
The Archive without Museums

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The Archive without Museums

HAL FOSTER

Conditions of Possibility

In 1928, in an essay on “the formal method in European art scholarship,” Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev associated the becoming-academic of art history at the end of the nineteenth century with the becoming-autonomous of modernist art during the same time.¹ In particular they related two aspects of this history to two attributes of that art: its foregrounding of “the constructive aspect” of the art work, and its attention to “alien art” in an imperialist age. Indirectly, the first oriented art history to formal questions (as with Heinrich Wölfflin), and the second to different *Kunstwollens* or artistic wills (as with Alois Riegl).

Might the discourse of visual culture² at the end of the twentieth century depend on two parallel preconditions—on the foregrounding of the visual virtuality of contemporary media, and on the attention to cultural multiplicity in a post-colonial age?³ A third parallel might be proposed straightforwardly. Art history relied on techniques of *reproduction* to abstract a wide range of *objects* into a system of *style*—as defined in diacritical terms by Wölfflin in *The Principles of Art History* (1915) (e.g., open versus closed composition, linear versus painterly technique), or in cross-cultural affinities by André Malraux in “The Museum without Walls” (begun 1935), the first version of *The Voices of Silence* (1951). Might visual culture rely on techniques of *information* to transform a wide range of *mediums* into a system of *image-text*—a database of digital terms, an archive without museums? Already apparent in the pedagogy of the lantern-slide, the discursive effects of photographic reproduction were not thought through until the 1930s. What are the

1. See M. M. Bakhtin and P. M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 41–53.

2. Here I define “visual culture” mostly in relation to art history. As both an academic rubric and a social description, the term totalizes prematurely. But its use cannot be wished away; now begins the contest over its meanings and applications.

3. Of course, the art-historical recognition of other *Kunstwollens* was partial, and, if acknowledged at all, they were usually sublated into a Hegelian narrative centered on Western art. No doubt visual culture will develop its own version of this fetishistic recognition-and-disavowal: not a Hegelian sublation, perhaps a multicultural tabulation.



André Malraux amid the illustrations for le musée imaginaire. Circa 1950.

Opposite: Erwin Panofsky in his Hamburg study. 1920s.

electronic preconditions of visual culture, and how long will it take to grasp the epistemological implications?



Institutional Arrangements

Under “West European formalism,” then, art history and modernist art were not opposed, at least not in the court of aesthetic autonomy. The foremost American exponent insisted on this counterintuitive point just when the formalist tradition had become terminal: “Modernism,” Clement Greenberg wrote in 1961, “has never meant anything like a break with the past.”⁴ By then aesthetic autonomy had narrowed to medium-specificity, a move that was very effective institutionally. For through a sharing of this principle, art, history, and museum alike could agree on a proper practice, discourse, and exhibition of modernist art. No doubt the museum was first among equals as it provided the institutional

4. Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965), p. 199.

illusion of autonomy for the other two parties. Indeed, *The Voices of Silence* opens with a celebration of this museal magic: “A Romanesque crucifix was not regarded by its contemporaries as a work of sculpture; nor Cimabue’s *Madonna* as a picture. Even Pheidias’s *Pallas Athene* was not, primarily, a statue.”⁵ Only the museum could elevate such different object-functions to the art-status of painting and sculpture alone.

Often medium-specificity in modernist art aspired to an ontology of *all* art: painting and sculpture were thought to possess an essential nature that practice, history, and museum might disclose, each in its own way. Whether this ontological assumption is a deep truth or a supreme fiction is now an academic question.⁶ For practically, though it once offered all three parties a coherent way of working, it no longer does so today. Due to artistic transgressions, theoretical critiques, political demands, and technological pressures, these old institutional arrangements are broken, and visual culture is thrown into the breach. Does it do more than cover the cracks? Is visual culture only a surrogate for a retooled modernism, a revised art history, a redesigned museum? Or is it a placeholder for new formations not yet defined? What will its institutional arrangements be? One thing is certain: not only has modernist art fallen into ruins, but art history departments and modern art museums are in flames, and the inferno is not only epistemological.

Antinomies of Art History

“Constructive” art alone did not incline art history to the principle of autonomy (most scholars were indifferent if not hostile to contemporary practice); there was also the philosophical imperative of neo-Kantian critique. And “alien” art alone did not tend art history to a narrative of different *Kunstwollens*; there was also the philosophical imperative of Hegelian history. As Michael Podro has argued, these

5. André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 13. “The Middle Ages were as unaware of what we mean by the word ‘art’ as were Greece and Egypt, who [sic] had no word for it. For this concept to come into being, works of art needed to be isolated from their functions. What common link existed between a ‘Venus’ which *was* Venus, a crucifix which *was* Christ crucified, and a bust? But three ‘statues’ can be linked together” (p. 53). For a contemporaneous critique of *le musée imaginaire*, see Georges Duthuit, *Le musée inimaginable* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1956). For a retrospective critique, see Rosalind Krauss, “The Ministry of Fate,” in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 1000–1006, and “Postmodernism’s Museum without Walls,” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 341–48.

6. It is not without philosophic and historical interest, however, for it makes the difference, say, between Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried on modernist painting, or Ernst Gombrich and Erwin Panofsky on Renaissance perspective. Often the ontological assumption was extended to mediums that defy ontologizing. What, for example, is film, now that it seems to disappear, in its past, into related attractions (as Tom Gunning calls them) and, in its present, into digital processes? Where we once ontologized mediums to death, we now historicize them out of existence. Meanwhile, new technologies recode them before our eyes—or beyond them.

two motives guided “the critical historians of art” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: to demonstrate the autonomy of art *and* to connect it to social history.⁷ Obviously the two are in tension, and the tension runs through the discipline like a fault line.

On this fault line art history seems contradictory, even oxymoronic: how can art be autonomous *and* imbricated in social history? Of course, from Wölfflin through Greenberg at least, a dominant response was to argue that, in the first instance, art constituted its own history. Yet as this resolved the opposition in favor of the autonomous term alone, it was no resolution at all—which is also true of responses that favored the social-historical term alone. More recently, other discourses are enjoined to ease the tension between autonomy and imbrication, in particular semiotics—e.g., art as signifying practice—and psychoanalysis—e.g., art as socially symptomatic. Yet, in the final analysis, are these terms not a little analogical, a little magical, too?

Mana Terms

In his introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss reflects on such terms. There he posits, famously, that language arose all at once, in an explosion of signification, a big bang that left a semiotic surplus for all time. “There is always a non-equivalence or ‘inadequation’ between signifier and signified, and ‘every mythic and aesthetic invention’ works to cover this ‘non-fit,’ to soak up this ‘overspill.’⁸ His prime example is the Maussian term *mana*, which represents the secret power that some Melanesians seemed to ascribe to some objects. Yet, Lévi-Strauss insists, the term has such primitive force only for Mauss: the “overspill” occurs in his text alone; the semantic soaking up, the magical thinking, is his. In short, critical discourse has “floating signifiers” too.

THIS COMPLETELY IGNORES WITTGENSTEIN

Where, then, do they appear, and what magic do they work? “Somewhat like algebraic symbols,” Lévi-Strauss tells us, they “represent an indeterminate value of signification” (55). In art history this indeterminate value often concerns the signification of context; hence its *mana* terms often point to social connection and historical causation. Yet as *mana* terms they point to these determinations mostly to bracket or to cover them. (Who does not have such a fetish word, a favorite term where, as in a black box, such mediations only *appear* to happen?) Perhaps this problem is basic to any discourse concerned with determinations, or that

7. Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). Often the difference between semiotic and social-historical methods is understood as another version of this split (which it is not).

8. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (1950), trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 60–63. Like the primal murder of the father in Freud, this origin is obviously heuristic, outside the very system that it founds.

constructs its object in terms of an inside and an outside, a text and a context.⁹ But it is especially marked in art history because of its granting of autonomy and claiming of imbrication. Many notions rise out of this apparent contradiction, and most feature *mana* terms.

Consider *Kunstwollen*. As is well known, Riegl advanced the notion in the interests of aesthetic autonomy against the claims of material determinism made by the architectural historian Gottfried Semper: artistic will, not technical skill, was the motto of the day. Yet for Riegl this will also expressed the character of its period and/or culture. In 1920 Panofsky objected, rightly, that *Kunstwollen* psychologized art; but this was its indirect purpose: to ease the antinomy between autonomy and imbrication through a cultural psychology.¹⁰ Moreover, Panofsky substituted a notion that did much the same thing. Although concerned with the conception of structures rather than the expression of wills, “symbolic form” also worked to reconcile autonomy and imbrication.¹¹ And these two *mana* terms are among the most sophisticated in art history; others, such as “modes of vision” in Wölfflin, are far more brutal. On the one hand, he defines these modes, through the master opposition of classical and baroque, as radically diacritical (again, open/closed, linear/painterly . . .). On the other hand, on the first page of *Principles of Art History*, he is even more radically referential: “every painter paints ‘with his blood’.”¹² Notwithstanding the ironic distance carved out by the quotation marks, Wölfflin collapses autonomy and imbrication here through a racialist invocation of a *Volkisch* mind-body. And this psychobiologism, at once reductive and inclusive, returns in art history whenever tribal terms like Gothic and geo-cultural oppositions of North and South are used in the old ways.¹³

Perhaps art historians today are more self-aware; certainly there are more twelve-step programs for ideology-abuse. Yet the antinomies have not disappeared, so neither have the *mana* terms. Important texts that open onto visual culture are also not free of such signifiers. In *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*

9. There are many variations on this opposition—psychological or social, structure or history, Freud or Marx, Lacan or “the historicists”—and many attempts to reconcile the two. As it predetermines all versions, the opposition is the problem, and often a theory is most productive when it breaks down this opposition (thus the interest in trauma today) or when its own oppositional structure breaks down.

10. Panofsky, “The Concept of Artistic Volition” (1920), *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1981).

11. In both cases, however, a figure of agency is smuggled in to animate either text or context and so to connect the two. Drawn from Ernst Cassirer, “symbolic form” is developed by Panofsky in early texts like “The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection on the History of Styles” (1921) and “Perspective as Symbolic Form” (1924–25).

12. Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950), p. 1.

13. This is to question not that significant differences are registered by these terms but how they are registered. It is also to suggest not that art history is racialist but that the contradiction between autonomy and imbrication is often covered by a racialist psychology. Was there an Aryan motive in the nineteenth-century reformulation of art history, as there was, according to Martin Bernal, in the nineteenth-century reformulation of classics? See his *Black Athena* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

(1972), an inaugural work in this discourse, Michael Baxandall uses tropes like “period eye” and “cognitive style” evocative of a cultural mind. However, he does so to *undo* the opposition of autonomy and imbrication: emphasis falls on the *and* of “painting and experience,” on the *between* of “visual skills” and “social facts.”¹⁴ Baxandall sees these relations as dialogical relays, yet sometimes he figures them in passive terms, as in the geological trope that opens the book (“a fifteenth-century painting is the deposit of a social relationship” [1]) or in the paleontological trope that soon follows (“paintings are among other things fossils of economic life” [2]). Such analogies are central to magical thinking; as Paul de Man revealed, they may be irreducible not only in critical discourse but in language as such.

Recent texts in visual culture also eschew the trope of the cultural mind for the figure of the historical viewer. Under theoretical influences that range from Lacan and Althusser, to Foucault and new historicism, to Raymond Williams and cultural studies, this viewer is seen not in idealist terms as a *Zeitgeist-in-person*, but in materialist, even nominalist terms as a social construction. As constructed, this subject is specific, indeed singular, and there are no confused generalities of *Kunstwollens* or symbolic forms. Yet, also as constructed, this subject is flooded by the social. (Gendering may be remarked, almost ritualistically now, but only as a social construction; rarely acknowledged is the intransigence of a sexuality, an unconscious, or any substance that might exceed the historically specific.) Here, rather than the art, the subject is the “deposit of a social relationship,” and often it is the principal object of analysis as well. Paradoxically, then, this historically specific subject is also generally consistent, broadly representative, and so we are offered portraits, often very brilliant, of the seventeenth-century Dutch viewer, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment imagist, the nineteenth-century European observer, and so on. If the painter in one art history once painted “with his blood,” the viewer in this visual culture observes “as constructed to do so,” and in its very inconsistency this subject provides the consistency of the discourse. Here, then, the shift from art history to visual culture is marked by a shift in principles of coherence—from a history of style, or an analysis of form, to a *genealogy of the subject*.¹⁵

14. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), unpaginated preface. Apart from its importance, I refer to the Baxandall because of its sensitivity to the significant difficulties of terms and lexicons.

15. In *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) Jonathan Crary cites Michel Foucault on his concept of genealogy: “I don’t believe the problem can be solved by historicizing the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call a genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to a field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history” (*Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon [New York: Pantheon, 1980], p. 117).

Antinomies of Visual Culture

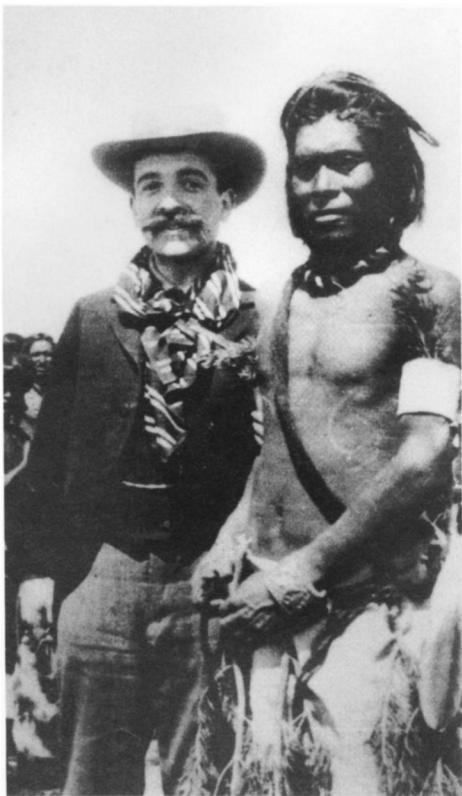
As a partial social description, visual culture seems almost commonsensical (suspect though common sense is). As a general academic rubric, it is less obvious, more oxymoronic than art history. Certainly its two terms repel each other with more force, for if art history is strained between the autonomy of its first term and the imbrication of its second, visual culture is riven by the virtuality of its first term and the materiality of its second. One way to draw out these nominal implications is to trace the shift from *art* to *visual* and *history* to *culture*—that is, to take these substitutions seriously.

Culture Envy

The shift from history to culture intimates a shift, inadvertent or otherwise, to anthropology as a guardian discourse. Of course art history was also involved with anthropology (the relation between the two is akin to a sibling rivalry, with moves to identify followed by moves to dissociate). Some critical historians worked to redefine artistic production in anthropological terms: Riegl implicitly with his lowly forms like textile ornament and marginal fields like the late Roman art industry, Aby Warburg explicitly with his notion of art as document (*Urkunde*) and study of Pueblo Indian rituals. Recently these figures have attracted much attention, which suggests a recovery of this culturalist dimension of early art history.¹⁶ Yet the immediate source of the ethnographic model in visual culture remains cultural studies. Along with new historicism, cultural studies has prompted the turn from hierarchies of high and low art, or major and minor forms, to tabulations of images deemed more or less equal in value (whether aesthetic or cognitive, documentary or symptomatic). The challenge to elitist hierarchies and traditional canons is important, but the transformation of art history into image history is also problematic.¹⁷ In its suspicion of art, it is not reflexive about its own omnibus category, the image. So, too, its dismissal of aesthetic autonomy as retrograde, and its embrace of popular forms as progressive, is too automatic. More important, this transformation may not complicate historical accounts so much as default on them. For in the ethnographic model one moves horizontally, from site to site,

16. See Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), and Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), as well as Kurt W. Forster, "Aby Warburg: His Study of Ritual and Art on Two Continents," in this issue. Also see Aby M. Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, translated with an interpretive essay by Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

17. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, the editors of *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1994), suggest "history of images" in the introduction. In "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?" (in this issue), W. J. T. Mitchell substitutes "the study of human visual expertise," but this phrase is no less problematic. There is a rough division in visual culture between projects concerned à la new historicism with the genealogy of the subject, and projects concerned à la cultural studies with popular media and subcultural expressions.



Aby Warburg with Hopi Indian.
1895–96.

across social space, more than vertically, in a discourse inscribed with a historicity, a responsibility of form, of its own.¹⁸ In this way the shift from history to culture may promote, in art as well as in criticism, a posthistorical reduction as often as a multihistorical complication.

As the precedents of cultural studies and new historicism suggest, the ethnographic turn is not specific to visual culture; it pervades nontraditional work in art and academy alike, and it is important to understand why. First, anthropology addresses *alterity*, which makes it, along with psychoanalysis, the lingua franca of much art and theory today. Second, anthropology studies *culture*, and postmodernist practice has long claimed this expanded field of reference as its own. Third, anthropology is *contextual*, an often automatic value for contemporary artists and critics, many of whom aspire to fieldwork in the everyday. Fourth, anthropology arbitrates the *interdisciplinary*, another often rote value. Finally, the *self-critique* of anthropology is attractive, for it promises a reflexivity of the ethnographer (often at the center) even as it preserves a romanticism of the other (often on the margins).

This also presupposes anthropology as the natural home of ethnography, ignoring Garfinkle's critique and reworking of ethnography in sociology.

18. I discuss this problem in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996). On "the responsibility of form," see Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985), pp. 50–51, as well as Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), especially the introduction.

Yet the ethnographic turn is clinched by another factor, which involves the double inheritance of anthropology. According to Marshall Sahlins, two epistemologies have long divided the discipline: one stresses symbolic logic, with the social seen in terms of exchange systems; the other privileges practical reason, with the social seen in terms of material culture.¹⁹ In this light anthropology already participates in the two contradictory models that inform much art and criticism today: in the old ideology of the text, the linguistic turn that refigured the social as symbolic order and/or cultural system and advanced “the dissolution of man,” “the death of the author,” and so on, and in the recent longing for the referent, the experiential turn to identity and community that often rejects the old subject critiques and text paradigms. With a move to this split discourse, then, artists and critics can resolve these contradictory models magically: they can take up the guises of cultural semiologist and contextual fieldworker, they can continue and condemn critical theory, they can relativize and recenter the subject, at the same time. In our state of theoretical ambivalences and political impasses, anthropology becomes the compromise discourse of choice.²⁰

THIS CLAIM IS NOW ALSO SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED. ANTHROPOLOGY IS NO longer seen as the discourse of choice, compromising or not. *Image Epiphany*

Just as anthropological assumptions and social imperatives govern the shift from history to culture, so psychoanalytic assumptions and technological imperatives govern the shift from art to visual. Here the image is to visual culture what the text was to poststructuralist practices: an analytic that reveals the object in new ways, but sometimes to the detriment of materiality and historicity. For especially in visual culture that develops out of film and media studies, the image is often treated as a projection—in the psychological register of the imaginary, the technological register of the simulacral, or both—that is, as a doubly immaterial phantasm.

As with the longing for the cultural, this hypostasizing of the visual is active in art history too, not only in its technology (again, the photographic abstraction into style: *le musée imaginaire*) but also in its teleology, for, in one Rieglian

19. Marshall Sahlins, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). At the time, at least, Sahlins favored the first epistemology.

20. Clearly this is a reductive account of anthropology, but these exchanges are reductive, and they often occur according to a used-car principle of discourse. First some anthropologists adapted poststructuralist methods from literary criticism to reformulate culture as *text*—just when literary criticism had worn out this model. Then some literary critics adapted ethnographic methods to reformulate texts as *cultures* writ small—just when anthropology was about to trade in this model for others that focus on the state, legal codes, and so on. This interdisciplinary exchange of damaged goods prompts an obvious question: if textual and ethnographic turns pivot on a single model, how truly interdisciplinary can the results be? More specifically, if cultural studies, new historicism, and visual culture often smuggle in an ethnographic model (when not a sociological one), might it be “the common theoretical ideology that silently inhabits the ‘consciousness’ of all these specialists . . . oscillating between a vague spiritualism and a technocratic positivism”? (Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Ideology of the Scientists and Other Essays* [London: Verso, 1990], p. 97).

account, the story of art is a complicated, cyclical sublimation of the tactile into the optical. Here again modernist art is not necessarily opposed to art history, for, in one formalist account, this art also works to purify the pictorial in terms of the optical—that is, to map the impressions of the retina onto the plane of the picture.²¹ Apart from its artistic interest, this purity has a social function: to save modernist art from its corrupt double, mass culture. Yet the rarefying of optical effects and the fetishizing of visual signifiers are not foreign to capitalist spectacle; they are fundamental to it. So, too, visual culture might advance more than resist further hypostasizing of the visual and disembodying of the viewer today. This “pictorial turn” trumps any theoretical one, and it is hardly an event to celebrate.²²

This pictorial turn seems to contradict the ethnographic turn noted above. Perhaps, as Kant and Hegel once wrestled for the philosophical soul of art history, so psychoanalysis and anthropology now vie for the theoretical heart of visual culture. Yet, like the Kant/Hegel opposition, the visualist/culturalist contradiction may be only apparent (again, on the symbolic side of anthropology, culture need not signal material practices). It may also be overwhelmed by other forces. Consider *Body Criticism* (1991), a prominent text in visual culture, in which Barbara Stafford argues passionately for the equal rights of the image.²³ As she insists, Platonic philosophy long degraded the image as bodily and feminine, old biases against the image persist (Puritanical suspicion of its pleasures, Enlightenment suspicion of its deceptions, and so on), and the humanities are still bound to literary protocols (philological, exegetical, rhetorical, hermeneutic, deconstructive). But, philosophically, to argue the equality of word and image, even to reverse this hierarchy, does not affect the old opposition of the two; its metaphysics remain in place (her very objection to the word as masculine confirms the old association of the image as feminine). And, politically, a critique of the verbal humanities need not lead to an affirmation of visual culture; in her case, however, it does. And this affirmation overwhelms any opposition of word and image or sign and body, subsumed as they are by the “virtues of visualization.”²⁴ In this celebration of virtuality, in this “aesthetics of almost,” painting, sculpture, “linear sentences”—any practice not “consonant with an era of insubstantial and endlessly variable transformations”—is tagged for the historical dustbin (475). However provocative, this “epiphanic discipline” betrays a profound anxiety about the future of art history, indeed of the humanities in general, which is

21. See Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), especially chapters 1 and 3.

22. For the hypothesis of a “pictorial turn” in theory, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 16. The inadvertent doubling of spectacular culture by postwar painting was first remarked by Leo Steinberg in *Other Criteria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 55–91.

23. Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

24. “Not deconstructive autopsy, but demonstrating the historical virtues of visualization for the emergent era of computerism is the task at hand” (catalogue description of Barbara Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996]).

manifested here in a call for a “new pedagogy” of “visual aptitude” (“literacy” was always a deeply ideological notion; “visual aptitude” may be even more so). Onward “imagists” of “the imaging art-science of tomorrow” (472) retool and retrain; such is “our civic role and duty” (6). In an academic version of the Stockholm syndrome, some visual culturalists have identified with our technocratic captors; one can imagine the endorsement (the endowment?) from Bill Gates.

Archival Relations

If there is a relation between visual culture and electronic information, how can it be thought outside of anxious affirmation or romantic revolution? One way is to invoke the archive as defined by Foucault, “the system that governs the appearances of statements,” and to ask what this new order might enable as well as disable.²⁵ Thus Foucault described an archival relation, neither affirmative nor revolutionary, between Manet and the museum and Flaubert and the library: “every painting now belongs within the squared and massive surface of painting and all literary works are confined to the indefinite murmur of words.”²⁶ As Flaubert explored this new space, Foucault suggests, he also defined it clearly enough that modernist successors like “Joyce, Roussel, Kafka, Pound, Borges” could challenge it: “The library is on fire” (92). The same is true of Manet, and with Picasso, Duchamp, Ernst, Twombly, Rauschenberg, the museum begins to burn as well.

A further archival relation is demarcated by the Bauhaus. In its project to transform the work of art, the Bauhaus contested the archival relation of painting and museum demarcated by Manet. Yet this contestation also facilitated “the practical extension of the system of exchange value to the whole domain of signs, forms and objects.”²⁷ In other words, the Bauhaus transgressed the old orders of art, but it also advanced the new principles of design, “the political economy of the sign.” In this way each new archive both liberates and constrains, and each new transformation is both a transgressing and a trumping (“recuperation” is not dialectical enough to describe this event).

If visual culture marks an archival transformation, then, it has precedents, above all the epochal event that informs both Manet in the imaginary space of the museum and the Bauhaus in the political economy of the sign: the transformation of art in “the age of mechanical reproduction,” as disputed by Benjamin in the eponymous essay (1936) and Malraux in *The Voices of Silence* (signed “1935–51”). Benjamin argues that photographic reproduction strips art of context, shatters

25. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; New York: Harper Books, 1976), p. 129.

26. Michel Foucault, “Fantasia on the Library” (1967), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 92–93. Also see Eugenio Donato, “The Museum’s Furnace: Notes Toward a Contextual Reading of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*,” in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), and Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

27. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), p. 186.

tradition, liquidates aura. Not only is cult value lost forever, but exhibition value is also threatened, and in lieu of these old and new rituals a political refunctioning of art becomes possible. Out of the same archival event Malraux files a very different report. If for Benjamin exhibition value troubles art value, for Malraux the museum guarantees art as such. Moreover, if for Benjamin reproduction shatters tradition and liquidates aura, for Malraux it provides the means to reassemble the broken bits into one metatradition of style, a new Museum without Walls whose subject is the Family of Man—and it is the very flow of a liquidated aura that allows all the fragments to course together in the River of History (“the persisting life of certain forms, emerging ever and again like spectres from the past” [24]).²⁸

Together Benjamin and Malraux describe a dialectics of seeing permitted by photographic reproduction (one must understand them *as* dialectical, not choose between them). Is there a new dialectics of seeing allowed by electronic information? If, according to Malraux, the museum guarantees the status of art and photographic reproduction permits the affinities of style, what might a digital reordering underwrite? Art as image-text, as info-pixel? An archive without museums? If so, will this database be more than a base of *data*, a repository of the given?

The World According to GIGO

Consider two bulletins on visual culture from opposite ends of its spectrum: the Getty Museum and *Artforum International*. The first announces an Art History Information Program (AHIP) designed to produce a “cultural information infrastructure.” Its initial step is to set “crucial standards” for access, imaging, documentation, and description (already, it reassures one to know, another Getty acronym, the AITF or Art Information Task Force, has “reached an agreement on categories of information used to describe works of art”). And its final step is to

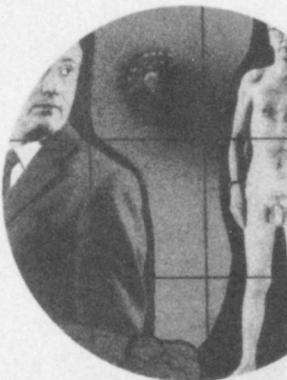
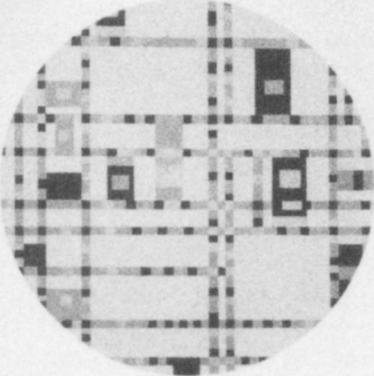
28. Or again: “All that remains of Aeschylus is his genius. It is the same with figures that in reproduction lose both their original significance as objects and their function (religious or other); we see them only as works of art and they bring home to us only their makers’ talent. We might almost call them not ‘works’ but ‘moments’ of art. Yet diverse as they are, all these objects . . . speak for the same endeavor; it is as though an unseen presence, the spirit of art, were urging all on the same quest, from miniature to picture, from fresco to stained-glass window, and then, at certain moments, it abruptly indicated a new line of advance, parallel or abruptly divergent. Thus it is that, thanks to the rather specious unity imposed by photographic reproduction on a multiplicity of objects, ranging from the statue to the bas-relief, from bas-reliefs to seal-impressions, and from these to the plaques of the nomads, a ‘Babylonian style’ seems to emerge as a real entity, not a mere classification—as something resembling, rather, the life-story of a great creator. Nothing conveys more vividly and compellingly the notion of a destiny shaping human ends than do the great styles, whose evolutions and transformations seem like long scars that Fate has left, in passing, on the face of the earth” (p. 46).

My juxtaposition of Benjamin and Malraux is prompted by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Warburg’s Model? The End of Collage in Postwar European Art” (manuscript). Buchloh adds a third text to this ensemble, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* of Aby Warburg, an extraordinary montage of numerous images manipulated by Warburg to suggest archetypal forms of expression. Below I suggest two more texts to this ensemble of reflections on the archival transformation of mechanical reproduction.

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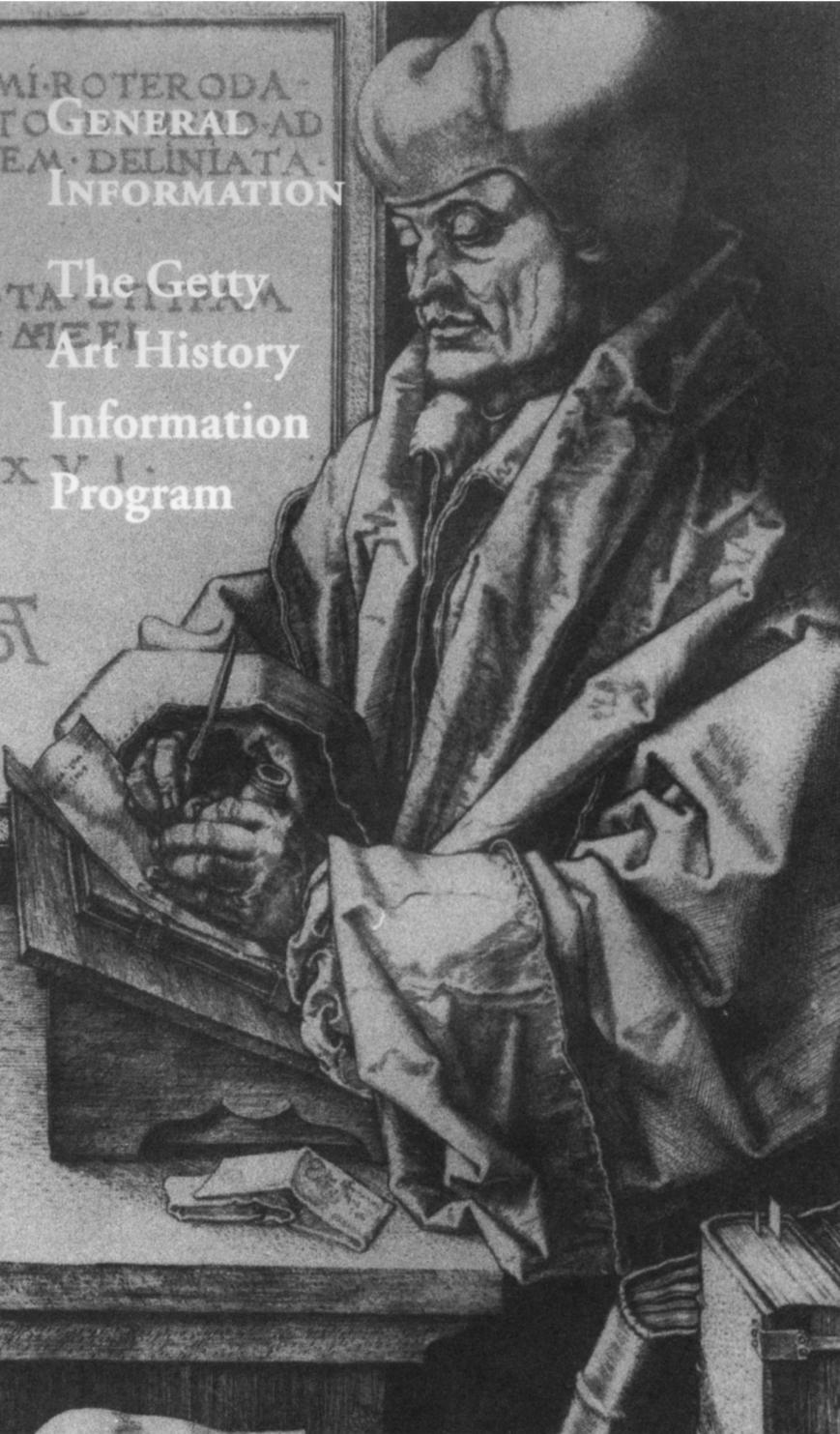
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INFORMATION

THN · KΡΕΙΤΤΩ · TA · **The Getty**
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Art History
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integrate this cultural information into “a virtual database,” which is promoted here in terms of repertoire, access, connection, speed—all the familiar use values of the information age. Yet these use values are also exchange values: motives of rationalization. And here contradictions abound, for AHIP imagines a new digital-visual culture, but in the service of the old art-museal world, and it embraces computer networking, but in the name of “cultural heritage.”²⁹

On the one hand, this virtual database dissolves the object; on the other hand, it is pledged to referentiality. Operationally, however, digital and art-historical protocols may not conflict, at least to the degree that both depend on iconographic data, or a logic of GIGO (computerese for the quality of data entered into a system: Garbage In, Garbage Out). In this respect the AHIP database might be named the Revenge of Iconography, or maybe just Business as Usual. (One can imagine the dissertation subjects: lemons in seventeenth-century Dutch still life, dogs in art, dicks in Twombly.)³⁰ On first impression the logic of GIGO also governs another project sponsored by the Getty, the Museum Educational Site Licensing Project (MESL, my favorite acronym), which networks chosen “image-providers” (formerly known as museums) with chosen “image-consumers” (formerly known as universities). Here the image epiphany appears total, and simulation overwhelms whatever referentiality might still be posited, for even as one is on-line with the source museum one gazes at a simulacral screen of images of images.³¹

Finally, the AHIP announcement is oblivious to the irony of its cover, which reproduces the Dürer portrait of Erasmus, the quintessential humanist in his study, quill and ink in hand. On the one hand, this is appropriate, for the database is dedicated to humanist scholarship in which the word remains predominant.³²

29. There is no bad faith here, unlike the CORBIS project of Bill Gates, who in *The Road Ahead* (New York: Viking, 1995) describes this vast digital image-repertoire in the rhetoric of reverence for the object, the original, the museum. But the true reverence is for the art bank that guarantees the value that Microsoft intends to extract from these images.

30. In “Warburg’s Model?” Buchloh discusses the atlas projects of Marcel Broodthaers and Gerhard Richter. The first, a compendium of images of eagles of all sorts, reads as an entropic parody of art-historical iconography; the second, a vast array of often banal source images, reads as an entropic meltdown of art-historical archives.

31. Like computers in the classroom, the Web in the museum has a double status: on the one hand, the museum remains the source site; on the other hand, this old site becomes a pretext for its information site, its home page. Just as museum space is thus dissolved, so is its public dispersed. Yet this may also be a way to adapt creatively to a time of financial recession and social withdrawal. As Michael Govan has suggested to me, some institutions have the capital to ride above this political-economic downturn—to franchise and merchandise. Other institutions, not so bound to particular sites, have the flexibility to hold on below—to use the Web, say, to program and to publicize. However, still others, perhaps the majority of modern and contemporary museums, may be caught in between, with not enough capital to go above and too much overhead to go below. For a good short history of the travails of museums, see Georges Teyssot, “La liberté d’errer: Notes on the Problematic of a Museum of (Modern) Art,” *Any* 13 (1996).

32. In the Greek motto of the image, Dürer defers to Erasmus: “the better image will his writings show.” In his *Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), Panofsky stresses this motto, which suits his textual iconography as well.

But it is also telling in another way, for just as the Museum without Walls posits a Family of Man, so the archive without museums presupposes a universal viewer-consumer, who may indeed be the ultimate descendant of the humanist subject traditionally associated with the Renaissance, aligned with its perspective in particular. In a 1938 lecture (that might be constellated with the Benjamin and Malraux texts of the same time), Heidegger considered this subject “of the world picture”:

The interweaving of these two events, which for the modern age is decisive—that the world is transformed into picture and man into *subiectum*—throws light at the same time on the grounding event of modern history, an event that at first glance seems almost absurd. Namely, the more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at man’s disposal as conquered, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively, i.e., all the more importunately, does the *subiectum* rise up, and all the more impetuously, too, do observation of and teaching about the world change into a doctrine of man, into anthropology. It is no wonder that humanism first arises where the world becomes picture.³³

Again, the subject of the archive without museums may descend from Erasmusian humanism, but its will to mastery is now pushed to the point of the inhuman (or all-too-human). To call it antihumanist implies an intention that does not often exist; nevertheless, it may be inhuman in another sense too: the humanism of the world-become-picture may reverse into an *inhumanism* of the world-become-information. For in the virtuality of the archive, Mario Perniola argues, “what is real is not what appears at any moment, but what is conserved in memory,” and this memory is “external to the spirit, to the actuality of its acquisition of consciousness”:

If effectual reality is no longer conceived as actual (as in the metaphysical tradition that survived until the advent of mass-media society), but as virtual (as in the society of information technology), the entire humanist world vision that conferred upon the subject its ontological meaning collapses. . . . What is essential does not issue from the inwardness of the soul, but from the outwardness of writing, of the book, of the computer.³⁴

My second bulletin on visual culture comes from *Artforum*, which is less a forum for art than a review of visual culture. In this respect it converges with other

33. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 133. This humanist “mans the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole” (132).

34. Mario Perniola, *Enigmas*, trans. Christopher Woodall (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 65–66. Yet this very inside/outside structure remains metaphysical.

magazines, for as *Artforum* moves into the arenas of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, fashion and celebrity, they move into its domain of visual culture. (On the horizon a fat glossy beast, loaded with scents and CD-ROMS, slouches toward SoHo to be born: *Vanity Forum of Visual Vogues*, or simply *Interview*.) The December 1995 issue of *Artforum* was a year-end roundup, a familiar format of pop magazines, and its table of contents read “Exhibitions, Film, Media, Music, Architecture” (with art subsumed under exhibitions), a mélange of practices made personal by the editor with hip panache: “Brancusi and Blur; Newt and Nauman; O. J. and CK1; Hush Puppies and Hodgkins; Waterworld and the Whitney . . .” What, he wanted to know, was “the Spirit of the Age”? In search of an answer critics of all sorts volunteered (there was no apparent duress and not much irony) to become Siskel-and-Ebert consumer-guides to the events of the year, all so many Caesars of the empire of nothing: thumbs up, thumbs down.

Rather than the Spirit of the Age, the riddle posed by the issue was its own principle of inclusion, the plane of consistency of all the disparate things under review (that is, if we exclude the attention deficit disorder of contemporary magazine-readers). Like the purloined letter, the best clue turned out to be in full view: on the cover were fourteen images set in colored disks in a way that recalled Christmas ornaments, Benday dots, and a television grid all at once. At first glance the model of this visual culture seemed an amalgam of all three, a consumerist pop TV magazine show, for what else but television could turn such divergent events into equivalent images (the *Friends* cast, O. J. Simpson, a Florine Stettheimer painting, Courtney Love, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, a Matthew Barney video frame, a Prada model, a Larry Clark film still, *Cité de la Musique* by Christian de Portzamparc, a Gilbert & George montage, Hugh Grant on *The Tonight Show*, an *Absolutely Fabulous* TV frame, a bus advertisement for Calvin Klein jeans, a Georg Baselitz painting)? But television appeared in this tabulation too, indeed more than any other image (again, the transformation of medium into image is fundamental to the archive without museums). So many image-texts, so many info-pixels: here too, far from the Getty (but what is distance in this world?), the implicit order of things is a virtual database.³⁵ And in this order the avant-gardist transgression of categories becomes, at the level of “consumption,” a hip manipulation of signs and, on the level of “production,” a corporate merger not only of mediums but of entertainment industries: so many clicks on the Web, so many moves on the Market.

The moral of these two examples is simple: the primacy of the visual in visual culture may be only apparent. Already its order may be governed by a digital logic that melts down other logics of word and image as the computer melted down other machines.

35. In this instance the bar code printed on the *Artforum* cover demystified a little the info-myths of repertoire, access, connection, and speed.

A New Alexandria

Thirty years ago, in *Les Mots et les choses*, Foucault was prompted by a “certain Chinese encyclopedia” in Borges to consider the epistemic order of things in different periods.³⁶ Out of this monstrous encyclopedia of animals that disrupted “the age-old distinction between the Same and the Other,” Foucault made an allegory about a catastrophe in the very allegorical structure of knowledge—of words related to things in a spatial system. Here the umbrella and sewing-machine, familiar from the Surrealist definition of collage, no longer possessed the operating table necessary to support a chance encounter: “What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible” (xvi). Now, for all appearances, this Borgesian disorder *is* our order, this post-Surrealist heterotopia *is* our *topos* (“Brancusi and Blur, Newt and Nauman . . .”), and again it is an event that both liberates and constrains. After photographic reproduction the museum was not so bound by walls, but it was bordered by style. What is the edge of the archive without museums? Perhaps its limit takes the form of an illusion—of a superficial mobility of signs that covers a profound stasis of system. Perhaps the library has returned, but as a container in which other orders are melted down, then set in deep freeze. An entropic archive, a new Alexandria.³⁷

Speaking for Being, a Heidegger might regard this Alexandrian archive as the epitome of “the standing-reserve” fundamental to all technology, of which “man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer.”³⁸ Speaking for the Old World, a George Steiner might see it as the manifest destiny of America, the land not of open territories but of museum-malls that purchase and preserve the remnants of European cultures.³⁹ To contest this Alexandrianism, however, one need not agree with these archconservatives; one cannot agree with them. For this Alexandrianism is hardly complete, and it does permit other uses and abuses. Moreover, “the avant-garde moves,” as Greenberg argued in “The Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (another text to add to the constellation of the late 1930s), “while Alexandrianism stands still. And this, precisely, is what justifies the avant-garde’s methods and makes them necessary.”⁴⁰ This remains the case today.

36. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; New York: Random House, 1970), p. xv.

37. Although not quite as Orientalist as “a certain Chinese encyclopedia,” the trope of Alexandrianism does project its deathliness elsewhere, when this deathliness is an uncanny thing, strangely at home in the West, as is demonstrated by Denis Hollier in “Literature Considered as a Dead Language” (in *The Uses of Literary History*, ed. Marshall Brown [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995], pp. 233–41). There Hollier shows “that the regime of the uncanny within which postmodernism operates is the very definition of classicism.” Even neonational literatures that advance a romantic model of oral traditions cannot escape the classical status of dead languages: “Let us call it the irreality effect: the numbing citationality that gives rise to a kind of generalized Pompeiiization.”

38. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 27.

39. George Steiner, “The Archives of Eden,” *Salmagundi* 50–51 (Fall 1980–Winter 1981).

40. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 8.

Images "R" Us

Secretly or otherwise, many discourses either model or mirror a subject. Concerned with judgment, refinement, and taste, aesthetics tends to a self-modeling, while art history tends to a self-mirroring.⁴¹ Certainly, to proclaim the autonomy of the art object, as aesthetics and art history often do, is to project or to presuppose an autonomy of the art subject, and on this point—that art might reconcile opposed faculties and so demonstrate a freedom of mind—Kantian and Hegelian traditions agree.⁴² Of course this self-making can become forced, rigid, moralistic. “The only means of access to art work remains exaltation, i.e., a feeling of moral obligation,” Benjamin wrote of a disastrous experience of Wölfflin in lecture in 1915. “He does not see the art work, he feels obliged to see it, demands that one see it, considers his theory a moral act; he becomes pedantic, ludicrously catatonic, and thereby destroys any natural talents that his audience may have.”⁴³ But this moral act can also enliven rather than embalm the subject, or so Michael Fried claimed fifty years later: “While modernist painting has increasingly divorced itself from the concerns of the society in which it precariously flourishes, the actual dialectic by which it is made has taken on more and more of the denseness, structure and complexity of moral experience—that is, of life itself, but life as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness.”⁴⁴

My caricatures of the Getty scholar as digital iconographer, the *Artforum* consumer of exhibitionism-value, and the technocratic teacher of VisApt aside, what ideal subject does visual culture model and/or mirror? Far from autonomy, this discourse traces a chiasmus of subject and image. In the first equation of the chiasmus, the subject is defined not only as an image-maker but *as an image* (if this is our god today, then *homo imager* is indeed made in its likeness). That the foundational act of our identity is an imaginary mimesis, an identification with an image, is also a basic tenet of psychoanalysis (e.g., Freud on the bodily ego, Lacan on the mirror stage), which is one reason why psychoanalysis is so central to visual culture—but also one reason why it might reinforce rather than reveal the inflation of the imaginary in visual culture (here I mean the

41. Again, like the characters in *The Wizard of Oz*, privileged notions in art history *are* subjects or parts of subjects: *Kunstwollen* has a will, symbolic form has a mind, and many other tinmen (from empathy theory to poetic art criticism) at least have a heart.

42. See Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, passim.

43. Walter Benjamin, letters to Fritz Radt (dated “Munich, November 21, 1915” and “Munich, December 4, 1915,” the year in which *The Principles of Art History* was published), cited in Thomas Y. Levin, “Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History,” *October* 47 (Winter 1988), p. 79.

44. Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1965), p. 9. As defined here, this alert autonomy seems more compensatory than dialectical; certainly it is privileged. It also might be undercut by the very aesthetic conviction that, according to Fried, modernist art must also inspire in the subject. That is, aesthetic conviction suggests a dependence on the art object, even a devotion to it, that might render the object less an ideal mirror of the subject than a prosthetic support that this subject needs, desires, fetishizes.

social phenomenon as well).⁴⁵ The second equation of the chiasmus follows from the first: if the subject is defined as an image, the image is defined as a subject, in *its* image. Like the first simile, this is a provocative thought-experiment, but it confuses a psychic investment in an image with the investment of an image with a psyche, the subject-effect of an image with the remaking of an image as a subject.⁴⁶

This is problematic because the chiasmus of subject and image is isomorphic with the structure of commodity fetishism as outlined by Marx in *Capital*. In the capitalist divorce of producer from product the relation between people takes on “the fantastic form of a relation between things,” and inanimate things take on the even more fantastic form of human agents—a confusion that recalls “the misty realm of religion” where “the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own.”⁴⁷ This confusion, which Marx figures as a visual projection, indeed as an imaginary misrecognition, is deepened in the commodity-image fetishism of visual culture. Not only does this new fetishism obscure productive relations and material conditions like the old, but it also renders this confusion more internal to the subject, almost constitutive of it. Rather than the misty realm of religion, the appropriate analogy may now be the digital animation of Hollywood. *Doctor Doolittle* crossed with *Toy Story*: we talk to the images, and the images are us.

This fetishistic anthropomorphism drives many discourses today: no longer just friendly, computers are interactive; not just communication, the Internet offers interconnectivity; and so on. Today the pathetic fallacy is a technological truth, and per the structure of fetishism the reverse must be considered as well: a technological fallacy whereby the machine projects its modalities into the subject. In this regard consider the language of the electronic revolution. From Microsoft to *Mondo 2000*, this rhetoric is less cyberpunk than techno-psychedelic; hence the hallucinogenic tropes of virtual reality (the rebirth of Timothy Leary as techno-guru is telling here), or the aleatory tropes of the Web (the new site of post-Surrealist *dérives*). Access is two-way; the epiphanic entrance to the Information Highway is promised as a euphoric exploration of the mind. This is not just *Clockwork Orange* paranoia: in the age of electronic information a principal frontier of capitalism is the unconscious.

For many of us autonomy is a bad word, a ruse in aesthetic discourse, a deception in ego psychology, and so on. We forget that autonomy is a diacritical term like any other, defined in relation to its opposite, that is, subjection. Historically subjection is often figured in the primitivist terms of fetishism. Indeed, the African fetishist (this phantasm is almost always located in Africa)

45. See Krauss, “Welcome to the Cultural Revolution.”

46. See Mitchell, “What Do Pictures *Really* Want?” Mitchell is well aware that pictures may resist this personification or psychification—that they may want nothing. But this only confirms the projection.

47. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 165.

was an important foil for the enlightened European: structurally, the irrational subjection of the former supported, even preceded, the rational autonomy of the latter.⁴⁸ Explicitly, in *Du culte des dieux fétiches* (1760) of Charles de Brosses, fetishism is “an infantile cult” that traps its worshippers in a “perpetual childhood.” Implicitly, in “What Is Enlightenment” (1784) of Kant, fetishism is the secret epitome of “the self-incurred tutelage” to be vanquished by the Enlightenment.⁴⁹ Marx is part of this Enlightenment project: his critique of commodity fetishism is also made in the name of autonomy, as is the Freudian critique of sexual fetishism (though Freud knew it could not be vanquished). As given to us by the Enlightenment, aesthetic autonomy is articulated against fetishistic enslavement as well: the orderly austerity of the Kantian art work opposed to the sensuous seduction of the fetish, the disembodied disinterest of the Kantian viewer to the embodied desire of the fetish worshipper, the sublimation of Kantian object and subject alike to the perversion of fetish and fetishist alike. Often modernist artists and critics seized the fetish to challenge this aesthetics of autonomy. Marx once described fetishism as “the religion of sensuous desire”; this is a decent description of Surrealism as well. Surrealism sought to inject desire into the aesthetic, to bind subject to object fetishistically, and to this end it modeled the art work not as an ideal ego integral in form, but as a part-object of drives. Not cognitive disinterest but libidinal investment: “I defy any amateur of painting to love a picture as much as a fetishist loves a shoe.”⁵⁰

There are two problems with the anti-aesthetics of the fetish today. First, this dissident position in modernism has become a dominant position in post-modernism: once artists showed work; now they exhibit fetishes. There is no tradition of autonomy to subvert; our tradition is Surrealist. Second, the exploration of the unconscious is the project no longer of wannabee Bretons alone but of wannabee Gateses as well. Of course, Chairman Bill does not have a monopoly yet; alternative explorations do exist.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the battlefield of Alexandria and avant-garde has changed today, and strategic aesthetics must be devised accordingly.

Again, autonomy is a bad word. But we tend to forget that its use is politically situated. Enlightenment thinkers like Kant proclaimed autonomy in order to wrest institutions away from the *ancien régime*, art historians like Riegl to resist determin-

48. See the extraordinary genealogy of fetishism in William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish” *Res* 9, 13, 16 (1986–88), as well as my “The Art of Fetishism,” in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For a related logic in American literature regarding the possessive white subject—that its presence required the supportive nonpresence of the black slave—see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1993).

49. Charles de Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches* (Geneva, 1760); Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?,” in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*, ed. David Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 29–34.

50. Georges Bataille, “L’Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions,” *Documents* 8 (1930).

51. One can imagine what a David Cronenberg, not to mention a Philip K. Dick, might do with the name Microsoft alone.

istic accounts of art, modernists from Manet to Judd to challenge the priority of iconographic texts, the necessity of illustrational meanings, the imperialism of mass media, the overburdening of art with voluntaristic politics, and so on. Like essentialism, autonomy is a bad word, but it may not always be a bad strategy: call it *strategic autonomy*.