Plate 58 Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm*, 1950, oil on canvas, 267 x 526 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; George A. Hearn Fund, 1957 (57.92). © 1992 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/ARS, New York.

The question of agency in relation to production and evaluation is thus implicit in Greenberg's adjudications of meaning and value, but it is not systematically addressed as a problematic issue (in fact, it doesn't exist for Greenberg as an 'issue' at all). When in the mid-1960s critics and others started to condemn Greenberg's approach and his defence of certain abstract artists, and when Pop Art's success was seen as undermining his status as 'prophet of future trends', they particularly attacked his lack of interest in agency and intentions. What I wish to defend is *not* the belief that intentions, motivations or retrospective accounts should be considered as primary within explanation, but that any argument that refuses to engage with the question of their relevance (and of other kinds of material) is inadequate. This would be equally true of some kinds of 'social histories of art', which Greenberg and other art critics had condemned as secondary and supplementary to the primary tasks of description and formal evaluation.

The 'Americanization of Modernism'

Greenberg's support for the Abstract Expressionists in the 1940s and 1950s, from their early exhibition as a nascent New York School in the mid-1940s to their institutionalization as the 'official' avant-garde orthodoxy by the late 1950s, also raises wider questions about the 'purity' of his concerns, about the appropriation of his ideas by others, about the validity of his account of their paintings, and about the role of institutions – such as the Museum of Modern Art – in promoting and installing a new canon of works. By the early 1960s, both artists and critics who had once been considered dissident found themselves in the Establishment pantheon. Within this wider context and history, Greenberg's critical activity may be seen as part of a particular political and ideological formation, in which the rhetoric of 'purity' and 'autonomy' also has Cold War connotations. Within these conditions, art and culture in general were seen, and used, as part of a 'cultural offensive' against the Warsaw Pact.

Within the 'Americanization of Modernism' in the post-war period, Greenberg's writings and curatorial activities may be seen as components of the institutional enshrinement of Abstract Expressionism. This culminated in the Museum of Modern Art's

show The New American Painting, which toured eight European capitals in 1958 and 1959. According to Alfred H. Barr jr, curator of modern painting and sculpture at the museum, this official recognition came at the end of a 'long struggle' and represented their 'present triumph'. Related to this judgement was the critic Porter McCray's verdict that this 'triumph' was that of a 'unique and indigenous ... kind of painting' (quoted in Barr, *The New American Painting*, pp.19 and 7). Greenberg had been among the first (though not the first) to recommend paintings by Pollock back in the early 1940s, and had been instrumental, along with others, in arranging the contracts that gave Pollock, Hofmann, Baziotes, Motherwell, Rothko and Still their first one-man shows with Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in 1943 and 1944. By 1948, and after articles by Greenberg on the Abstract Expressionists in magazines such as *The Nation*, the reputations of the group and their international significance were beginning to be established. De Kooning, Pollock and Gorky showed at the Venice Biennial in 1950, sales of Abstract Expressionist paintings rose at galleries such as Betty Parsons, and coveted art prizes were awarded to Abstract Expressionists.

It is important to register that Greenberg's own critical rhetoric, increasingly 'specialized' or 'reduced' to his identified 'Modernist' concerns during the 1940s and 1950s, always coexisted with a wider, eclectic, celebratory set of accounts by other authors extolling the virtues and values of Abstract Expressionist painting. These accounts consisted, in part, of the kind of humanist and psycho-biographical prose that Greenberg had explicitly attacked in his review of Gottlieb's work in 1947. Constituting what may be called a 'humanist Modernism' (in distinction to what may be called 'Greenbergian Modernism'), they continue to be written; and, in quantitive terms, they have been the predominant form of explanation of Abstract Expressionist painting. Like much pre-Modernist art history, this discourse is centred on the primacy of authorial (artists') intentions, motivations and meanings. Such accounts fuse biography, chronology and creative intent into the kind of anecdotal commentary that Greenberg despised in both painting and art criticism. The following can stand as exemplary:

> In January 1946, a fire in Gorky's studio destroyed much of his work: drawings, sketches, books, were reduced to ashes. In February of the same year he underwent an operation for cancer. Perhaps sensing that he had little time left to live, he began working even more compulsively ... He was, as William Rubin has noted, a painter of poetic allusion. He was a painter of nature filtered through memory and fantasy who moved from representation towards abstractions, from the realm of the exterior world to the inner imagination.
> (D. Waldman, *Arshile Gorky*, p.58)

It is important to note that whatever we conclude about the value of such accounts (which exhibit the monograph's rambling form, cataloguing 'great works' and 'significant events' in the lives of artists), propositions about agency, motivation and wider circumstances of production are represented as keys to explanation. Greenberg's so-called 'formalism', as I've tried to show, is actually suffused with metaphors of intent and will. To give an adequate historical account of the Abstract Expressionists, we must consider (and, beyond that, evaluate) the artists' stated aims, intentions, motivations and retrospective accounts, along with the circumstances within which all these were produced. All these elements should be recognized as legitimate evidence within a proper historical inquiry.

The historian Irving Sandler accused such 'formalist writers' as Greenberg of narrowing their interests to such a degree that they represented artists as solely concerned with formal issues. Sandler's work on Abstract Expressionism represents an amalgamation of historical methods and critical positions. Although it draws on analysis of the formal components of composition in Abstract Expressionist painting, it also articulates elements of artists' statements into the overall account. What Pollock or Rothko *thought* they were doing, or what they *intended* to do, thus became pivotal aspects of Sandler's explanation of the artists' works as historical phenomena in a broader social context. Greenberg's 'essentialism' of formal issues is thus a type of misrepresentation.

Sandler proposed, rather, that 'the Abstract Expressionists faced what they referred to repeatedly as "a crisis in subject-matter". As the phrase indicates, their preoccupation was with meaning – with what to paint rather than how to paint' (*The Triumph of American Painting*, p.31).

This returns us directly to the question of values, and the contexts in which they are formulated. I have attempted to show that, to understand this 'crisis in subject-matter', we must recognize the shift from the concerns 'of the 1930s' to the situation in which these artists found themselves during the late 1940s and 1950s. Given this history, it is difficult to accept the Modernist explanations given by Greenberg and others of the virtue and success of their abstract art in the post-war period.

In his introduction (p.15) to the catalogue for The New American Painting exhibition, Barr presented the Abstract Expressionists as a group of artists committed to the values of a principled individualism. He described them and their painting as 'a stubborn, difficult, even desperate effort to discover the "self" or "reality", an effort to which the whole personality should be recklessly committed: I paint, therefore I am'. Such a critical judgement – as absolutist in its way as Greenberg's formulations were to become – was, it may be argued, exactly the kind of closure on explanation that Still had anticipated when he wrote to his dealer Betty Parsons in 1948:

> Please – and this is important, show [the paintings] only [to] those who have some insight into the values involved, and allow no one to write about them. NO ONE. My contempt for the intelligence of the scribblers I have read is so complete that I cannot tolerate their imbecilities, particularly when they attempt to deal with my canvases. Men like Soby, Greenberg, Barr, etc. … are to be categorically rejected.
>
> (Still, quoted in S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, p.201)

Such an (again) absolutist refusal, this time of any critical judgement, may be seen mirrored in the difficulties many people have felt when looking at Abstract Expressionist paintings: the works 'resist' readings or, alternatively, admit so many differing interpretative readings and modes of explanation (Greenberg's, Barr's, Waldman's, etc.). The paintings could be (and were) represented as essentially to do with being 'American', or 'essentially individualistic' – in fact, as both at the same time, so that the former implied the latter. The 'triumph' of American painting – proclaimed by Sandler in 1970, and coming after what was seen by Modernists as the dross of 1930s social realist and Regionalist art (connected to the equally shoddy ideologies of socialism and ruralism) – was a triumph that Greenberg had earlier signalled, though less polemically, in '"American-type" Painting' and in other articles published in journals such as *Horizon* and *The Nation*.

While the Abstract Expressionists had 'set out to paint good pictures, and advance[d] in pursuit of qualities analogous to those they admire[d] in the art of the past' ('"American-type" Painting', p.93), their break out of 'provinciality' (a code word for 1930s art) was, according to Greenberg, to do with being American. Jackson Pollock's art contained feelings that he said were 'radically American. Faulkner and Melville can be called in as witness to the nativeness of such violence, exasperation and stridency' (Greenberg, 'The present prospects of American painting and sculpture', p.166). Compared with Jean Dubuffet, Pollock is 'American and rougher and more brutal' ('Review of exhibitions of Jean Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock', pp.138–9). These comments seem far removed from his tone and formal concerns in both '"American-type" Painting' and 'Modernist painting'. Arguably, however, this 'Americanization' of painting was instrumental in raising the status and value of a group of artists (many of them European by birth or ethnicity) as part of a new, distinctively *American* 'high art' – the successor to French Modernism.

By the 1970s this historical development had become an orthodoxy of conventional art-historical accounts of the New York School. Sandler tells us that between 1947 and 1951 'more than a dozen Abstract Expressionists achieved breakthroughs to independent

styles' (*The New York School*, p.ix). Yet these styles are also, he says, recognizably both 'New York' and 'American'. Further, 'American vanguard painting came to be considered the primary source of creative ideas and energies in the world' (p.ix).[9]

Newman offered a different explanation of his own work. Consider *Covenant* (Plate 5), along with the following statement:

> Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and others could read it properly, it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism.
>
> (Newman, 'The sublime is now')

Conclusion

Newman's sentiments return us, directly, to questions about art *in* society, and about culture *and* democracy, within the shaping (and changing) orders of post-Second World War monopoly capitalism and state socialism. These questions, evidently, were as relevant to Newman in the 1950s as they had been during the 1930s. If the classic Abstract Expressionist paintings by Pollock, Rothko, Newman and others signified a negation of the subject-matter typical of Depression realism, along with a rejection of Stalinist cultural ideology, then it is also possible that, as Newman's statement indicates, the same canvases were intended to negate the sights and signs of the monopoly capitalist system of economic production 'triumphant' in the USA during the 1950s. The 'tragedy' that Rothko talked about could be interpreted as that of the victory of corporate capitalism over Nazism and then Soviet Communism. After 1945, the rhetoric of the New Deal and its reformist mission is discarded, along with any ideology seen as alien to the interests of the US state and to the demands of a massively expanded capitalist economy, whose dynamic becomes, once again, the motor of US social and historical development.

From 'art history' to 'cultural studies'

Within a traditional history of art in the USA, it would be a simple step to move to the USA of the 1960s and to show how a new generation of artists rejected the codes and conventions of the Abstract Expressionists and turned to represent exactly the icons of US commodity culture, whether in complicity with it or in obscure attempts to provide a form of critique. Andy Warhol's soup tins and Marilyns, Claes Oldenburg's giant hamburgers, and Roy Lichtenstein's cartoon-format warplanes depict and process the forms and narratives of that imperializing, consuming empire (Plates 59–63). Jasper Johns's 'Flag' paintings exemplify the ambiguities of this 'modernized' vernacular tradition – picturings of the Stars and Stripes, mobilizing and mutating the conventions characteristic of that 'essentially' *American* avant-garde, the Abstract Expressionists (Plate 64).

However, from Greenberg's perspective in the late 1930s to *our* situation in the 1990s, there is a direct, though problematic, continuity. Its ramifications go far beyond art history and art criticism. Debates about 'high art', the status of 'mass culture', and their relation to social and political organization and power have persisted from the 1950s onwards. More recently, the notion of 'postmodernist' art, culture and society has developed, unsettling the orthodoxies inherited from the late 1940s and 1950s about 'High Modernism' and the value or status of avant-garde art. While the cluster of issues and arguments around both Modernism and postmodernism is complex and multifaceted, it is possible to indicate

[9] For an account of the political use made of Abstract Expressionist painting during the 1950s and 1960s, see E. Cockcroft, 'Abstract Expressionism', pp.39–41, and S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*.

Plate 59 Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe (diptych)*, 1962, silkscreen ink on canvas, 208 x 290 cm. Collection of Mr and Mrs Burton Tremaine, Meriden. © 1992 The Andy Warhol Art Foundation, New York.

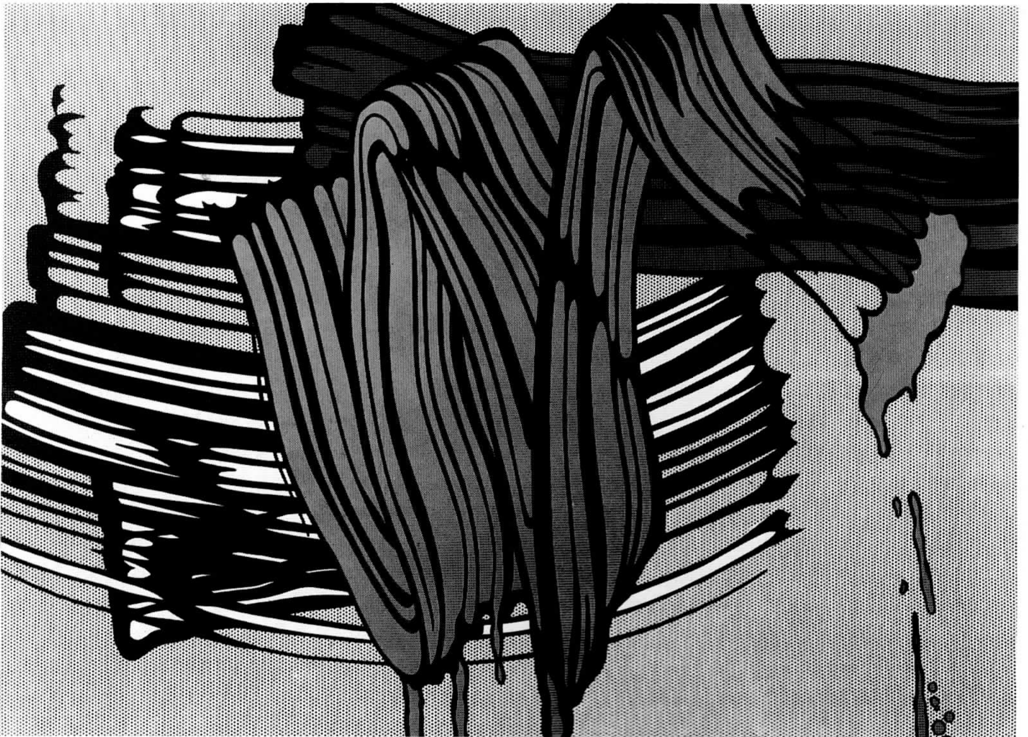
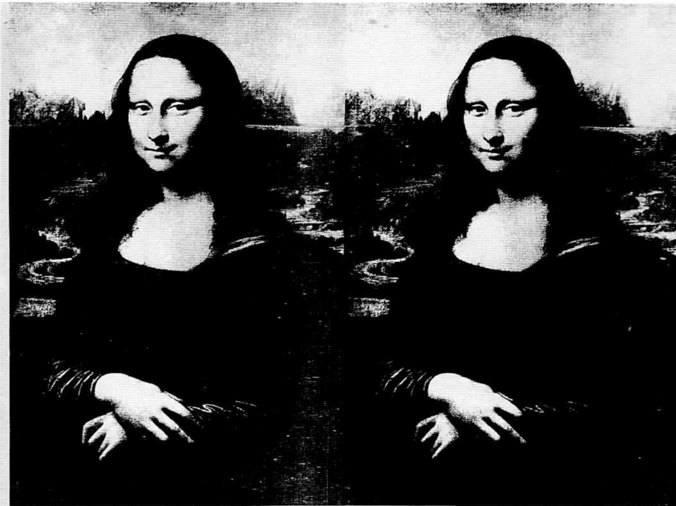


Plate 60 Roy Lichtenstein, *Big Painting no.6*, 1965, oil and magna on canvas, 233 x 328 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf. Photograph: Walter Klein. © Roy Lichtenstein, DACS, London and VAGA, New York, 1993.



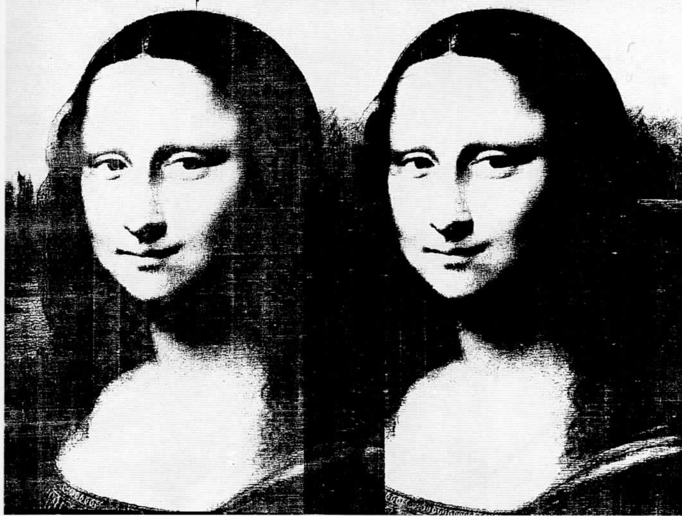


Plate 61 Andy Warhol, *Four Mona Lisas*, 1963, silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 112 x 74 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; gift of Henry Geldzahler, 1965. © 1992 The Andy Warhol Art Foundation, New York.

Plate 62 Claes Oldenburg, *Giant Hamburger*, 1962, painted sailcloth stuffed with foam, 132 x 213 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Plate 63 Roy Lichtenstein, *Blam!*, 1962, oil on canvas, 200 x 170 cm. Richard Brown Baker Collection. © Roy Lichtenstein, DACS, London and VAGA, New York, 1993. Photograph courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery.

some important components of this debate that relate directly to the main themes and values present in Greenberg's 'Avant-garde and kitsch'. What follows is an attempt to 'radicalize' this debate and to situate it within the context of the 1990s. From this perspective, Greenberg's dismissive interest in kitsch may be transformed into an attempt fully to understand all aspects of the culture, in their specificity and interrelationships.

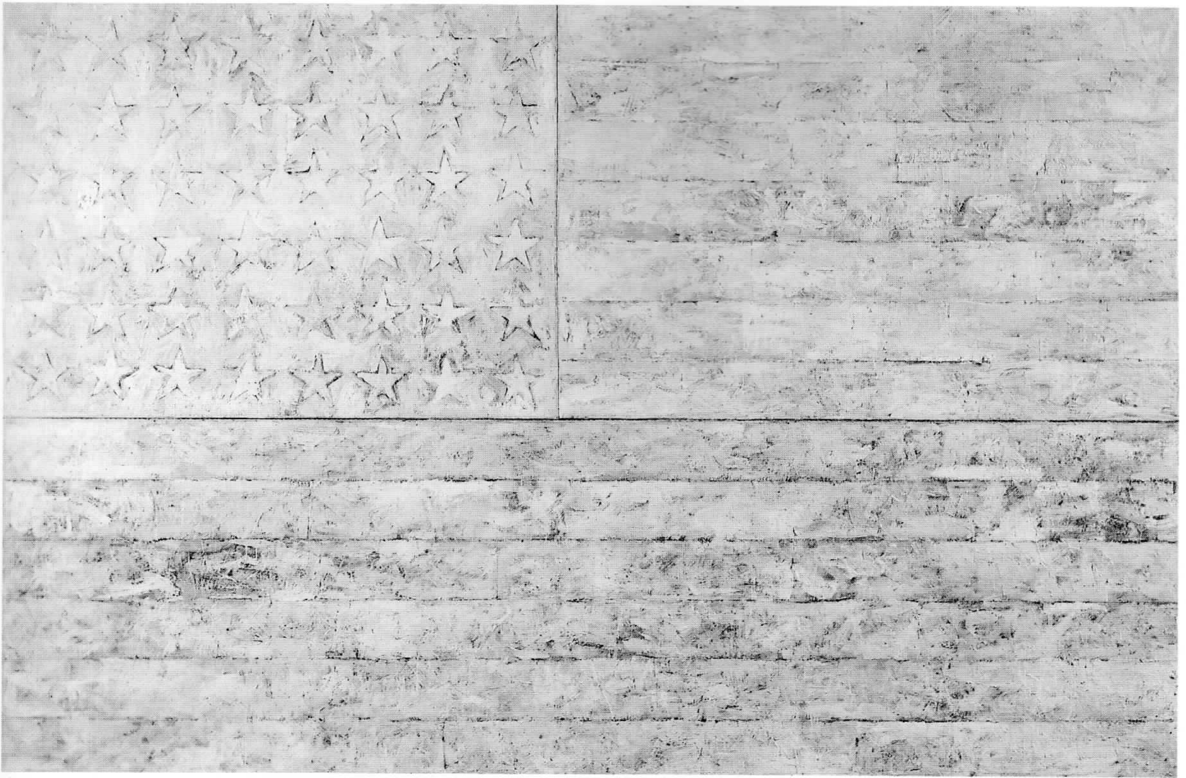


Plate 64 Jasper Johns, *White Flag*, 1955, encaustic and collage on canvas, 200 x 307 cm. Collection of the artist, courtesy of the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. © Jasper Johns, DACS, London and VAGA, New York, 1993.

Three major sets of problems can be set out:

1. The status and value of Modernist art understood as a kind of 'refusal' or 'resistance' or even 'negation' of monopoly capitalist society. This is usually allied to a claim about the 'autonomy' or 'relative autonomy' of avant-garde art (and sometimes of art criticism) from that society.
2. The status and value of 'mass culture', and its relation to maintaining social order in monopoly capitalist (and state socialist) societies.
3. The possibility or desirability of a politically engaged realist art opposed to the organization and values of present monopoly capitalist or state socialist societies. A related question here is what 'realism' would mean or look like *now*, and how this could be related to particular conditions of production (material, technical, social and ideological).

Beginning to understand how values are formed involves asking questions about *who* believes *what*, in *which* historical and social circumstances, and in relation to what other kinds of human activity and value. This to say that all critical and theoretical arguments and accounts have developed historically, in specifiable – though obviously complex and different – human societies. How we arrive at an evaluation of values, and of the terms in which they are posed (we may want to say, for example, that a 'Modernist' value involves a 'social' judgement), includes our knowledge and understanding of relevant historical and social circumstances, and of the kinds of pressure and limit that have led people to formulate, or adopt, particular values.

If magazine covers and posters were 'kitsch' for Greenberg in the late 1930s, then we might agree that television occupies that position in the 1990s. As an extension of the

technology of photography developed in the first half of the century, and as a medium developed to enable the simultaneous broadcasting of sound and pictures, television may be said to constitute a massively propagated reservoir of disposable (i.e. impermanent) 'image-narratives' akin to the production of nineteenth-century academic and sentimental painting. Television technology and institutional direction over the past fifty years have been largely within the control of private and capitalist interests in North America and Western Europe – with the important exception of the BBC in the UK, and of other government-run channels in continental Europe. The priorities of capitalist broadcasting, centred on higher ratings leading to higher profits, have dictated the types of programme most often transmitted and sponsored by corporate advertising. Soap operas, 'human interest' stories, sport, thrillers, etc. dominate television output and reproduce, within a different medium, many of the narrative forms that previously reached a 'mass' public through magazines and films. 'Western television' is also likely to predominate within the development of the medium in the central and eastern European nations committed to capitalist 'free enterprise' on the US model. A further 'encroachment' of kitsch, via television's international extension as a vehicle for capitalist advertising, suggests that we may be in a similar (or worse) position to the one that Greenberg diagnosed during the late 1930s.

From this analysis, it is possible to see how a certain dominant kind of art history and art criticism wants to see art – or great art – as a form of opposition to this, showing what might be called a 'Utopic face' in contrast to the dire products of contemporary electronic kitsch. Art could be represented as like a

> sacred island systematically and ostentatiously opposed to the profane, everyday world of production, a sanctuary for gratuitous, disinterested activity in a universe given over to money and self-interest, [which] offers, like theology in a past epoch, an imaginary anthropology obtained by a denial of all the negations really brought by the economy.
>
> (P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p.197)

The notion that art had a special 'presence' and effect, 'liberatory' or 'transcendental' in a variety of obscure ways depending on the particular argument, was examined by the critic and historian Walter Benjamin writing in the 1930s. He believed that, in an age of mechanical reproduction (soon to be extended into electronic forms of image-production and dissemination, via broadcasting from both earth and, later, satellite), the security of Art's status as 'special' or 'sacred' was *threatened*, rather than entrenched, by the mechanization of forms of production. The revolution of mechanical image-making, he thought, was analogous to the revolution that socialism seemed to promise:

> The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition ... Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind ... This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognized as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty ... With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of production, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art ... An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction ... lead[s] us to an all-important insight: for the first time in the world, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree, the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.
>
> (W. Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction')

It is clear from the history of television, however, that reproducibility in *itself* is no guarantee of anything: the conditions of control active on a particular medium or technology can determine the way in which it is developed and deployed. The capitalist ordering of television has shaped, limited, influenced and directed the use of the form and its likely development in the future. Its political role in Western societies has largely been to validate and entrench the monopoly capitalist control over the economy and social and political life. This has not been an *inevitable* or *necessary* process, but an outcome within a society such as the USA that was prepared to grant this enormous amount of power and resources to a set of interests beyond the control of the political state that putatively represents the interests of the people.

Many artists became interested in the opportunities afforded by the medium of television (and the attendant technology of video) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pop artists, as we have seen, began to show a special interest in the circulation of images within the culture of the US as a whole. In part, Warhol, Lichtenstein and others wanted to connect the traditional and supposed 'autonomous' fine-art traditions and interests with the popular culture of images burgeoning in the country through the saturation of television and film. From this perspective, the return to a concern with the medium of painting as a self-sufficient activity – containing its own justification – became impossible. By 1968 and the re-radicalization of artists over crises such as the Vietnam War, and with the rise of the Black Civil Rights movement and the 'New Left' (feminist, ecological and cultural political formations), an extremely critical and unambivalent coalition of artists' groups came into being concerned to analyse the nature and diversity of power in US society. Particular struggles developed around the visual forms and embodiments of power relations in the culture as a whole; examples here include the feminist examination of the pornographic representation of women, and of sexism generally, and the anti-imperialist critique of the dominant representations of the 'Third World'.[10]

For many artists working around 1968, the question of culture *and* democracy became pressing as a factor influencing the development and rationalization of artistic practice. Though a group or individual might have a particular interest in an issue to do with class, gender, race or anti-imperialism, a linking theme was the relationship between the 'democracy' of US society and the nature of the cultural forms within it. Fine or 'high' art practices and values, exemplified by Modernist notions of 'autonomy' and self-criticism, could not be mobilized within the re-politicized conjuncture of 1968. On the other hand, the electronic media (considered by Benjamin as a key to political revolution) were seen to be controlled by the forces of capitalism and the state and were therefore active in maintaining the system. The possibility, then, of a politically critical dialectic between the two facets of the culture, which might transform the understanding of both and their interrelationship, was a central issue that confronted the contemporary artists who saw themselves engaged *in* the culture – rather than placed, idealistically, outside it.

'High art' and 'mass culture', avant-garde and kitsch, Jackson Pollock and satellite television: these polarities may be seen as aspects of a single perspective, two sides of one judgement:

> The two faces of this 'Modernism' could literally not recognize each other, until a very late stage. On the one hand what was seen was the energetic minority art of a time of reduction and dislocation; on the other the routines of a technologized 'mass' culture. It was then believed that the technologized mass culture was the enemy of the minority art, when in fact each was the outcome of much deeper transforming forces, in the social order as a whole.
>
> (R. Williams, 'Culture and technology', p.143)

[10] In Chapter 2, F. Frascina considers in detail these oppositional forms and the circumstances in which they emerged; see also G. Pollock's 'Vision, voice and power', E. Said's *Orientalism*, N. Chomsky's 'Politics' and L. Lippard's 'Mapping'.

What emerged from this lack of recognition, according to Raymond Williams, was the 'unholy alliance' of a simple technological determinism (the belief that the advanced technologies of Western societies in the twentieth century necessarily led – and will continue to lead – to the extension of a massified 'kitsch' culture) and a 'cultural pessimism', common to large sections of the left- and right-wing intelligentsias. In this 'unholy alliance', the possibility (or the question of the possibility) of substantive democracy in political or cultural terms – and the very attempt to determine what a 'cultural democracy' might mean – is either shelved or disregarded altogether. It becomes, as with Greenberg, a 'repressed' context for critical evaluation, yet *simultaneously* an apparent irrelevance in the formulation of those critical judgements, which are held to be 'autonomous' or 'intuitive'.

For Michael Fried, a supporter of Greenberg writing in the 1960s, the ultimate determination of value becomes an unexplained intuition of 'rightness' or 'wrongness' based on the experience of the works themselves:

> … only one's actual experience of works of art ought to be regarded as bearing *directly* on the question of which conventions are still viable and which may be discarded as having outlived their capacity to make us accept them …
>
> (M. Fried, *Three American Painters*, p.44)

This begs the question: what kind of 'experience' is Fried talking about? Is it an experience that can somehow exclude all the knowledges, ideas and values that people carry around in their heads? Is he arguing that the proper kind of 'experience' in front of the work of art involves somehow first divesting oneself of such knowledges, ideas and values (and all other experiences for that matter) that might *interfere* with the operation of intuition? 'Experience', as an obviously central category, needs explanation.

The sites of values, experiences, intuitions and accounts, however, remain for Fried those of Art – painting, the artist and the canvas. This 'specialization' is in itself symptomatic of the basic judgement that needs questioning. Williams poses the issue bluntly:

> High technology can distribute low culture: no problem. But high culture can persist at a low level of technology: that is how most of it was produced. It is at plausible but hopeless conclusions of this kind that most current thinking about the relations between culture and technology arrives and stops.
>
> (Williams, 'Culture and technology', p.128)

On the one hand, we have 'high art': take Michelangelo's *Isaiah*, painted in the Sistine Chapel in 1508–12 (Plate 65). On the other, we have Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* cover, *Rosie the Riveter*, of 1943 (Plate 54). Do these represent 'minority civilization' and 'mass culture', with both being components of a single (Western) human culture although separated by over four hundred years of continuous social transformation? In the mid-twentieth century, Pollock and Rothko were posed as elements of continuity within that 'minority civilization': they were represented as emblems of Art and Value, and seen as resistant to the technologies, the social relations, the 'ordinary culture' and life of actual contemporary Western societies.

In the late 1930s artists, critics and others in the USA argued for the creation of a permanent government Bureau of Fine Arts. They believed that capitalism, in its organization of production and social relations, was inherently incapable of providing, or engendering, the conditions for the development of a democratic culture. If the state could successfully reform the financial and industrial institutions of US society (which was, and is, a big 'if'), then why shouldn't cultural institutions and production also be democratized? Then, as now, one immediate retort was: what does it mean to talk about a 'democratic culture'? Even the coupling of the two words is condemned as anachronistic (or worse, as 'Fascist' or 'Stalinist'). One legacy of Stalinism and Fascism from the 1930s has been the belief, held by those on both the Left and the Right, that 'real', 'authentic'

Plate 65 Michelangelo, *Isaiah* (detail from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel), 1508–12, fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican. Photograph: Alinari.

culture (Art with a capital 'A') is an activity or object, a value, an ambition, a purity – threatened historically by the social relations of capitalist society (a society that is also called 'democratic') and certainly likely to be eradicated altogether by those who would wield power in the most commonly offered and assumed versions of future socialist or communist societies.

I do not mean to declare worthless or élitist the paintings of Pollock, Rothko or any of the other Abstract Expressionists. Nor have I called for a return to 'Realism', via Gustave Courbet or anyone else. Simply to choose either of these alternatives would be to ratify and privilege the practices and values defined and defended as Art and as the fulcrum of critical cultural activity in modern capitalist societies. Nor am I insisting on 'the end of art criticism' or art history. Rather, I suggest a return to an open dialogue about culture – the traditional and new technologies of visual representation – and its relations to a debate about the meanings of democracy in this society. This kind of debate would find echoes in the searching inquiry that 'Avant-garde and kitsch' represented in 1939.

If we take these questions seriously, we will be willing to consider the range of actual cultural forms prevalent and influential in contemporary Western societies. Rather than beginning with what is actually a conclusion – that, say, prints, film, television, video are irretrievably compromised forms of 'mass culture' (or simply not part of the history of

'Modern Art') – this seriousness will require us to make an investigation. We will need to examine particular materials, means of production, conventions and codes of communication – as well as particular audiences and publics, modes of reception, and the institutional arrangements that have controlled, do control and could control the values, meanings and contents of visual cultural technologies and forms. By the mid-1960s many artists and artists' groups, associated with Pop, Performance and other forms of 'inter-arts' activity, were investigating these technologies and the values associated with them.

At the same time, however, painting and sculpture should not be seen as simply irrelevant or outmoded in some technicist-ideological sense. In an adequate cultural history of visual representations in the twentieth century, there could be an active consideration of all forms of visual representation, and recognition of the interconnectedness of these forms, as elements in a single culture or society. The question of values, and how values are formed within specific social and historical frameworks, could also be recognized as a necessarily political issue, as was clearly seen by artists and critics (and others) in the USA during the 1930s. Interest in and commitment to the principles of democracy and a democratic culture were central characteristics of debates and practices of artists and critics active in the period. Davis's concern about 'cultural monopoly' in the art world of New York in the 1930s could be extended to a contemporary concern over the cultural monopoly of newspaper and television ownership in the 1990s. The persistence of the issues around 'democracy' and 'culture', and the place of art in relation to both, requires that histories and theories of Modernist art and criticism should address these questions openly and as a recognized and central part of that inquiry.

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