

REVIEW: CLEMENT GREENBERG'S  
*ART AND CULTURE*

Hence it developed that the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not [merely] to “experiment,” but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence.

Clement Greenberg, 1939<sup>1</sup>

It may seem inopportune to review here a book published in 1961 by an American critic, writing largely for the New York based art-world of his day. It is not, for Greenberg is plainly a modernist, and deeply interested in art in Europe during the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> To examine the overarching thesis of this anthology of essays is to come to understand that Greenberg's sees painting, sculpture, poetry or literature to be most fundamentally a social *praxis*, playing a major role in the formation of future society. Art's activity produces artefacts: these act as ‘symbols’ of freedom (in a Kantian sense—Greenberg's intellectual ancestry lies back through Marx, Hegel and Kant) for the avant-garde, and thus help facilitate social change. But the existence of these artefacts is consequent to the *praxis*, not antecedent. In Greenberg's eyes, art in the age of modernism performs a practical critique, necessarily directed towards its *own* formal historical genesis. Contemporary thinkers (and I am thinking here of Trotsky) share much in common with Greenberg, but there are essential and interesting differences. Both think that art is vital to an escape

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<sup>1</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, New York, 1961, 5.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, the prime and foundational essay of the anthology, ‘The Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ was published in 1939 and *this* essay will refer mainly to it. Further, I shall be contrasting Greenberg's thoughts to those of Trotsky and Breton, whose joint manifesto was published in 1938, in the same New York based journal as Greenberg's, as we shall see.

from the political crisis of the 1930s, but whereas Trotsky wants to lay the foundations for a new society via radical, anarchic artistic freedom, Greenberg insists on a more conservative approach: art must evolve in development *upon*, and in critical awareness of its own past. *Art and Culture* reads as a sort of guide (by theory and examples) of how to assess or create art on such terms. Avant-garde culture had originated in Europe (particularly in France) eighty years earlier: unsurprisingly, the book gravitates around Paris-based artists.<sup>3</sup> True, the 1939-45 war resulted in the avant-garde's potency being largely handed to New York, but only in the context of it being passed there *from* Europe. In short, Greenberg is looking back at the European avant-garde to attempt to show how the post-war avant-garde ought move forward. Hence, a review of this book is contingent on an assessment of Greenberg's handling of the pre-war avant-garde and of its artists.

In the first few pages of the book, Greenberg makes a striking and significant claim. He thinks the avant-garde artists' methodology is analogous to that of science: "it was no accident ... that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically—and geographically too—with the first bold development of *scientific* revolutionary thought in Europe."<sup>4</sup> This connection to science is not casual and needs some explanation; for doing so leads to an understanding of what Greenberg means by the 'avant-garde' and of the tight criteria he sets for who makes the (influential) list of 'significant' artists in the book, and who does not. With Modernity (starting, let's say with Copernicus' discovery that the earth revolves around the sun, not vice versa), people's conception of their relationship to the cosmos begins to change from where it

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<sup>3</sup> Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 116. Chagal, for instance, is characterised as *arriving* from Russia, and once he has engaged with Picasso and Matisse, he is "synchronised with the Paris school." Ibid. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 4 (my emphasis).

had sat for a substantial time. Until then, it was held that the earth and Man held an ideally stable, unchanging place at the centre of all things. But with Copernicus' discovery much of our presumed epistemological certainty begins to destabilise.<sup>5</sup> We no longer enjoy any privileged teleological state or place; we become no-one in particular, no-where in particular. Now, change is a rationally expected norm: ideas evolve, knowledge increases through time. Modern science evolves, a methodology that constantly develops knowledge, open-endedly. Science works by critiquing its own practice: existing theories work well enough for a while, but because of advances in related areas, they eventually become insufficient or inaccurate. New, more practically useful theories are built over them.<sup>6</sup> It is this (r)evolutionary aspect of science that Greenberg sees as apt for describing how the avant-garde and its art should be positioned in society. They are like a 'cultural science', proposing models for society, but through a process of self-criticism, periodically build new models on top of old ones.<sup>7</sup> Referring to Greenberg's words placed at the beginning of this review, this progress is not chaotically experimental but systematic in a parallel to science. Though Greenberg does not say all this in as many words, we can excise the stance from *Art and Culture*; and moreso, we can see how and why he holds Cézanne and Analytic Cubism as crucial to the pre-war avant-garde.

During the (pre-Modernity) Renaissance, the invention of fixed, central-

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<sup>5</sup> Things are brought to a head with Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant establishes limits to what he claims are the boundary of our ability to reason theoretically. For instance, we can have no theoretical knowledge about God. Hence, we cannot appeal to God's (supposed) immediate authority to see how to establish society. See footnote 12 for Greenberg's own comments on Kant's role in art.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this, see Tom Huhn, 'A Modern Critique of Modernism: Lukács, Greenberg, and Ideology', *Constellations*, 177-8.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that Marx saw the development of his ideas as sort of cultural *science*, as had Hegel and Schelling before him. Paul Hart, 'Review: The Essential Legacy of Clement Greenberg from the Era of Stalin and Hitler', *Oxford Art Journal*, 78.

point perspective was significant, for it exemplified the universe as having a central point, the nexus of all related things, creating a seamless transition between the viewer's world and a painting's symbolic one.<sup>8</sup> With Modernity, this perspective system began increasingly to be doubted. The reflections in Manet's *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1882) do not add up, generating an anxiety commensurate changes in society.<sup>9</sup> Impressionism, Pointillism, Cézanne and Analytic Cubism carry on this progression, the dissolution of the single viewpoint. Viewing and representing shifts from teleological unity to a multiplicity of views, *from* nowhere in particular, *of* nowhere in particular. This 'monadic' shift in art parallels the sort of avant-garde social(ist) thinking that Marxist Greenberg endorses. Thus, such art can act as a symbol for social change. But like science, art *must* change. If it does not, it becomes 'academic', dwindling to virtuosic repetition of outmoded ideas.<sup>10</sup> But Greenberg thinks that this change must be strictly conditioned, and it is here that his ideas begin to become contentious, because of the conditions he applies. Not all avant-garde views will agree with them.

Ever since Kant's Critiques of reason, a major concern of Modernism has been self-criticism of one's own procedures. The notion is powerful in science, for science is in the business of making inductive inferences, and such self-

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<sup>8</sup> Typically the head of the paintings significant character lies over the vanishing point, nowhere better exemplified than in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1510-11), in the Vatican Palace. Plato and Aristotle, the two prime pre-Modernist philosophers, are placed at this exact point. Plato points up to the heaven of Ideas, and Aristotle down to the Ptolemaic earth, but neither is going anywhere new, anytime soon.

<sup>9</sup> Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 50. The big change happening was the urbanisation, industrialisation and commodification of Europe and labour. Of Manet's painting, we could use Lacanian terms to say that the anamorphic gaze of the disjointedness of the reflections creates a subjective awareness that we are not in control, and a subsequent desire for the *objet petit a*. This desire will run rampant during the twentieth century, becoming a cause of totalitarianisms and war. We could think of Greenberg's parallelism between science and avant-garde methods as seeking to restore a balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian (Nietzsche), lacking in, for instance, Nazism's excessive aesthetising of politics (Benjamin).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 4.

critique helps test the validity of those inferences.<sup>11</sup> Greenberg makes the same demand on the avant-garde. He calls it “the imitation of imitating.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, the *praxis* of a given art form must come to critique *its own means*. For Greenberg, another real significance of Cézanne is not that he finds new ways to render motifs, but that he begins, seriously, to use painting to critique the ontology of a painting on a flat surface as painting on a flat surface. Hence, Greenberg also fully endorses Cubism’s move towards abstraction; external referents are at best a distraction. Greenberg is tough: even Kandinsky’s abstraction dissatisfies him, for in his paintings the primary motive is to find a visual language to express things outside painting.<sup>13</sup> “Kandinsky’s lack of Cubist grounding in the nature of pictorial ‘abstract’ space began to reveal itself most unmistakably as a liability.”<sup>14</sup> Even Picasso, as painter of *Guernica* is censured: *that* painting relies too much on externally referring imagery.<sup>15</sup> This sounds contradictory, for as I have been saying, Greenberg thinks that art

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, Greenberg lauds Kant as the first modernist. Huhn, ‘A Modernist Critique of Modernism’, 186.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Elsewhere, Greenberg writes: “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left in all the more secure possession of what was left to it.” Greenberg uses Kant’s method as a normative methodology for the historical development of the arts: “What had to be exhibited and made specific was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself.” Clement Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting’, *The New Art*, New York, 1966, 101-2.

<sup>13</sup> See Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular 1912 / Wassily Kandinsky*, 1955, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 59-60.

In his sympathetic obituary of Greenberg, Roger Kimball complains that assessments of Greenberg were typically of the order: “Greenberg was a bit of a hypocrite, spouting Marxist rhetoric while disdaining the taste of the masses ... [He] compromised his critical independence by accepting works of art as presents from artists he admired and wrote about ... [and was] the narrowest of judges, someone who shamelessly touted his few favorite artists.” Roger Kimball, ‘Clement Greenberg: An Appreciation’, *Commentary*, 50. This reviewer will attempt a more balanced, charitable reading of Greenberg (even if a negative one); for polemic is not the best way to derive worth from a seriously intended book.

ought produce symbolic artefacts for the avant-garde's contemplation. What is happening is that he is rejecting certain *types* of symbolism, like Kandinsky's 'spiritualism'. This reductiveness is troubling, considering that almost the entire history of art involves mimesis. Greenberg is implicitly appealing to a Hegelian notion: that culture advances through a series of crises: apparently mimesis is no longer necessary and hence necessarily not desirable. (We will contrast this to views of Trotsky and Breton.) Such narrow demands make Greenberg vulnerable to charges of dogmatism. On reading *Art and Culture*, it is astounding that Greenberg *utterly* ignores many artists commonly seen as being fundamentally at the core of avant-garde art of the time. Neither René Magritte nor Marcel Duchamp, for instance, rate a single mention in Greenberg's book; Dada and Dali each rate one passing, polemic comment. This review will ask why. Is such ridiculous exclusion damning of Greenberg?

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To answer this, it will be helpful to briefly survey Greenberg's formative history, for he was (until well after the war) a Marxist and involved in a literary exchange with no less than Leon Trotsky and André Breton during 1938-9. For when Trotsky had been banished by Stalin and had gone to Mexico (to be with Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and André Breton), the New York based Marxist journal, *Partisan Review*, invited Trotsky and Breton to publish their 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' (1938).<sup>17</sup> Greenberg, however, had already started writing for the same journal and 'The Avant-Garde and Kitsch' was published during the following year, 1939. Considering that both essays deal specifically with the social role of avant-garde art, it is no rash

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<sup>16</sup> It is ironic that on Kant's view, 'genius' acts outside the realm of theoretical reason; Greenberg is seeking using theory to deontologically prescribe artistic freedom. See especially Immanuel Kant, 'Critique of Judgement', *Basic Writings of Kant*, New York, 2001, §§47-9.

<sup>17</sup> Hart, 'The Essential Legacy of Clement Greenberg', 77.

claim to say that Greenberg is responding to Trotsky. It is Greenberg's strictures, compared to Trotsky's and Breton's *non*-strictures, on the artistic avant-garde that brings out the differences.

Trotsky and Breton demand a radical freedom for art, an anarchic one.<sup>18</sup> Artists should be *completely* free to choose their themes and methods: "the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless ... he freely seeks to give *his own* inner world incarnation in his art."<sup>19</sup> Trotsky's and Breton's idea is of a newly levelled playing ground, a *melange* of symbols for the avant-garde to take hold of, then a discovery of *common* ground by which artists and the avant-garde may fight "usurpers of the revolution." By contrast, and recalling Greenberg's analogy of science to art, *he* thinks the avant-garde ought seek change *through* the continuation of the self-critical modernist critique first established by Kant. Greenberg holds as central the relationship between *existing* society and that to come. The avant-garde is anticipatory, working *within* the structure of late capitalism. Its aim is to lay fertile seed, a culture of high quality, preparatory to the (hopefully) immanent arrival of democratic socialism.<sup>20</sup> Put simply, for Greenberg, anarchic revolution is too radical; it

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<sup>18</sup> Trotsky and Breton: "True art, which is not content to play variations on ready-made models but rather insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time [c.f. Hegel and Tolstoy]—true art is unable *not* to be revolutionary, *not* to aspire to a *complete and radical reconstruction* of society ... We recognize that only the social revolution can *sweep clear* the path for a new culture." Leon Trotsky and André Breton, 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', *Theories of Modern Art*, Berkely, 1968, 484 (third and fourth emphases are mine).

Greenberg mimics: cultures in a state of stagnation immobilise into "academicism" (a polemic term) in which "creative activity dwindles to virtuosity ... all larger questions being decided by the precedent of old masters. The same themes are mechanically varied in a hundred different works, and yet nothing new is produced." Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Trotsky and Breton, 'Manifesto', 485-6 (my emphasis).

<sup>20</sup> Greenberg gets this idea from Marx, who writes, "mankind sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of completion." Quoted in Paul Hart, 'The Essential Legacy of Clement Greenberg', 86. Hart speculates that Greenberg, with an eye to guiding the post-war avant-garde of New York, is here considering the poor results of the Bolshevik Revolution's radical substitution of power: the new structure must be *substantially* prepared before the old is removed. Ibid.

sweeps away necessary foundations as well as unnecessary walls.

But there is diplomatic compromise lurking in these authors' essays. In the manifesto, Trotsky and Breton (along with, Rivera and Kahlo),<sup>21</sup> imply a critique of geometric abstract art, favouring non-geometric abstraction (favoured by Surrealists or Muralists). According to Paul Hart, Trotsky and his cohorts used the manifesto to attempt to secure leadership of New York's arts avant-garde, particularly in terms of what would be promoted by the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>22</sup> But Greenberg may equally be accused of political interests colouring his edicts. A. H. Barr Jnr., then the senior curator of the Museum of Modern Art, had recently ratified the two abstractions as dominant tendencies of international culture, but in the catalogue essay for the major 1936 exhibition, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, had identified a polarity between them. Greenberg believed that the people that the avant-garde *needed* for financial and political support (people like the Rockefellers) would find the sort of art Breton espoused too radical to fully support, unlike the relatively conservative cubism which remained, after all, easel painting.<sup>23</sup> Greenberg is opting for a 'safer' path than Trotsky and Breton. Though his choices instrumentally lead to the later success of abstract expressionism, we can lay a criticism against him here, for easel painting seems more easily reified to a commodity (albeit an elite one) than the ephemeral non-concrete nature of, say, performance art. Greenberg's diplomatic 'interest' (on Kantian terms) threatens to limit art's capacity to gesture towards freedom through *disinterested* demands on it.

At any rate, it is by here fairly clear why Greenberg must reject avant-

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<sup>21</sup> Trotsky was staying with Rivera and Kahlo and Breton. Ibid. 80. Recall that both Rivera and Kahlo produced or showed work in America.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



garde art like Dadaism. Though this offers critique, it does so through subversion, a complete ‘anti-art’ rejection of the history of artistic formalism: a strategy more in line with Trotsky’s anarchic thinking than Greenberg’s historically dependent evolvement. But recalling that Greenberg’s essay in *Partisan Review* is a “reply” to the more senior Trotsky’s article, we can now surmise Greenberg ignores the art he disapproves of, inferring rather than engaging in direct polemic or argument against it. But in fact, if we look closely, Greenberg’s book does make a major attack on such art: he accuses it of being a form of kitsch. This is nasty stuff, for Trotsky rejects kitsch as much as Greenberg. To judge Greenberg’s charge, we need to look at what kitsch means to these writers and why it is so bad.

Under capitalism, kitsch arose, says Greenberg (and Trotsky would agree), as a product of the Industrial Revolution and newly universal literacy. Reading became a ubiquitous skill, necessary to productive efficiency, but the peasants who migrated to the cities as proletariats or petty bourgeois had neither the leisure nor comfort necessary to the aesthetic education of the ruling classes, the actual supporters of the avant-garde.<sup>24</sup> But the working class does have leisure, and seeks diversion from labour: the new commodity culture of kitsch was born. Kitsch placates, providing easy pleasure and faked sensations, “demand[ing] nothing of its consumers except their money—not even their time.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, no real critique of culture or *positive* cultural freedom is part of, or offered by kitsch. Unlike kitsch culture, which is ideologically *led*, “the avant-garde moves.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 8.

Kitsch is as prevalent under Stalinism and Nazism, and is just as bad. During the period, Stalin's communist party had adopted socialist realism as its official style. Art was expected to be uncritical in celebrating (supposedly) ever-increasing scientific development of industry and production (and of Stalin as the hero of world socialism). Social realism was supposedly the only art style that would be comprehensible to the proletariat. In fact, as Greenberg points out, the proletariat *prefers* kitsch, though not for good reasons. It is preferred because, though literate, the labouring masses do not enjoy the *cultural* education necessary to distinguish between a Cézanne and a Repin. The latter's mimesis is readily accessible to pleasure, the former's abstraction is not.<sup>27</sup> And of course 'loyal' Stalinist artists adopted socialist realism in a demonstration of solidarity against fascism.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, a mirror image situation existed in fascism. The Nazi's Nuremberg Rallies during the 1930's, for instance, were a grand aesthetic affair, but individual creativity and thought were subsumed under the generalising and propagandistic will of the ideology.<sup>29</sup> In either extreme though, the effect is the same: the reigning ideology must approve intellectual programmes, and it is convenient to the interest of each ideology that art be kitsch. This is a form of 'interestedness'

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<sup>27</sup> Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> Hart, 'The Essential Legacy of Clement Greenberg', 77.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Benjamin suggests that fascism (and war, by its lights) is an aesthetic politics, whereas communism politicises art. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London, 1973, 244. Of course the classic example of a symbolic father's repression is Hitler's 1937 "degenerate Art" exhibition.

that Greenberg, reflecting Kant, rejects, for it is contra freedom.<sup>30</sup> Both Greenberg and Trotsky forbid kitsch, for the avant-garde needs the ability to contemplate freely, if it is to advance beyond existing social concepts. But it is from here that Greenberg's, Trotsky's and Breton's unity collapses, for Greenberg actually accuses art that does not fit his criteria of *being* a form of kitsch—and this includes Dada and Surrealism.

In 'The Avant-Garde and Kitsch', Greenberg refers to art in the Dada-Surrealist camp as "avant-gardism", a polemic term.<sup>31</sup> Such art, he thinks, does not "move forward," rather, it simply reworks the work already done by the genuine avant-garde, providing *illustrative* examples of the avant-garde's work: "If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch ... imitates its effects."<sup>32</sup> Being imitative of the avant-garde is not sufficient to being genuine artistic avant-garde; rather it is kitsch in the same way that Repin's socialist realism is a kitsch form of Courbet's. Duchamp, one imagines Greenberg thinking, betrays the modernist trajectory of self-critical (and hence, socially practical) formalism when he abandons painting. That Magritte continues to paint is an arbitrary choice: his paintings may as well be made of collage or

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<sup>30</sup> Kant, 'Critique of Judgement', §5, 'Comparison of the three specifically different kinds of delight.' For that matter, art in our own time (of global capitalism, the ideology that won the war and which Greenberg would be stuck with) is characteristically *pleasurable*. It still tends to be subsumed, but now under a different kind of symbolical ideological 'father'—referred to by Slavoj Žižek as the 'anal Father'. Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? : Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*, Albany, 2004, 46-7. In our time, the 'proletariat' must labour to support the global-capitalist system, and the mechanism the anal father uses to ensure this an omnipresent demand: that we must seek and consume enjoyment. In creating in us an ultimately unfulfillable desire for pleasure, the anal father ensures that we seek ever more to do so: through consumption of the surplus of society—kitsch commodification. Art, Greenberg would say, that is merely pleasurable fails in its duty of modernist self-critique. Arthur Danto recounts how right until his death, Greenberg complained of post-modern art being "decorative". Arthur Danto, 'Clement Greenberg: A Life', *Artforum International*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

photographs (or simply in words?).<sup>33</sup> But why must we accept that Dada or Surrealism is simply imitative of the avant-garde? Greenberg needs to provide strong reasons, yet he does not clearly do so in his book. He *would* have a case if he could clearly show that his thesis of the historical evolution of form is *absolutely necessary* to art; yet *that* is the core argument that is missing. Formalism may well be *sufficient* to art (hence Pollock & Co.), but why cannot the progress of art also *bifurcate* (hence Duchamp & Co.)?

We can speculate for such an argument for the necessity of formalism, on Greenberg's behalf. Such an argument might appeal to earlier formalist theories like Clive Bell's 'significant form' as a common measure to *all* art, be that art an ancient cave painting, a late Titian or a Magritte.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, there *is* a lot to be said for such an argument. One could spend a great deal of time looking at and contemplating—in a Kantian way—the surface of Titian's *Rape of Europa* (1599-62); whereas a moment's glance seems sufficient to the assimilation of Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928-9), as far as the *painting* itself goes.<sup>35</sup> We can say by inference that Greenberg thinks that this painting does not qualify as avant-garde art because although it claims (though its title) to critically examine the practice of mimetic painting, its relative indifference to the physical act and history of painting disqualifies it from being a 'real' avant-garde painting. Magritte ought have been aware of Cézanne and Analytic

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<sup>33</sup> As Donald Fried would say, Magritte's art is essentially *theatrical*—and he means that term polemically. Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Arforum*, June, 1967, 118.

<sup>34</sup> See Clive Bell, 'Significant Form', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, June 1919, 254ff.

<sup>35</sup> Even so, one might profitably spend a lot of time contemplating the idea *behind* Magritte's painting—Greenberg's accusation that Dada and the like is merely re-hashing avant-garde ideas in a kitsch way still needs (and lacks) substantial support. Perhaps Greenberg's best defence is to say that Titian's painting seems to give us the best of both worlds. The ideas behind *it*, from ancient mythology, are rich and worthy of contemplation, but so is the painting itself, and also the *relationship* between the way the painting is painted, and the myth behind it. Titian gives us more value for our buck than Magritte.

Cubism when he painted, and that he cannot step backwards into crude mimesis. Needless to say, such arguments (which Greenberg diplomatically neglects to state plainly) are *extremely* contentious.

Countering Greenberg's thinking, it is worth recounting a complaint that Duchamp made during 1962 about reception of his ready-mades: "When I discovered readymades I thought to discourage aesthetics ... I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."<sup>36</sup> For Duchamp, formal properties are merely a hindrance to the deeper role of art: to invoke a contemplative play of thoughts and concepts. Considering that such play may have aesthetic qualities in a way similar to poetry, one might ask why Greenberg needs to insist on the retention of formal, physical qualities in different artistic genres. Is he not simply, without realising it, lagging behind avant-garde artists, just as critics who saw and rejected *Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)* (1907) were in fact lagging behind the avant-garde Matisse? Greenberg can be made invulnerable to this charge only if there is a fundamental conceptual difference between his and Duchamp's criteria for what constitutes art. Both invoke contemplation, but for Kantian Greenberg such contemplation necessarily (if only ideally) is free of concepts. A judgement of art is made only *as if* it could be backed by conceptual arguments—else art would become a science instead of a symbol.<sup>37</sup> Only if such a requirement is actually necessary to art, and only if Duchamp's ready-mades incorporate no such non-conceptual aspects, can we say plainly that Greenberg is not dogmatic. Again, this is a very contentious claim, though we could attempt to argue that what is wrong with Duchamp's work is that it is

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<sup>36</sup> Arthur Danto, 'From Aesthetics to Art Criticism and Back', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 106-7.

<sup>37</sup> See Kant, 'Critique of Judgement', §6: 'The beautiful is that which, apart from concepts, is represented as the object of a *UNIVERSAL* delight.'

in danger of being subsumed under philosophy, an idea that would be anathema to Nietzsche.

Greenberg comes out of all this very tarnished, yet I shall finish with a plaintive plea in his support. If sensual formalism is to be banished from the city, then shall we not be poorer for that banishment? People have been making and contemplating plastic sculpture and painting since long before writing was invented. Apparently the practice has something going for it, so why stop now? Conceptual reasons aside, we apparently desire sensual beauty in art.

(3100 words)

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