

The Temptation of New Perspectives

Let me begin by offering three rather disparate characterizations of these remarks. They constitute, first, a sort of story about an interest literary theory might take or discover in art history; as such they sketch out if not an actual intellectual and institutional itinerary then something of the underlying logic of one. It is, I think, important here that this is not a story about the portability of theory or method but more a story about the way in which what is sometimes called theory reshapes or rediscovers itself within its new occasion.

1. My remarks might also be described as a sort of oblique introduction to certain writings by Jacques Derrida. Under this description, it will be a significant feature of my presentation that it falls somewhat short of its goal. Martin Heidegger produced, beginning in 1935, a piece of 'aesthetics' under the title 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' In the late 1960s Meyer Schapiro threw his considerable professional weight behind a sharply administered art-historical correction to Heidegger's treatment of a particular van Gogh, with the clear intent of disposing of the apparent more general interest of Heidegger's speculations. In the mid 70s Derrida took up this argument in a complex 'polylogue' called 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing' that seems aimed at least in part at renewing the philosophic interest of Heidegger's essay.¹ One question one might have about this sequence of writings is whether or not it is of any conceivable interest to art history; I want to suggest that it is, and I want to do so by a somewhat circuitous return to the speculative foundations of art history. If I do not now have much to say about the three essays in question, I am nonetheless working toward a certain description or redescription of the place in which the debate among them happens.

2. Finally, this reflection is an attempt to map, in an admittedly brief and preliminary fashion, something of the relations that may now bind together the notions of 'theory,' 'postmodernity,' and 'art history.' It is an attempt to say something about the kinds of challenge and possibility that may be facing the discipline of art history now.

3. I have already mentioned Derrida, and it should be clear in advance that my position is at least loosely deconstructionist.

Deconstruction presents itself as, in general, a practice of reading,

a
deconstruction-
ist

a way of picking things up against their own grain, or at their margins, in order to show something about how they are structured by the very things they act to exclude from themselves, and so more or less subtly to displace the structure within which such exclusions seem plausible or necessary. Like an analyst listening to an analysand, deconstruction attends to the other that haunts, organizes and disorganizes, a speech that takes itself to be in control of its meanings and identity. Deconstruction arises as a certain commitment to flux and to fluidity—rather like this essay, it rambles, circles, connects, and disconnects. In his *Blindness and Insight* the late Paul de Man offered a summary of Derrida's reading of Rousseau that still seems a good enough short introduction to deconstruction's typical and most easily standardized textual procedures:

Whenever Rousseau designates the moment of unity that exists at the beginning of things, when desire coincides with enjoyment, the self and the other are united in the maternal warmth of their common origin, and consciousness speaks with the voice of truth, Derrida's interpretation shows, without leaving the text, that what is thus designated as a moment of presence always has to posit another, prior moment and so implicitly loses its status as a point of origin. . . . All attempts to trace writing back to a more original form of vocal utterance lead to the repetition of the disruptive experience that alienated the written word from experience in the first place.

The term deconstruction itself was coined by Derrida as, at least in part, an interpretation of a nest of terms in the philosophic writings of Martin Heidegger that had been variously rendered 'destruction' and 'retrieve.' With these terms Heidegger attempted to name a relation to his tradition that was at once radically critical of and profoundly attached to it; for Heidegger, as for most continental philosophy after Hegel, the distinction frequently made in Anglo-American circles between being an historian of philosophy and actually doing philosophy is essentially senseless: one does philosophy out of its past and in search of what remains in some sense concealed within that past. Derrida's revisionary translation of Heidegger's terms participates in this complex ambition, at once continuing and critiquing the deep lines of the Heideggerean project, and it accelerates the confounding of the reading of philosophy and the doing of it.

Given the weight this places on the act of reading, it is hardly surprising that Derrida's writings should have had a substantial effect on literary criticism. But, of course, crossing from philosophy to criticism and from France to America, deconstruction enters into engagement with different pasts and different conditions, and some of us at least are still concerned to understand the full weight of these differences.

The term 'deconstruction' seems to have entered art talk primarily because of a perceived appropriateness to the effect of work frequently

key →

critical
Reading

★

★

★ described as 'postmodern.' It has also gained some more general methodological purchase as a part of broader efforts to bring literary theory to bear upon the consideration of visual objects—as, for example, in the work of Norman Bryson. But there is certainly one other area in which one can imagine it intervening, and that would lie in the reading of the texts of art history itself. In the long run, these three areas are bound to be interconnected, and the surest index of this interconnection lies perhaps in the apparent naturalness with which one will speak, precisely, of 'reading' a painting; deconstruction does not let such remarks pass as somehow 'merely metaphorical.'

To one who comes from literary theory, one of the most striking features of art history is what I might call its 'foundedness.' Literary criticism is, at least in this country, not founded in the way art history is: it took no special argument to invent departments for the study of literature, although it did take the construction of some special methods, more or less captured by the phrase 'close reading.' Literature departments are just that—literature departments; even if their curricula are for the most part organized by period, the essential element in their self-definition seems to be a notion of the rights or necessity of 'literary language' and not, in the first instance, the historicity of their object. It was enough for I. A. Richards and others to find a way to read that could be justified in the face of very strong and particular philosophic pressures—generally associated with the project of logical positivism—for there to be English Departments.²

With art history we have a very different situation. There are founding texts, texts engaged in a struggle to define both an object and an account of our access to it. The work of Riegl, Wölfflin, Panofsky, and others is quite different from that of the founders of academic literary criticism; it is more densely engaged with a philosophic past—above all an Hegelian past—that seems at once to offer to it and to deprive it of the very same object; my questions will be about how far art history can be said to have mastered this past in establishing a certain past as its object. It should be noted in advance that the philosophic past at issue here is one the discipline shares to a significant degree with the tradition that eventuates in Derrida's philosophic work of reading and writing.

This is then a sort of report on work in progress in which I have been trying to make some sense of these founding struggles, to read in them the scars and fissures by which they are still marked and which can open again at any moment—and which are indeed perhaps being forcibly opened now under the impress of a new inflection of the modern. The argument I offer here is partial in every sense: tendentious, incomplete in its arguments and evidence, and committed to a certain finitude of appearances.

Whatever interest the works that concern us may have held for

dig below
art hist
lit. hist



★

observers throughout the course of what we now call the history of art, that history in its specific visibility becomes possible only at a certain moment within the Western tradition, and this moment is firmly moored to the name of Hegel, whose claim that art has come to an end—has become, that is, merely historical—engenders both an object and a question about our access to it.

Hegel's claim, as I understand it, is not so much that the artistic impulse has exhausted itself as much as it is that an impulse once inchoate and buried in the terms of its world has become now detached and explicit, and that with this achievement it passes over into the still greater explicitness of philosophy. From Hegel's vantage what had been lived variously as ornament, religion, memorial, and so on shows itself to have formed a single history, a story of what is now visible as art. The concept of art is thus bound up with the notion of its end; its achievement is inseparable from its pastness—art comes to presence and explicitness precisely as historical, as already overcome. It is in this sense that one might see or sense in Hegel a certain registration of the museum as the essential site of art (although, to the best of my knowledge, the word 'museum' does not appear in Hegel's writings). One might thus be led to think of what are now called 'institutional theories of art' as coeval with the emergence of art itself.

I want to note a couple of consequences of this view.

1. A first is the inscription of a permanent worry about context within the project of art history: precisely because the becoming available of art is the story of its detachment from context, there will be a deep tension within the art-historical project between the historicity of its object, the rhythms that organize art as art, and the history in or through which works were lived. This tension seems now most visible in the form of a conflict between the claim to achievement and the claims of context and condition, between the masterpiece and its social history. Institutional theories of art derive such power as they have from their apparent ability to span—or obliterate—some versions of this gap, but they are perhaps better taken as symptoms of it, intimately entangled with the extraordinarily difficult relation of art history and modern art. One mark of the postmodern—I am thinking of the work of someone like Hans Haacke—lies in its impulse to address this entanglement as art and not as a theory of art.

2. These considerations may point us toward a second consequence of the Hegelian account of art: that the emergence of art as a properly historical object is contemporaneous with the possibility of claiming to make art as art. The same history that produces the possibility of art history produces the possibility of modernism in art, and the two possibilities are linked in the thought, which I borrow from Stanley Cavell, that modernism is well defined as the having of the past as a problem. It bears remarking here that these twinned possibilities do

Hegel

1.
context

2.
art
as
art

not and in general cannot face one another, falling as they do on opposite slopes of the cusp that is the becoming explicit or objective of art. If art history and modernism in art are tied to one another, they nonetheless do not stand fully in one another's view. One thing the recently entered claims to 'postmodernism' may mean is just that this relation has achieved a certain kind of availability for us: that modernism itself can now appear to us as historical, and that art history can now be seen as in some specifiable sense modernist. A full acknowledgment of the postmodern would then entail not simply the addition of a period to the normal art history curriculum but a reevaluation of the discipline itself.

?

3

revisionism

A third consequence of the Hegelian view can set us toward such a work of revision. For those moved to lay out the terms of art history in Hegel's wake, a certain argumentative course is laid out in advance. A Hegelianizing history of art must give some account of its own coming to be, and this means an account, explicit or not, of the becoming historical of art in the North, in Germany above all. It seems to me important that whatever else Wölfflin and Riegl are doing, they are also offering a story about how art history emerges as a Northern discipline. The failure of this offering—a breaking with Hegelian kinds of narrative—would then be an important feature of what art history has been for us. The full story of this failure is not simply intellectual or argumentative; it is a story of war and immigrations, of translations made and not made, of the construction and fate of Germany, and of the propping of that construction on an imagination of Greece and in the face of another, prior claim to Renaissance. It is a story that knots together a nation, its poets and philosophers, Hölderlin and Hegel, Nietzsche and Burckhardt, in ways I cannot pretend to understand. 'America' too would have its place in this story. What I offer instead is a few thoughts about Riegl and Wölfflin and Panofsky.

German Founders of Art History

The Hegelian task assigned to the German founders of art history is extraordinarily complex. A casual index of this complexity may perhaps be found in the recurrence of the term 'late' in the titles of major works by both Riegl and Wölfflin. It seems important to notice this as a description not only of the periods under central consideration but of an interest in 'lateness' or 'belatedness' inscribed within the founding task. 'Lateness' seems to encode or allegorize beyond chronology interests in being both German and post-Hegelian as well as an uncertainty about when art history comes on the scene in relation to the actual history of art. One might recall here Hegel's assertion that 'philosophy always arrives on the scene too late'—an assertion through which philosophy assumes or is condemned to the burden of modernism. One might also note that these resonances might well cease to be heard in the different philosophical climate of, for example, America.

If under the impress of Hegelian logic and historiography, the ques-

tion of art history is inseparable from the question of the becoming historical of art, the theoretical foundations of the discipline will be laid only through accounts of the history of art. These accounts will have as one major task the avoidance of any overt reliance upon the Hegelian schematizations that end by reducing an apparent history of vision to a real history of philosophic knowledge and self-consciousness on the one hand, or to a transient and historically regional science within a larger logic on the other.

Riegl

Alois Riegl, for example, seems to play peek-a-boo with the dialectic, giving us what appear to be analyses from significantly different methodological positions of disparate empirical moments within the history of art. And yet something seems to bind just those moments together, thus justifying Riegl's claim that with his study of the later Roman art industry, the story of art attains closure. And indeed Riegl's work does seem to sketch out a certain systematic dialectic within which methodological variation shows itself as a dialectically driven development like that of the consciousness that journeys through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—we have an initial moment of the self-unfolding of sheer artistic will and attention in the *Stilfragen*, a later moment of transformation that imposes upon that sheer will an awareness of its being for another, and a final moment in which that other is explicitly posed as a human, and Northern, subject. Across the movement from palmette motifs to late Roman art to the group portrait, the initial brute fact of 'attention'—and its subsidiary terms of 'feeling' and 'will'—becomes the highly complex fact of a Northern audience or witness to the historicity of art. Punning implicitly, perhaps unconsciously, but nonetheless powerfully against Hegel, this narrative is one of the freeing of art from the haptic *grasp* of the Concept to an opticality standing in permanent need of a beholder to guarantee its objectivity. Hegel is thus revised back toward Kant, inscribing a permanent formalism among the constituent elements of the emergent field. This revisionary move remains difficult for art history, at once enabling its objectivity in the face of the threat of its absorption into mere intellectual history and risking the detachment of those objects from the thicker prose of the world in which they gained their initial shape and human purchase.

The tension engendered here can be seen to animate centrally the work of Wölfflin as it struggles to assert the 'two roots of style,' and finds that difference between what might be said to be internal and external to art repeated within what is claimed to be purely internal. As I understand the intention of Wölfflin's argument in his *Principles*, it is in part to justify both classical and Northern baroque, with their linked subpolarities, as distinct and equally legitimate modes of representation. Each yields a valid presentation of things—on the one hand 'as they are' and on the other 'as they appear.' Further, both modes are

defined primarily not by any relation, adequate or otherwise, to things, but by their ability to sustain visual presentation—the painterly giving us things as ‘pure seeings,’ sheer visual presences, and the linear giving us, with equal claim to the truth of painting, the fact of material surface and planar extent.

When, however, we protest against Wölfflin's formalism and isolation of the visual from the larger world, we are registering an effect of the text that outraces the argument it would embody. To recognize this is to extend the implications of Marshall Brown's deconstructive reading of Wölfflin's *Principles* and his argument about the primacy of the baroque and impossibility of the classical as such, which we can now recognize as itself a version of the question of things-as-they-are/things-as-they-appear.³ It is the baroque impulse alone that moves toward a purification of vision apart from material conditions or bodily/conceptual graspings. That is, if one takes Wölfflin's intention seriously one has to postulate an original and irreducible duplicity to such key terms as 'vision' and 'surface.' But in doing so, one loses the stable and principled object of the disciplined or disciplinary history of vision, so the text works always to displace its major insight to the margins in order to ensure an apparent stability at the center. If Brown is right that the classical becomes actual only and always in the baroque, the cast-out impurity of its proper and impossible image of vision returns as the always deferred or excluded ‘second root of style’ (so this nondialectic of classical and baroque threatens to betray art history again to Kant). This renegotiation of the distinction between haptic and optic is not without its costs: in particular, one loses the distinction between, and interlacing of, internal and external form that underlay Riegl's understanding of the place of the art historian and that gave his account its dialectical energy. What one gains is something like a method, an analytic vocabulary, propped up on what seems to be the discovery and isolation of the proper object of a history of vision.

One index of the continuing instability of Wölfflin's object appears in the complex bundle of references to language at work in the text *Principles*. On the one hand, his five founding polarities introduce a recognizably linguistic model for art history, surprisingly close to Saussure's. Given the strong diacritical tendency of Wölfflin's polarities, it becomes natural to speak of our ‘reading’ of one or another feature as ‘marked’ in one way or another. The language of art would be structured by diacritical contrasts of linear/painterly, open/closed, and so on. At the same time, however, Wölfflin casts each individual term within these oppositions as itself amounting to a language; these two levels of linguistic analogy are run constantly together in his text, thus tangling together problems of translation and representation. Such terms as ‘one's own language’ or ‘mode of representation as such’

Wölfflin

key

introduce a deep complication to notions of medium, genre, and relation within art history. This uncertainty within Wölfflin's text about the level at which a linguistic analogy is to enter the account seems of a piece with the other uncertainties about internal and external roots of style and the classical and the baroque that I have tried, too briefly, to chart here: all of them, I suggest, work both to maintain a constant reference to reading within the field of the history of vision, and to maintain it as at once flexing and natural, something like a metaphor—but a metaphor without which one cannot quite manage, a catechesis then.

There is a sense in which we may be tempted to think of Riegl certainly, and Wölfflin largely, as ancient history, not yet really art history. With Panofsky we seem to step into an altogether different register, one in which the founding of art history is an achieved fact. But I think this sense is perhaps well understood as the effect of a text of extraordinary power.⁴

Certainly one element in our sense of Panofsky's difference lies in the distance he takes from the 'Northern' problematic that seemed to impose itself on both Riegl and Wölfflin. Whereas in Wölfflin, key terms ('thing in itself,' 'thing as it appears') can, from paragraph to paragraph and often undecidably, be given variously Kantian or Hegelian inflections, in Panofsky, Kant unequivocally presides and the explicit problematic of historicity recedes. The 'Kant' in question here is also quite particular: given the state of Kant's German inheritance in the early part of this century, Panofsky could, in effect, have moved either toward the neo-Kantian tendencies that culminate in the work of Ernst Cassirer or toward the more radical revision of Kant set in motion by Heidegger. And Panofsky's choice was, clearly, for Cassirer. Panofsky thus turns away from the arguably most powerful inheritors of Hegel in his tradition—Nietzsche and Heidegger. This choice is reflected in Panofsky's effort to read the necessarily hermeneutical activity of art history as a constrained passage from the 'natural' to the 'essential,' the circularity of which can be held at bay and is essentially inconsequential.⁵ One can say that Schapiro's much later attack on Heidegger in effect replays this early reduction of interpretive implication within one's object to questions of methodology distinct from the historicity of the object.

One consequence of this choice appears to be a return to the valorization of Italian art that now seems to be defining art history in its traditional practice.⁶ But we will not have given an adequate account of this until we have described not only how the retreat from Hegelian and Heideggerean considerations of historicity de-emphasizes the question of Northern art, but also how Panofsky finds within Italian art a more compelling articulation of the terms of our access to the past. Both Michael Podro and Michael Holly have convincingly located this

Panofsky

+

Kant

?

Italian
Ren

new articulation in the essay 'Perspective as Symbolic Form,' with its explicit dependence on Cassirer. It is, I think, hard to find a succinct formulation for what Panofsky manages here: I suppose I want to say that he finds in the Renaissance a period that delivers us from what might seem the debilitating fact of periodicity by finding in it an optical model that can liberate us from our situations. History lies before us much as we might imagine nature to, available to our view. What I want to stress here is that any critique of the 'privileging' of the Italian Renaissance in art history will be empty and merely resentful insofar as it does not recognize that such privileging is not in any simple sense arbitrary. It is not the case that one could take Panofsky's science and correct its untoward privilegings. Its privileges are continuous with its ability to have an object at all. To put it somewhat differently: what we call access to the past is always re-describable in terms of privilege and appropriation, and to give up one is to give up the other. To step outside of such privilege is to cease to have an object and to fall into the merely empirical or willful.

Panofsky's essay acts, across its manifold difficulties, to forge an art-historical subject whose distance from and responsiveness to his or her objects, is, if not fully natural, at least fully rational. The Renaissance achievement of rational perspective becomes the condition of possibility of the art-historical discipline, and we are compelled to its terms whenever we look to establish another world view that would not, for example, privilege the Renaissance, because we can neither 'look' nor imagine a 'world view' without reinstalling at the heart of our project the terms only the Renaissance can expound for us.

The way to Panofsky's understanding of the objectivity of art history lies through the Renaissance because that Renaissance provides the means to elide questions of the becoming historical of art; his valorization of perspective forges an apparently nonproblematic access of the rationalized space of the past. We are freed then to imagine ourselves henceforth as scientists of a certain kind, and within this imagination the grounds of privilege become invisible and profoundly naturalized. The shift away from Hegel and toward the assumptions and interests of Anglo-American philosophy is an essential part of this reimagining of art history, as is the psychologization of such key inherited terms as 'schema.' With this, Riegl, and Wölfflin, the speculative past of art history itself comes to seem mere prehistory, the proto-science from which art history has elevated itself.

This altogether-too-brief sketch means then to suggest that the achievement of art history can also be thought of—and perhaps must be thought of—as a forgetting of itself and its object. Just as for Heidegger and Derrida philosophy can and must be thought of as a forgetting of itself and its object—which is hardly to say that with them philosophy ends. It is, however, to say that the conditions of its

?

arth

→

continuation become radically complex and self-critical, something Derrida tries to make explicit by packing Heidegger's interest in both philosophy and the destruction of philosophy into the commodious portmanteau of 'deconstruction.'

A

My story has brought the notion of perspective to a position of particular prominence, and I want, in closing, to note some of the ways in which we may now, under the impress of a new inflection of the modern, want to say that the invocation of perspective can and must be thought of as a forgetting of perspective, a forgetting of the fact that we are always situated and presented with a partial view. I will try to bring this back around to some large-scale considerations about the discipline of art history, but it is perhaps worth noting some of the small-scale questions that are here in tow. Why is it natural to us to speak of an introductory survey course as providing 'perspective'? What would it be like to imagine that an introductory course in something in particular could provide 'perspective'—that is, the seeing of something from somewhere, rather than the seeing of everything from nowhere? What if the survey were the achievement and not the precondition? I will shortly be trying to say something about photography and here too there are small questions in tow: What is a slide projector? How simple or complex a tool is it? Is its use a contingent fact about art history, or is it more intimately bound to the structure of the field? I don't have answers for these questions; it is enough for me, at the moment, that they can find a place within an exploration of the intellectual foundations of art history.

pooh

↗

use of the word perspective

↳

Our ordinary uses of the word 'perspective' are oddly divided: we claim it on the one hand as what gives us the world more or less just as it is, and on the other as a name for what divides us one from another. You have your perspective and I have mine—and yet the perspective rendering has as good a claim on public truth as anything we can imagine. Something of this division surely informs the recurrent, often strangely senseless, arguments about whether perspective is 'natural' or 'conventional'—the moral of these arguments may just be that perspective pushes us up against deep incoherences in our normal sense of these words, which would then also be deep incoherences in our understandings of how we stand with or toward one another.

However we come down on these questions, it is clear that our involvements with the notion of perspective cannot be confined to considerations of pictorial practice; the word haunts our images of knowledge from the moment we imagine that the best model for the grasping of sense lies in the seeing of an idea, an *eidos*, to the Nietzschean moment in which we appeal explicitly to something named 'perspectivism' as a way of moving beyond the falsification of the world through a vision of its beyond. 'Perspective' never was a practice art history simply found within its purview, which is why

Panofsky's formulation of it had the power to wrest a discipline from its historical embeddedness and transform it into a science. This would also be why certain reformulations of it may pose a deep challenge to the terms of that science as a whole and provide an impetus to the rereading of texts whose founding power and radical complexity are half-forgotten.

I am thinking here particularly of the ways in which certain discussions of postmodernism turn crucially on the fact of the camera.

Camera

A

The camera is most simply a machine for producing automatic linear perspective renditions of the world. It can of course do other things, including give the lie to this automatism, but it is for the present enough that it can do this one thing. Because it can do this one thing, it is frequently tempting to see it as spelling out an end of art, or of painting, or of a certain kind of painting. But I don't think this is what is finally interesting about the camera. What matters for at least some recent writing on photography and postmodernism is that in fulfilling a certain dream of vision—the dream, more or less, of an eye gazing out upon its world—the camera exerts effects that go beyond and turn against that dream: it gives us that world as profoundly textual, even in its very moment of appearing, or it gives us that world as a source as well as an object of vision.⁸ It can compel us to return to, reengage with, the early grapplings with the apparent duplicity and self-division of vision; it can return us even to the baroque and seemingly gratuitous complexity of the models and experiments through which the Renaissance found its way to rational perspective.⁹ It may be tempting to say here something familiar like 'postmodernism offers us a new perspective on the past,' but what needs to be said is something more like, postmodernism compels a rethinking of the way in which we imagine "perspective" to offer us an access to the past. It is perhaps worth noting that it follows from this that whatever 'postmodernism' is, it is not quite a period term and it is not quite, within the existing terms of art history, an art-historical object; it is more nearly a way in which attention can be drawn to certain 'grammatical'—a term I prefer to 'methodological'—difficulties in our talk of periodization and objectivity. What defines the postmodern within an art history curriculum is a certain slippage between it and the received terms of that curriculum.

Key

I have described the camera as a linear perspective machine and I have seemed to make a certain challenge to art history dependent upon its existence. But this mere machine can no more bear such a weight than the mere facts of brush, pigment, and surface could bear the weight of painting in general. It takes a certain history and a certain art history for this description of the camera to become compelling, to let it impose itself not simply as a description but a challenge. The art-historical story about modernism that I follow says that the camera can

matter in this way only in the wake of painterly claims to the achievement of something like pure opticality. But my interest lies here with the subject of art history and not its object, so I would like to close by locating the camera on the Heideggerean route not taken by Panofsky.

Heidegger's thought about art, like Hegel's, is tied to a thought about modernity, which Heidegger describes as a sort of fall into what one can only call blinding lucidity—a flat availability of objects to our view, our calculation, and our research, as if we were frozen into a permanent midday, the world freed of its burden of shadow. It names this modernity 'the age of the world as picture' and glosses it in terms of the reign of the 'Ge-stell,' usually rendered as the 'frame.' It is a feature of this flat availability of things that among the things available are, hanging 'on the wall, like a rifle or a hat,' works of art. And because these pictures hang there in just this way, they offer us no access to the fact that our world too has come to hang before us like a picture—but it is also the case that if we could come to understand what a picture is we might come again to understand what a world is.¹⁰ We stand poised for Heidegger between a mere aestheticism and some other grasp of the work of art, and what poses us there Heidegger calls 'technology.' I am calling it, for now, within a certain history of art, 'the camera.' Heidegger's counter-appeals are too often palpably and weakly Romantic—he hears the unalienated voice of the peasant in his proximity to the earth; he hopes for a god and an *eschaton*. In his best moments he knows that none of this will do; that there is nothing saving apart from the very danger itself; that, for example, the very thing that materializes the world as picture might also renew for us a sense of why it is that pictures matter, releasing us from the noontide demon's grasp.

And here I will stop. I have come a certain way toward turning a full circle, ending with the Heidegger from whom Derrida actively translates 'deconstruction' and I have tried to show something about how art history and the history of art history might be at issue within that movement. I have tried to stop at a particular place, a site of textual controversy in which both vision and reading are at stake. On the wall hangs a van Gogh, about whose value we know everything and nothing. Before it, arguing, gesturing, and pointing, stand Martin Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro. Watching it and them, reading it and them, writing, there is now Jacques Derrida, as well. His writing scatters into indefinite and unspecifiable voices. What do 'perspective,' 'frame,' and 'vision' mean here? What kind of history is this? Where do 'we' stand? What discipline, what patience, and what violence is called for here?

☆
frame
Summary
of
thesis

Key!