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HERMESLEZING
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Jeff Wall

Modern and modernist art is grounded in the dialectic of depiction and anti-depiction, depiction and its negation within the regime of depiction. The self-criticism of art, that phenomenon we call both 'modernist' and 'avant-garde', originated in terms of the arts of depiction and, for the hundred years beginning in 1855, remained within their framework.

The forms of the depictive arts are drawing, painting, sculpture, the graphic arts, and photography. These of course are what were called the 'fine arts' to distinguish them from the 'applied arts'. I will call these the 'canonical forms'.

The depictive arts do not admit movement. Movement in them has always been suggested, not presented directly. The quality and nature of that suggestion has been one of the main criteria of judgment of quality in those arts. We judge the depictive arts on how they suggest movement while actually excluding it.

Movement is the province of other arts—theatre, dance, music, and cinema. Each of these arts also has its own avant-garde, its own modernism, its own demands for the fusion of art and life, and its own high and low forms. But in the 1950s, those who took up and radicalized the pre-war avant-garde convic-

tion that art could evolve only by breaking out of the canonical forms, turned precisely to the movement arts. I am thinking here of Allan Kaprow, John Cage, or George Maciunas. They sensed that the depictive arts could not be displaced by any more upheavals from within, any more radical versions of depiction or anti-depiction. They came to recognize that there was something about the depictive arts that would not permit another art form or art dimension to evolve out of them. The new challenge to western art would be advanced in terms of movement and the arts of movement. Cage's piano concert, *4'33"*, first presented in 1952, can be seen as the first explicit statement of this challenge.

This was, of course, opposed by proponents of the canon, pre-eminently Clement Greenberg. Greenberg published his essay *Towards a Newer Laocoon* in 1940, twelve years before Cage's concert. In it he wrote, "There has been, is, and will be, such a thing as a confusion of the arts." He argues that, in each era, there can be, and has been, a dominant art, one all the others tend to imitate to their own detriment, perversion, and loss of integrity. From the early 17th century to the last third of the 19th, he says that the dominant art was literature. What he calls modernism is the effort on the part of artists to reject that mimesis and work only with the unique, inimitable characteristics of each individual, singular, art. He says that this emphasis on uniqueness is central to the creation of the best and most significant art of the period between 1875 and 1940—in painting, from Cézanne to the advent of Abstract Expressionism.

For Greenberg and his generation—and at least one further generation—the confusion was confusion within the depictive arts. Even if literature or theatre were the models for painters and sculptors, the imitations were executed as paintings or sculptures. A painter did not put on a play in a gallery and claim it was a 'painting', or a 'work of art'. The painter made a painting that, unfortunately, suppressed its own inherent values as painting in trying to create the effect a staged scene of the

same subject might have had. For Greenberg, this was a severe confusion.

But if that was a severe confusion in 1940, or 1950, or even 1960, it is not a severe confusion after that. After that we have a new order of confusion of the arts, a new dimension of it, because the mimesis, the blending and blurring of distinctions, is not confined to occurrences within depiction, even though they are taking place on the terrain called 'contemporary art', a terrain discovered, settled, and charted by the depictive arts.

The development of this dispute was at the centre of critical discourse between the early 1950s and the later 1960s, at which point the proponents of the new movement-based forms become dominant. In 1967, Michael Fried radicalized Greenberg's arguments and staged the last and best stand in defense of the canonical forms. This was of course his famous essay *Art and Objecthood*, where he introduced the term 'theatricality' to explain the condition brought about by the rise of the new forms. The term made explicit the fact that the radical breach with the canonical forms is not effected by some unheralded new type of art but comes with brutal directness from theatre, music, dance, and film. Fried's argument may have had its greatest effect on his opponents rather than his supporters, for it revealed to them with an unprecedented intensity and sophistication both the stakes in play and the means by which to play for them. The development of the new forms exploded and accelerated just at this moment, amidst the clamour of criticism of *Art and Objecthood*.

Fried's accomplishment is founded on his close reading of the internal structure of painting and sculpture. His contestation with Minimal Art is framed in those terms. Yet implicit within his argument are at least two other aspects, two moments of transition between the criteria of the depictive arts and those of the emergent movement.

The first of these is of course the Readymade. The Readymade is the point of origin in the history of the attempt to displace

the depictive arts. Yet it has an unusual relation to depiction, one not often commented upon.

The Readymade did not and was not able to address itself to depiction; its concern is with the object, and so if we were to classify it within the canonical forms it would be sculpture. But no-one who has thought about it accepts that a Readymade is sculpture. Rather it is an object that transcends the traditional classifications and stands as a model for art as a whole, art as a historical phenomenon, a logic, and an institution. As Thierry de Duve has so well demonstrated, this object designates itself as the abstraction 'art as such', the thing that can bear the weight of the name 'art as such'. Under what de Duve calls the conditions of nominalism, the name 'art' must be applied to any object that can be legitimately nominated as such by an artist. Or, to be more circumspect, it is the object from which the name art cannot logically be withheld. The Readymade therefore proved that an arbitrary object can be designated as art and that there is no argument available to refute that designation.

Depictions are works of art by definition. They may be popular art, amateur art, even entirely unskilled and unappealing art, but they are able to nominate themselves as art nonetheless. They are art because the depictive arts are founded on the making of depictions, and that making necessarily displays artistry. The only distinctions remaining to be made here are between 'fine' art and 'applied' art, or 'popular' art and 'high' art, between 'amateur' art and 'professional' art, and, of course, between good art and less good art. Selecting a very poor, amateurish, depiction (say a businessman's deskpadd doodle) and presenting it in a nice frame in a serious exhibition might be interesting, but it would not satisfy the criteria Duchamp established for the Readymade. The doodle is already nominated as art and the operation of the Readymade in regard to it is redundant.

Moreover, a depiction—let's say a painting—cannot simply be identified with an object. It is the result of a process that has taken place upon the support provided by an object, say a

canvas, but that has not thereby created another object. The depiction is an alteration of the surface of an object. In order that the alteration be effected, the object, the support must pre-exist it. Therefore any selection of a Readymade in this case could concern only the object that pre-existed any alteration or working of its surface. The presence of this second element—the depiction—cannot be relevant to the logical criteria for an object's selection as a Readymade, and in fact disqualifies it.

Duchamp never selects any object bearing a depiction as a Readymade. Any time he chose objects bearing depictions (these are usually pieces of paper), he altered them and gave them different names. The three most significant examples are *Pharmacie*, a colour lithographic print of a moody landscape, selected in 1914, and the pair of stereoscopic slides, *Stereoscopie à la main* (Handmade Stereoscopy), from 1918, both of which are designated as 'corrected' Readymades; and the famous *LH00Q* from 1919, which Duchamp called a 'rectified Readymade'. But these terms have little meaning. The works in question are simply not Readymades at all. They are drawings, or paintings, or some hybrid, executed on a support that already has a depiction on it. *Pharmacie*, for example, could stand as a prototype for the paintings of Sigmar Polke.

Since a depiction cannot be selected as a Readymade, depiction is therefore not included in Duchamp's negation. This is not to say that the depictive arts are not affected by the subversion carried out in the form of the Readymade; far from it. But any effect it will have on them is exerted in terms of their exemption from the claims it makes about art, not their inclusion. They are exempt because their legitimacy as art is not affected by the discovery that any object, justly selected, cannot be denied the status of 'instance of art' that was previously reserved exclusively for the canonical forms. This new 'inability to deny status' adds many things to the category art, but subtracts none from it. There is addition, that is, expanded legitimation, but no reduction, no delegitimation.

The Readymade critique is therefore both a profound success and a surprising failure. It seems to transform everything and yet it changes nothing. It can seem ephemeral and even phantom. It obliges nobody to anything. Duchamp himself returns to craftsmanship and the making of works, and there's no problem. Everything is revolutionized but nothing has been made to disappear. Something significant has happened, but the anticipated transformation does not materialize, or it materializes incompletely, in a truncated form. The recognition of this incompleteness was itself one of the shocks created by the avant-garde. That shock was both recognized and not recognized between 1915 and 1940.

The failed overthrow and the resulting reanimation of painting and sculpture around 1940 set the stage for the more radical attempt inaugurated by Cage, Kaprow, and the others and culminating in conceptual art, or what I will call the 'conceptual reduction' of the depictive arts. This is the second element concealed within *Art and Objecthood*.

'Reduction' was a central term at the origins of conceptual art; it emerged from the new discourses on reductivism set off by Minimal art in the late 1950s and early 60s. Painting and sculpture were both to be reduced to a new status, that of what Don Judd called 'specific objects', neither painting nor sculpture but an industrially produced model of a generic object that would have to be accepted as the new essential form of 'art as such'.

Now, 40 years later, we can see that Judd, along with his colleagues Dan Flavin and Carl Andre, are clearly sculptors, despite their rhetoric. Others—Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Terry Atkinson, Mel Ramsden, Michael Baldwin, Sol Lewitt—took up that rhetoric, and were more consistent. They pushed the argument past 'specific objects'—or 'generic objects'—to the 'generic instance of art', a condition beyond objects and works of art, a negation of the 'work of art', the definitive supercession of both object and work. Object and work are superceded by their replacement with a written explication of why the written ex-

plication itself cannot be denied status as a generic instance of art—and furthermore why logically and historically, this text not only cannot be denied such status, but is in fact the only entity that can authentically possess it, since it alone has become, or remained, art while having ceased to be a specific ‘work of art’. This reduction renders everything other than itself a member of a single category, the category of less historically and theoretically self-conscious gestures—mere works of art. From the new judgment seat of strictly linguistic conceptual art, all other modes or forms are equally less valid. All are equivalent in having fallen short of the self-reflexive condition of the reduction.

The substitution of the work by a written text stakes its claim, however, under very specific conditions. The text in question can concern itself with only a single subject: the argument it makes for its own validity. The text can tell us only why and under what conditions it must be accepted as the final, definitive version of the ‘generic instance of art’ and why all other kinds of art are historically redundant. But it cannot say anything else. If it does, it becomes ‘literature’; it becomes ‘post-conceptual’.

I am only going to note in passing here that, of course, this attempt at delegitimation was no more successful than the previous one. But that is not what is significant about it. The conceptual reduction is the most rigorously-argued version of the long critique of the canonical forms. All the radical proposals of the avant-gardes since 1913 are summed up in it.

All those proposals demanded that artists leap out of what has always been called ‘art’ into new, more open, more effectively creative relationships with the ‘lifeworld’, to use Jürgen Habermas’ term for it. This leap necessarily involves repudiating the creation of high art, and inventing or at least modelling new relations between the creative citizen—who is now *not* an artist—and the lifeworld. The neo-avant-garde of the 1950s distinguishes itself from the earlier avant-garde in that

it is more concerned with this social and cultural modelling than it is with artistic innovation as such. Concern with artistic innovation presumes that such innovation is required for a reinvention of the lifeworld, but the conceptual reduction has shown that this is no longer the case, since the era of meaningful artistic innovation has concluded, probably with the death of Jackson Pollock in 1956.

Therefore, the argument continues, those people who would have been artistic innovators in the past now have a new field of action and a new challenge. They are no longer obliged to relate to the lifeworld via the mediation of works of art; they are now liberated from that and placed directly before a vast range of new possibilities for action. This suggests new, more inventive, more sensitive forms of cultural activity carried out in real lifeworld contexts—the media, education, social policy, urbanism, health, and many others. The ‘aesthetic education’ to be undergone by these people will impel them beyond the narrow confines of the institutions of art and release their creativity in the transformation of existing institutions and possibly the invention of new ones. This of course is very close to the ideas of the ‘counterculture’ generated at almost the same moment, and the conceptual reduction is one of the key forms of countercultural thinking.

And yet, despite the rigour of the conceptual reduction and the futuristic glamour of the challenge it posed, few artists crossed that line it drew in the sand, few left the field of art to innovate in the new way in other domains. From the early 70s on, it seems that most artists either ignored the reduction altogether, or acquiesced to it intellectually, but put it aside and continued making works. But the works they made are not the same works as before.

Since there are now no binding technical or formal criteria or even physical characteristics that could exclude this or that object or process from consideration as art, the necessity for art

to exist by means of works of art is reasserted, not *against* the conceptual reduction, but in its wake and through making use of the new openness it has provided, the new 'expanded field'. The new kinds of works come into their own mode of historical self-consciousness through the acceptance of the claim that there is a form of art which is not a work of art and which legislates the way a work of art is now to be made. This is what the term 'post-conceptual' means.

The reduction increased the means by which works can be created and thereby established the framework for the vast proliferation of forms that characterizes the recent period. The depictive arts were based upon certain abilities and skills and those who did not possess either had little chance of acceptance in art. The critique of those abilities, or at least of the canonical status of those abilities, was one of the central aspects of the avant-garde's attack on the depictive arts, and conceptual art took this up with great enthusiasm. The Readymade had already been seen as rendering the handicraft basis of art obsolete, and conceptual art extended the obsolescence to the entire range of depictive skills. The de-skilling and re-skilling of artists became a major feature of art education, which has been transformed by two generations of conceptual and post-conceptual artist-teachers.

The reduction enlarged the effect of the Readymade in validating a vast range of alternative forms that called for different abilities, different skills, and probably a different kind of artist, one that Peter Plagens recently called the 'post-artist'. In keeping with the utopian tenor of avant-garde categories, this new kind of artist would not suffer the limitations and neuroses of his or her predecessors, trapped as they were in the craft guild mentality of the canonical forms.

The closed guild mind values the specifics of its *métier*, its abilities, skills, customs, and recipes. The proponents of the distinction and singularity of the arts always recognize *métier* as an essential condition of that distinction, and they might

argue that it is one that can also have a radical and utopian dimension, as a space of activity that can resist the progressive refinements of the division of labour in constantly-modernizing capitalist and anti-capitalist societies.

The proliferation of new forms in the post-conceptual situation is unregulated by any sense of craft or *métier*. On the contrary, it develops by plunging into the newest zones of the division of labour. Anything and everything is possible, and this is what was and remains so attractive about it.

By the middle of the 1970s the new forms and the notion of the expanded field had become almost as canonical as the older forms had been. Video, performance, site-specific interventions, sound works, music pieces, and variants of all of these evolved with increasing rapidity and were rightly enough considered to be serious innovations. The innovations appeared not as music or theatre properly speaking but as 'an instance of a specificity within the context of art'. They were 'not music', 'not cinema', 'not dance'.

The other arts make what I will call a 'second appearance' then, not as what they have been previously, but as 'instances of (contemporary) art'. It appears that in making this second appearance they lose their previous identity and assume or gain a second, more complex, or more universal identity. They gain this more universal identity by becoming 'instances', that is, exemplars of the consequences of the conceptual reduction. For, if any object (or, by obvious extension, any process or situation) can be defined, named, considered, judged, and valued as art by means of being able to designate itself as a sheer instance of art, then any other art form can also be so defined. In making its 'second appearance', or gaining a second identity, the art form in question transcends itself and becomes more significant than it would be if it remained theatre or cinema or dance.

The visual arts was the place where the historical process and dialectic of reduction and negation were taken the furthest,

where the development was most drastic and decisive. The avant-gardes of the movement arts were more subdued. There are many reasons for this; suffice for the moment to say that none of them had any internal need to reach the same point of self-negation as did the depictive arts. The negation-process of the depictive arts established a theoretical plateau that could not be part of the landscape of the other arts. Each of the performing arts was closed off by its own structure from the extension, radicalization, or aggravation, of self-critique. They can be said to remain inherently at the pre-conceptual-art level. This is no criticism of them, simply a description of their own characteristics.

Still, aspects of the dynamic of self-negation made their presence felt in the movement arts from the beginning of the 1950s at least. This process brought the movement arts closer to the avant-garde of what was then still the depictive arts and opened passages through which influence and ideas could move, in both directions. Almost all the new phenomena between 1950 and 1970 are involved in this crossbreeding. As the movement arts are affected by radical reductivism—and Cage's concert displays this clearly—their forms are altered enough that they begin to resemble, at least in some vague, suggestive way, radical works of depictive art. The silence of Cage's concert resembles, in this sense, the blankness of Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* from the same years.

These affinities brought out the notion that an event could have the same kind of artistic status as an object; in this period the notion of the event as the essential new form of post-conceptual art crystallized and became decisive. And the event is, by nature, an ensemble of effects if not a 'confusion' of them. Movement outside the frame of depiction, out from the atelier, gives new possibilities of form to the domain of momentary occurrences, fugitive encounters, spontaneous flashes of insight, and any other striking elements caught up in the flow of the everyday and of no value or effect when abstracted from that

flow as representation. They can only be sensed, or repeated, or made visible as some form of event, in which their contingency and unpredictability are preserved, possibly intensified, possibly codified.

The advent of the movement arts has also been a major factor in the project of blurring the boundaries between high art and mass culture. This is normally identified with Pop Art, as if the depictive arts themselves had the means to carry it out. But the depictive arts do not have those means because they have no distinct mass cultural forms. Mass culture produces millions of depictions of all kinds, but they are just that—depictions functioning in different contexts. They are not a different art form, just a different level or register of the depictive arts. Pop artists were obviously not the first to recognize this; what they did was to emphasize more strongly than anyone had previously that audiences and even patrons of art in a modern, commercial society may very well prefer the popular and vernacular versions of depiction to the more complex, more introverted, forms of 'high art'. Pop Art restaged the threatening possibility of the popular forms of depiction overwhelming the high ones, something Greenberg had warned about in *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* in 1939. But, despite this, Pop Art, as depiction, is irrelevant to the development of new forms of neo-avant-garde art and of a new fusion of high art with mass culture. And this is true of even the most extreme version of Pop, Warhol's.

Anything new in this regard is imported from the movement arts and from the creative or organizational structures of the movement arts and the entertainment and media industries based upon them. Warhol's mimesis of a media conglomerate was more significant here than were his paintings or prints. Warhol did not cross the line drawn by the conceptual reduction, but he moved laterally along it, and did so at the moment the line was being drawn, or even before it was drawn. But he wasn't very interested in extending his practice into the realms advocated by the radical counterculture. Quite the opposite. Warhol moved

into the crowded and popular domains of mass entertainment and celebrity, the engines of conformity. This is why he has been identified as the radical antithesis to artistic radicalism.

The process of blurring the boundaries between the arts, between art and life, and between high and low, takes place as a struggle between two equally valid versions of the neo-avant-garde and countercultural critique—the radical, emancipatory version, and the Warhol version. So it is not surprising that we can see aspects of the challenge set by the conceptual reduction operating in both.

Warhol's mimesis of a media conglomerate is a model not just for lifting the taboo on the enjoyments of conformism in a prosperous, dynamic society. Partly because it was so wildly successful, it was also a model for any sort of mimetic relationship to other institutions, popular or otherwise.

If Warhol could imitate a media firm, others coming after him could imitate a museum department, a research institute, an archive, a community service organization, and so on—that is, one could develop a mimesis, still within the institution of art, of any and every one of the potential new domains of creativity suggested by the conceptual reduction, but without thereby having to renounce the making of works and abandon the art world and its patronage.

Since the early 1970s, a hybrid form, an intermediary structure, has evolved on the basis of the fusion of Warhol's factory concept with post-conceptual mimesis. Artists were able to remain artists and at the same time to take another step toward the line drawn in the sand. Instead of disappearing from art into therapy, communitarianism, anthropology, or radical pedagogy, they realized that these phenomena, too, can make their own second appearance within, and therefore as, art. Within the domain of second appearance, artists are able to try out this or that mimesis of extra-artistic creative experimentation.

In the past 15 or 20 years, they have refined and extended the reflection on the challenge to abandon art. It is as if, in moving

along the boundary, negotiating the patronage provided by the art economy, or the art world, in combination with probing the actual effects of their mimesis in the world nearly outside the art world, they are attempting gently to erase that line, or even to move it slightly on the institutional terrain. This is the art of the global biennales—the art of prototypes of situations, of an institutionalized neo-situationism.

The biennales and the grand exhibitions—now among the most important occasions on the art calendar—are themselves becoming prototypes of this potentiality, events containing events, platforms inducing event-structures—tentative, yet spectacular models of new social forms, rooted in community action, ephemeral forms of labour, critical urbanism, deconstructivist tourism, theatricalized institutional critique, anarchic interactive media games, radical pedagogies, strategies of wellness, hobbies and therapies, rusticated technologies of shelter, theatres of memory, populist historiographies, and a thousand other ‘stations’, ‘sites’, and ‘plateaus’.

This is a new art form and possibly the final new art form since it is nearly formless. It promises the gentle, enjoyable dissolution of the institution of art, not the militant liquidation threatened by the earlier avant-gardes.

I am not here to make predictions. But, through the gentle process of mimesis and modeling, the prototypes may become more and more mature, more complex, and more stable. They will still be called ‘art’, since there is no means to deny them that name if they elect to be known by it. But they may begin to function as autonomous nomads, moving from festival to festival. Whatever purpose they might have may become institutionalized. The resulting institution could have an ‘art look’: if a gallery can resemble a wellness centre, then a wellness centre may come to look like an installation piece, and even be experienced as one. Then it would not be as if anyone renounced art, but that art itself became diffuse, and lost track of its own boundaries, and lost interest in them.

The critique of the depictive arts has always concentrated on the question of the autonomy of art, and the corollary of autonomy—artistic quality. Autonomous art has been mocked as something ‘outside of life’ and indifferent to it. The avant-gardes’ critique cannot be reduced to this mockery—but in demanding the breaching of the boundedness of the canonical forms, the avant-gardes have failed—or refused—to recognize that autonomy is a relation to that same world outside of art. It is a social relationship, one mediated, it is true, by our experience of a thing, a work of art, but no less social therefore than a get-together at a community hall. Defenders of autonomous art—‘high art’—claim that when works of art attain a certain level of quality, their practical human utility expands exponentially and becomes incalculable, unpredictable, and undefinable. They argue that it is not that autonomous art has no purpose, something that is commonly said about it, but that it has no purpose that can be known for certain in advance. Not even the greatest scholar of art can know what the next individual is going to discover in his or her experience of even the best-known work of art. He could not have predicted that Duchamp would want to deface the *Mona Lisa* as he did. The autonomy of art is grounded on the quality it has of serving unanticipated, undeclared, and unadmitted purposes, and of serving them differently at different times.

This is frustrating for those who have purposes, no matter how significant those purposes may be. Often, the more compelling the purpose, the greater the frustration and the more intense the objection. But for there to be works that can be depended on to serve a known purpose, the quality that makes the works autonomous must disappear and be replaced with other qualities. And there are thousands of other qualities. Just as there are now thousands of works displaying those qualities.

For 100 years, the programmes of critique have targeted the ‘problem of autonomous art’ in the name of those wider domains of creativity, whether called the proletarian revolution, the de-

mocratized public sphere, the post-colonial polis, the 'other', or the 'multitude'. But as long as the dispute took place within the boundaries of the depictive arts, it was impossible to dispose of the principle of artistic quality. Subversions of technique and skill are permanent routines by now, and they are just as permanently bound by the criteria they challenge and with which they must all eventually come to terms. And the most irritating thing about these subversions is that the most significant of them are accomplished by artists who cannot but bring forward new versions of autonomous art, and therefore new instances of artistic quality. The canonical forms of the depictive arts are too strong for the critiques that have been brought to bear on them. As long as the attempts to subvert them are made from within, they cannot be disturbed. As soon as the artist in question makes the slightest concession to the criteria of quality, the criteria as such are reasserted in a new, possibly even radical way.

This was the dilemma faced 50 years ago by those who, for all their by now famous reasons, were determined to break what they saw as the vicious circle of autonomy, subversion, achievement, and reconciliation. They recognized that their aims could never be achieved within the *métiers* and the canon. Once again they attempted the complete reinvention of art. They cannot be said to have failed, since they discovered the potential of the second appearance of the movement arts, the movement arts recontextualized within contemporary art as if they were Readymades.

In this recontextualization, the aesthetic criteria of all the *métiers* and forms could be suspended—those of both the movement arts and the depictive arts. The criteria of the movement arts are suspended because those arts are present as second appearance; those of the depictive arts, because they could never be applied to the movement arts in any case.

So 'performance art' did not have to be 'good theatre'; video or film projections did not have to be 'good filmmaking', and

could even be better if they were not, like Warhol's or Nauman's around 1967. There was, and is, something exhilarating about that. The proliferation of new forms is limitless since it is stimulated by the neutralization of criteria. The new event-forms might be the definitive confusion—or fusion—of the arts. An event is inherently a synthesis, a hybrid. So the term 'confusion of the arts' seems inadequate, even obsolete. Now art develops by leaving behind the established criteria. The previous avant-gardes challenged those criteria, but now they do not need to be challenged; they are simply suspended, set aside. This development may be welcomed, or lamented, or opposed, but it is happening, is going to continue to happen; it is the form of the New. This is what artistic innovation is going to continue to be, this is what artists want, or need, it to be.

This shows us that the canonical forms are no longer the site of innovation. Moreover, in comparison to the new forms, it now appears that they might never really have been, at least not to the extent claimed by the familiar histories of the avant-garde.

Burdened by their own notions of quality, the depictive arts have been able to question their own validity only in order to affirm it. To practice these arts is to affirm them or fail at them, even though that affirmation may be more dialectical than most negations. The emergence in the past 30 to 50 years, of a contemporary art that is not a depictive art has revealed the depictive arts as restricted to this negative dialectic of affirmation. This is the price paid for autonomy.

Contemporary art, then, has bifurcated into two distinct versions. One is based in principle on the suspension of aesthetic criteria, the other is absolutely subject to them. One is likewise utterly subject to the principle of the autonomy of art, the other is possible only in a condition of pseudo-heteronomy. We can't know yet whether there is to be an end to this interim condition, whether a new authentic heteronomous or post-autonomous art will actually emerge. Judging from the historical

record of the past century, it is not likely. It is more likely that artists will continue to respond to the demand to transcend autonomous art with more of their famous hedging actions, inventing even more sophisticated interim solutions. We are probably already in a mannerist phase of that. This suggests that 'interim mimetic heteronomy'—as awkward a phrase as I could manage to produce—has some way to go as the form of the New. It may be the form in which we discover what the sacrifice of aesthetic criteria is really like, not as speculation, but as experience, and as our specific—one could say peculiar—contribution to art.

Jeff Wall was born in 1946 in Vancouver, Canada, where he currently lives and works. He studied art history at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (1964–70) and undertook postgraduate studies at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London (1970–3). Since the mid seventies, he has acquired international recognition with his transparent colour photographs mounted in lightboxes. In these works he deconstructs the pictorial traditions of Western painting, cinema and documentary photography, while acknowledging the heritage of conceptual art and other critical movements. Parallel to his studio practice, Jeff Wall has become known as the author of many influential essays on art, such as *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel* (1984), *'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art* (1995), and *Monochrome and Photojournalism in On Kawara's Today Paintings* (1996).

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The Hermes Lecture is a biennial lecture about the position of the visual artist in the cultural and social field. It takes place in 's-Hertogenbosch and is a collaboration between entrepreneurs' network Hermes and the Research Group of Fine Arts at the art academy AKV|St. Joost, Avans University.

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notes:

ily cere- cahiers is a collection of texts (fragments). it is a branch of the collective *it is part of an ensemble*. these texts function as starting points for dialogues within our practice. we also love to share them with guests and visitors of our projects.

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