tragedy, the second as farce." If this indeed is the second time this thought is expressed in the philosophy of history, it must by its own criterion be farce and its first occurrence in Hegel tragic. And something like this indeed is true: since every Marxist knew this line—it is the kind of slogan that gets printed on T-shirts—it made it necessary for them to dismiss repetitions as farcical, as the learned revolutionaries in the Columbia University uprising of 1968 did when the learned students of Harvard underwent *their* uprising. And this had the overall effect that there could be no cumulative revolutionary movement, veterans of first happenings being obliged to be contemptuous of the veterans of their repetitions. Hegel's statement is far less well-known, and indeed certain Marxist writers, such as my colleague at *The Nation* Alexander Cockburn, expressed doubt that Hegel ever said any such

Reagan

Originally delivered on Wimal Dassanayake's invitation at his seminar on the self at the East-West Center in Honolulu in August 1990, but in a radically different form.

thing. But here is the passage, which occurs in the section on Rome in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*:

In all periods of the world a political revolution is sanctioned in men's opinions when it repeats itself. Thus Napoleon was twice defeated, and the Bourbons twice expelled. By repetition, that which at first appeared merely a matter of chance and contingency became a real and ratified existence.

Marx's jest appears in the tract *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* of 1852, and it refers to the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte, the nephew of the great Napoleon, who executed a coup d'état on the Eighteenth Brumaire (November 9, 1799). Had Louis Bonaparte been a reader of Hegel he would have seen in the repetition a "real and ratified existence." Had the Columbia students been readers of Hegel, they would have seen in the Harvard uprising a ratification of their own. The moral, perhaps, is that if one wants one's writings to inspire revolutionaries, it would be prudent to resist wisecracks, for one's humorless readers will take them as literal.

Since my writings about the end of art, which started in 1984, repeat a thought expressed in Hegel's marvelous *Lectures on Fine Art*, delivered 156 years earlier, in Berlin in 1828, I would clearly rather see in the repetition a ratification of historical necessity than a farcical reenactment—not the only reason I prefer being a follower of Hegel rather than Marx. But in truth I am a follower of neither, for I don't especially believe in historical repetitions. If anything, I suppose, I am a follower of Wittgenstein on the matter of iterated utterances; for he held that the meaning of a sentence very often is a function of the role it plays in what he termed a language game, so the same sentence expresses a different sense on different occasions of its utterance. Or, better, I am here a follower of Paul Grice and his fascinating thesis concerning conversational implicature. Simply put, that means that to understand what someone means by an utterance, one must fill in the conversation in which it gets uttered and see what movement of thought the sentence advanced. I think, for example, of history as having something of the structure conversations have, so that one could speak of *historical implicature*. And that would mean that one would find, upon noticing that philosophers in different periods have said outwardly the same thing, that the sameness dissolves

when one fills out the evolving discussion in which the sentence got uttered. But even within a context, the repetition is never simply that Nabokov, an admirer of Robert Frost, points out how vividly the second "And miles to go before I sleep" differs in force and meaning from the first. As a critic I am never put off by the fact that what an artist does has been done before. That someone did it "first," it seems to me, is often the kind of observation which blinds you to what the artists did who did it "second." It need never entail a lack or absence of originality. Of course, you might say, I would say that, just to protect myself from being thought unoriginal when I have said something that has already been said by Hegel! But let's examine another case, especially since neither Marx nor Hegel talks about things happening more than twice.

Recently I have become absorbed in the topic of photomontage, which was the chief artistic invention of the Berlin Dada movement of the early 1920s. There are some wonderful photographs of the First International Dada Exhibition of 1920, showing some of the main contributors posed with a poster which proclaims the death of art. "*Die Kunst ist tot*," the poster reads. "I long live the new Machine Art of Tatlin!" One photograph shows Hannah Höch and the "Dadasopher" Raoul Hausmann with the poster, another the great *monteur* John Heartfield and his colleague George Grosz. I think they thought that the photomontage exemplified machine art, as they understood it, inasmuch as it consisted of assemblages of cutout fragments of photographs printed in newspapers and periodicals of mass circulation, and both photography and printing were exemplary mechanical processes, conspicuously contrasted with the kinds of pictures the trained and expert hand might make by drawing or painting. It was what one might call "handmade" art that was dead, or fine art, or finally casel paintings, which was what precisely radiated the celebrated aura Walter Benjamin made so much of. And I am certain that when he contrasted what we might call "auragenic" art with what Benjamin himself called "the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," he had specifically John Heartfield's photomontages in mind. Heartfield, in addition to using mechanically processed fragments, inserted his own montages into further mechanical processes, since he rephotographed his work, and then printed it on the covers of the Left-wing *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, or AIZ.

Benjamin was a great admirer of Hearfield, "whose technique turned the book cover into a political instrument."

Now, easel painting was villainized in the revolutionary artistic ferment of the Soviet Union in its early days. In 1921, a plenary session of the Institute of Artistic Culture (Inkhuk), charged with formulating a role for art in a Communist society, voted to condemn easel painting as "outmoded," and several of the leading members left Inkhuk to enter industry; this was specifically Rodchenko's "Art into life!" initiative. In 1943, Lincoln Kirstein published a report of his visit to the Siqueiros murals in Chillán, Chile, the year before: "Siqueiros is a fighter, and at the present moment he proclaims himself on a personal crusade to destroy easel painting. To hear him talk, the *caballero* [easel] is the fascism of art, this monstrous little square of besmirched canvas, pulling under the skin of rotting varnish, fair prey for those canny usurers, the speculating picture dealers of the rue de la Boétie and Fifty-seventh Street." So when, writing in *Partisan Review* in 1948, Clement Greenberg warned of "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," he more or less adapted a critical matrix from radical thought and applied it to the art of his time, which he saw approaching the status of wallpaper as flat, all-over patterning of interior space. And I think it fair to say that the villainization of the easel picture continues today, less as an assessment of the state of painting—less, that is, as a claim that painting has somehow run out of steam—than as an attack on social and political institutions and practices with which the easel painting has been associated: the private collection, the art museum, the art auction, the gallery, the "usurers" of whom Siqueiros spoke. And the art that is to replace easel painting—the photomontage, the book jacket, the mural, the dropcloth, or, today, the performance, the earthwork, the installation, the video—are promoted precisely because of the difficulties they raise for the institutional embedding of the easel painting. And needless to say, such art as this opposes itself to the popular mentality which treats painting as somehow having a spirituality and a mystique, which brings thousands and thousands to trudge past Monet's serial paintings of the 1890s, or, more recently, Matisse's stupendous oeuvre.

It should be clear that the "Death of Art," construed as the Death of Fine Art, is a political declaration. It is a revolutionary cry, like Death to the Ruling Class! The Communists, subscribing as they did to a doctrine of historical materialism,

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ought, if their theory were historically sound, merely to have had to await the withering away of painting as a practice. But revolutionaries are not famous for patience or, for that matter, for consistency.

Now my thesis of the end of art was not in the least an ideological one. It was almost, in fact, counter-ideological, in that it entailed the end of all mandated ideologies, which believed themselves grounded either in the history of art or in the philosophy of art. It in any case was not a thesis about the death of art, though my essay first appeared in a volume of pieces devoted to my thesis, and the book carried the dramatic but false title *The Death of Art*. I used "end" in a narrative sense, and meant to declare the end of a certain story. It was, as I pointed out at the time, consistent with the story coming to an end that everyone should live happily ever after, where happiness almost meant that there were no more stories to tell. My thought was that art came to an end when it achieved a philosophical sense of its own identity, and that meant that an epic quest, beginning some time in the latter part of the nineteenth century, had achieved closure. Painting played a particular role in the epic because it was painting whose identity had been put in question by two factors, one of them technological and the other cultural. The technological *wisdom-question* was the invention of moving pictures, which meant that one could attain the great representational aims, always ascribed to painting, by a different means altogether. It was moving-picture technology rather than the invention of photography as such, for photography simply was another means of doing what painting had always done: it was, so to speak, a tie. ~~But~~ *moving* pictures quite left painting behind. The cultural challenge came with the challenge to the ideal of veridical representation itself, and the prize of other artistic ideals altogether, as practiced in alien cultures, Japanese, Chinese, Egyptian, African. Abstraction, which emerged in 1912, was one response to this latter challenge, but so was a good bit of post-Impressionist art. There was no question in artistic practice but that a certain idea of painting in place since about 1300, had come to an end. The issue was what was painting now to be, and this in the end could only be answered with a philosophical theory which I saw the painting movements of the twentieth century as a massive effort to furnish. And I thought in fact it had found what it sought by the 1960s, and that art now had to be understood as one with its own philosophy.

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I offered, in brief, a kind of master narrative which must be considered alongside the reigning master narrative of modernist painting which, as that very expression should suggest, was due to Clement Greenberg: "Modernist Painting" is the title of one of his most important essays. Greenberg is typically regarded as a formalist critic, but his formalism is grounded in a philosophy of history of great originality, and in truth I have often wondered whether one can be a serious critic without at least a tacit adherence to a philosophy of art history. In any case, Greenberg's philosophy of art history was in place at the very beginning of his critical career—for example, in his tremendous piece of 1939, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in which he sees a certain kind of abstract painting as the inevitable absolute for which the avant-garde had been seeking: "Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself." This is the "genesis of the abstract," and I draw attention to the historicist term. Greenberg goes on to say, "In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it upon the medium of his own craft." And he then invokes the great deities of Modernism—"Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miró, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse, and Cézanne"—who "derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in." The historical dimension becomes explicit in "Towards a Newer Laocoon" of the same year: "Guiding themselves . . . by a notion of purity derived from the example of music, the avant-garde arts have in the last fifty years achieved a purity and a radical delimitation of their fields of activity, for which there is no previous example in the history of culture." He characterizes purity this way: it "consists in the acceptance, the willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art." And the philosophy of art history is this: "The progressive surrender of the resistance of the medium." Finally, "so ineliminable was the logic of this development"—and I draw attention to the double connotation of necessity carried by "ineliminable" and "logical"—that artists who wished to be part of history had little choice save to enter it under Greenbergian criteria. Recently, Greenberg told me that he was only describing things, not making any prescriptions. He cited the difference between "is" and "ought" which he was pleased to learn derived from David Hume. But in these influential early papers it certainly reads like a prescription.

Greenberg's
Historicism
Formalism
Modernism
Response to
the crisis
of painting
in the 19th century

as he says, "The imperative comes from history." And "Modernist Painting" of 1960 puts it in this nut-shell.

The unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered "pure" and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. "Purity" meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance.

It is fairly striking that Greenberg and I see self-definition as the central historical truth of modernist art. But his narrative differs in every other respect from mine. He sees self-definition in terms of purity, and hence the history of Modernism as the pursuit of painting in its purest possible state: a kind of genre cleansing, as one might put it; a program easily politicized as aesthetic Serbianism. But my view is altogether antipurist. My thought is that art ends in philosophical self-consciousness of its own identity—but that entails no imperative to produce philosophically pure works of art. Far from it: a philosophy of art must be consistent with all the art there is and ever has been, all of it art in virtue of embodying whatever essence it is that can be expressed in a real definition, with necessary and sufficient conditions. In fact, it seems to me, an adequate philosophy of art straightaway entails pluralism, for it would be wholly adventurous that there should be one and only one kind of art—only, say, five-foot squares, matte and black, partitioned into three-by-three matrices, of the sort that Reinhardt, speaking in the spirit of purism, declared to be the only kind of painting there should be. The Greenbergian position entails a critical practice in which one can say of what is not pure that it is not art. Mine by contrast is altogether accepting. In ancient times, philosophers sought to define what it was to be a human being. "Rational animal" was a good try. But there is a great deal more in human reality than is captured by such definitions, and to try to breed for humans who were purified of all these accidentalities would merely create misery.

The difference between the two positions can be further marked by thinking of abstraction. By Greenberg's philosophy, abstract painting is a historical

Pluralism
Antipurist

inevitability. Figuration is an excrescence to be discarded by "self-criticism." Moreover, it has to be abstraction of a certain kind: Kandinsky deployed abstract forms in an unmistakable pictorial space. That too has to be purged. It belongs to what, in "Modernist Painting," Greenberg calls "sculptural illusion," for it implies a three-dimensionality inconsistent with painterly purity, which mandates absolute flatness. Greenberg concedes that "the flatness towards which modernist painting orients itself can never be an utter flatness." So, if you want to be a painter, you have a choice. You can endeavor to drive the limits further by whatever increment in the direction of utter flatness. Or you can become a sculptor, and seek whatever purity defines that medium. In any case, the flat painting is the destiny of abstraction on the Greenbergian model, and his own critical practice reflects this, first with color-field abstraction, then with the painting of such favorites of his as Jules Olitski, whom he continues to regard as the best painter around.

In my view, abstraction is a possibility rather than a necessity, and it is something permitted rather than obliged. In fact, the art world as I see it—as I think it sees itself, having lived through a certain history—is a field of possibilities and permissibilities in which nothing is necessary and nothing is obliged. Heinrich Wölfflin famously ended the preface to the later editions of *The Principles of Art History* by saying not everything is possible at every time. It is the mark of what I have termed the posthistorical period of art that everything is possible at this time, or that anything is. A year or so ago, the advanced art periodical *Tema Celeste* asked a number of critics and artists why a painter today would make a painting without any recognizable images in it. The responses were presented in three entire issues of the magazine. The 1990 season, in fact, had at least five major exhibitions of abstract art, and every American art magazine had to respond to the phenomenon, asking what it meant. All this activity scarcely a year after a critic in *The New York Times* had said that abstraction was burnt out. Whatever the historical explanation of this complex event, it did not seem to me that as a historical repetition, it could be assimilated to either a Marxist or a Hegelian characterization. The second moment of abstraction was neither a farcical reenactment of an earlier one nor a ratification of it. And it seems to me that the kind of answers Greenberg would have given to the first moment of

abstraction—that it was a historical inevitability, an imperative of history, a purification only to have been expected in the light of the observed dynamisms of modernist painting—hardly would recommend themselves the second time abstraction flourished. The clear truth was that abstraction was possible; the question was what made it so vehemently actual all at once. And the answer would have to be, it seems to me, causally local rather than global. It is the kind of thing one might expect after the end of art in its philosophical self-definition.

I think of posthistorical art as art created under conditions of what I want to term "objective pluralism," by which I mean that there are no historically mandated directions for art to go in, at least so far as the history of art, considered internally—as Greenberg certainly considered it—is concerned. For him, the arts entered their terminal phase when each ascended, as it were, to its own metalanguage, and where the materials of the art became the subject of that art. Under the auspices of that theory, for example, furniture making, as an art, would have as its subject wood, joinery, and finish. And the subject of sculpture would be stone and carving, or clay and the act of modeling. And painting, of course, would be about paint, and the act of putting it onto surfaces, and then the truth of surfaces. Painting about the way the world looks would be retrograde, historically speaking, since nonreflective. Strictly, it was not necessary, save for purposes of emphasis, that painting be abstract: it could be representational so long as it was not about whatever it represented, and I think De Kooning with his typical conceptual brilliance caught this point when he said, in 1963 in regard to his famous paintings of women, exhibited a decade earlier at the Janis Gallery, that it was of course absurd to paint the figure—but then it was no less absurd not to. But in 1953, when those works were exhibited, they were widely criticized as betrayals. And I think it impossible to convey to an audience of today the atmosphere of dogma which defined discourse in the art world of those years. The censoriousness of critical discourse would be captured in such phrases as "You can't do that!" or in the phrase which continues to play a role in conservative critical writing: "That is not art!"—said of something which could not in any obvious sense be anything but art. In painting, in the 1950s there was thought to be only one true historical possibility, and that was what one must call "materialist abstraction"

because it was about the materials of painting and nothing else. And objective pluralism as I understand it means that in the sense in which materialist abstraction was the only true historical possibility, there are no historical possibilities truer than any other. It is, if you like, a period of artistic entropy, or historical disorder.

The philosophy of history was said by one of its greatest practitioners, the Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt, to be a century, a monstrosity of thought in the sense that it demands the necessity of metaphysical truth and at the same time must be empirically true. My point is that Greenberg was seeking what in his own terms was a "historical justification for abstraction," which in fact was a historical justification of materialist abstraction in 1939. And I am seeking a historical justification for an account of posthistorical abstraction as but one of a number of other posthistorical possibilities in 1990, a quarter-century after a better philosophical answer to the question of art than materialist abstraction became available, and one, moreover, which liberated artists to do anything or everything. There is a vivid recollection by a German artist, Hermann Albert, of a moment when what I would term the truth of posthistory dawned on him:

In the summer of 1972 I was in Florence for a while, and one weekend I went on a trip to the mountains with some colleagues. We got out of the car and there we were standing in the Tuscan countryside with cypress trees, the olive groves, and the old houses—it was harmony. The sun was setting and soon it was out of sight, but the rays of sunlight were still illuminating the countryside obliquely. The shadows were getting longer and longer, and you could sense the approach of nightfall although it was still daytime. We stood, with our own consciousness, looking at this dramatic spectacle, and suddenly one of us said, "It's a pity you can't paint that anymore these days." That had been a key word I'd heard ever since I started trying to be a painter. And I said to him, out of sheer impudence: "Why can't you? You can do everything." It was only after I'd said that that I realized what had initially been a piece of provocation was really true. Why should anyone tell me I can't paint a sunset?

I want to underscore the date—1972. And I want to underscore the marvelous defiance in Hermann Albert's "You can do everything." As a German artist, the

rejection of abstraction was particularly charged, for Germans had taken up abstraction as a way of reentering the community of Western culture. The postwar Germans took up abstraction, after all an American export, as a way of endorsing the values of the victors. So when Albert said, "You can do everything," he in effect was saying that it was now possible to be a figurative artist in Germany without being a Nazi. But "You can do everything" almost defines the decade of the seventies. The art schools were filled with unsuccessful Abstract Expressionists, painters who sought to transmit the teaching of Greenberg and of Hans Hofmann, who insisted that a painting is not a window, and that it was a crime against painting to "poke holes" in canvases. Eva Hesse and Robert Rauschenberg both reported having been exposed to that kind of dogmatic instruction when students at Pratt. And in different ways they all enacted in their work the belief that you can do everything.

The seventies are a fascinating period whose art history is as yet uncharted, but it is certainly, as I see it, the first full decade of posthistorical art. It was marked by the fact that there was no single movement, like Abstract Expressionism in the fifties or Pop Art in the sixties—or, delusionally, Neo-Expressionism in the eighties. And so it is easy to write it off as a decade in which nothing happened when in fact it was a decade in which what happened was everything. It was a golden age which seemed to those who lived through it to be anything but a golden age. And my sense is that what gave it that character was the objective pluralist structure of posthistory: it was no longer necessary to pursue the material truth of art. Or rather, a lot of artists continued to accept the materialist ideal as that in which art essentially consisted, but felt that it no longer responded to anything they were interested in, and they pursued what they were interested in whether it was really art or not. That gave artists an immense amount of freedom, and since the gallery structure, with some marginal exceptions in the newly settled SoHo, had no place for anything except what was "really" art, artists had no special expectation anyway of fame or fortune. In 1973, New York was just staggering back from the edge of bankruptcy. One could live fairly cheaply, and do what one did for a very small circle of like-minded persons. And a lot of the cultural politics of the time in any case turned artists away from the institutions of the art world toward other, less commercial venues.

There was another kind of politics which began to ascend in that period, whose best example is a certain kind of feminism—namely, one which calls into question the kind of painting which was the vehicle of art history and which culminated, in Greenberg's theory, in materialist abstraction. The question began to be raised as to whether art of this sort was at all the appropriate vehicle for a feminine sensibility and creativity at all, whether, in fact, it was not itself a form of false artistic consciousness for women to seek to excel in something which was after all possibly just a form of expression natural to males. And analogous arguments sprang up along different lines through which various excluded minorities sought to express, in terms appropriate to their essence, the artistic forms of their being. I don't say this was altogether explicit in the seventies, but the tendencies culminated in the Decade Show at the end of the eighties, which had the consequence of marginalizing—guess what—easel painting. The reasons, certainly, were different from those which prevailed in Berlin in 1920 or in Moscow in 1921 or in Mexico in 1941. But it has been the mark of a certain form of politicized art in this century to villainize easel painting, and the charge that it is a white Eurocentric male expression is only the latest form the politics has taken.

So the slogan "You can do everything" is in many cases politically qualified in practice. In my own contribution to the *Terra Celeste* colloquium, I talked about abstract painting as a possibility in the accommodating framework of objective pluralism, and a correspondent scolded me for not realizing the kinds of pressure there are on someone who wants to be an abstract painter to produce work more feministically acceptable (the writer was a woman). There is beyond question a great deal of such pressure in the art world today, a lot of it, of course, internal, but unquestionably a great deal of it external, especially when one factors in wanting to make art acceptable to critics and institutions and programs with a clear political agenda. To this I have no response. Causes are causes. The only respect in which "You can do everything" is true is that of a philosophy of art history of the kind I have tried to develop here. But it is consistent with that that there should be all sorts of causes, political and otherwise, which enter into the explanation of art.

I want to conclude on two notes. The first concerns abstract painting today. Since it is, to begin with, no longer the bearer in anyone's mind of historical des-

tiny, abstract painting is but one of the things an artist can do. It is, as logicians say, compossible with representational art, and a great many abstract artists I know see no conflict, and certainly none of the ostracizing kinds of conflicts representational artists felt in the 1950s. Moreover, since the feeling of marginalization from within the art world is felt by painters whether they are abstractionists or representationalists, the two camps, bitterly divided in the era of Greenberg, find the differences between them today negligible by comparison with the differences between either of them and performance, say, or installation. But finally, there is a difference between abstraction and formalism. Some of the best abstractionists I know feel one does not leave meaning behind when one becomes an abstract painter, and that often meanings of a kind unavailable to figurative art can be carried by abstract art. In an interview with Carter Ratcliff, Sean Scully says about his severe abstractions of the late 1970s that he needed to paint "severe, invulnerable canvases, so I could be in this environment [New York] and not feel exposed. I spent five years making my paintings fortress-like." That kind of statement connects the formal properties with personal feelings, and professionalizes the work in an extraordinary way. And when he says, "Recently I've been more interested in having my painting be more vulnerable," a great deal more is involved in the shift from the relentlessly thin stripes of the seventies and the almost organic dilating and brushy stripes of Scully's later work than a shift in style. It marks rather a shift in life.

My second point is that "doing everything" is distributed across the whole face of the art world, as if by a division of labor. But the most interesting artists in this respect, I think, and artists who, moreover, have no easily identified predecessors, are in fact those who do everything themselves, and in whose oeuvre there is in consequence a certain magnificent openness, whatever one thinks of the component works. These artists tend mainly to be German—I may be wrong but I can think of none in America. I have in mind Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, and perhaps Rosemarie Trockel. Richter's abstractions are in shows of contemporary abstraction. Polke does large cloudy abstractions almost as if exemplars of the materialist abstraction of an earlier time. But we have to ask in both cases what abstraction means, given that one of the artists did the breathtaking images of the death of the Baader-Meinhof leaders, and the other produces montages using

photographs, but also engravings from other times, paintings from other cultures, and what look like stylizations of fifteenth-century calligraphy. A show of Richter or, for that matter, of Trockel, looks like a group show, and in their resolute distancing of a marked visual style, their readiness to use whatever they require for whatever purpose, their blank disregard for purity, these artists embody, in all that as well as in their spirit of absolute free play, the posthistorical mentality in its most spectacular form. We are about as far from materialist abstraction as can readily be imagined!

Hans haacke and the industry of art

6

arthur c. danto

THE ARTIST HANS HAACKE ACHIEVED A qualified martyrdom in an era generally supposed to have been one of total artistic permissiveness, at the hands of an institution hardly calculated to confer such status on an avant-garde artist seeking to press back the limits of art. Those inauspicious circumstances notwithstanding, an exhibition of Haacke's work was canceled, on the grounds of artistic impropriety, six weeks before it was to have opened, in 1971, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. It was annulled by Thomas Messer, then as now director of the Guggenheim, who also discharged the curator, Edward Fry, for persisting in championing an art indexed as unsuitable. The work that chiefly offended was devoted to the activities, over a twenty-year period, of a rapacious real estate operation in New York, and its repression demonstrates that even then, in 1971, real estate had replaced sex as the locus of dark practices and charged fantasy. Anything in the sexual line could be treated with artistic impunity (except perhaps as an advertisement in an art magazine), but it is a tribute to the precociousness of art that a desecration was perceived before it was recognized that housing had become sacred. Haacke