CLEMENT GREENBERG: PURE ART IN AN IMPURE WORLD

A Thesis

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modernist painting evolved in France in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries through a kaleidoscopic succession of different movements that culminated in two predominant but opposing points of view: 1) Cubist painting no longer using nature as a direct model, reorganized and geometrized form resulting in a move toward abstraction in painting; and 2) Surrealism, playing a secondary role to Cubism's lead, displayed a strong literary influence. The painters of Surrealism were closely associated with the poets and writers of the time. Surrealism, deriving partly from the Dada movement, continued Dada's nihilistic attitude that showed a particular animus toward painting. Painting seemed to be heading in a radically new direction for the first time since the Renaissance. It became obvious to those most concerned with the plastic arts that a reconsideration of painting (as well as sculpture) was in order. A new definition was needed within Modernism that would outline painting's current purposes and describe its
procedures. It is the contention of this thesis that these tasks were accomplished most successfully by the formalist critic Clement Greenberg.

Clement Greenberg's philosophy centered around a strictly formalist concern for painting's medium, especially in relation to abstract painting. Greenberg established a position for the painter in Modernism that is marked by a rightful autonomy, a proper detachment from society's distracting involvements.

The two essays most pertinent to Greenberg's definition of Modernist painting, Toward a Newer Laocoön written in 1940 and Modernist Painting written in 1960 are analyzed to demonstrate how Greenberg's concepts about painting altered over time as he went through the process he referred to as "educating myself in public."

In the years following World War II, Greenberg's philosophy fulfilled a clearly evident need of artists, critics, art historians, and society in general for a definition of Modernist painting and so acceptance of Greenberg's endeavors was assured. However, acceptance was accompanied by the dissenting voices of some critics as well as insurrection within the ranks of Greenberg loyalists. This was brought about by Greenberg's
particular kind of formalism that presented too narrow an allowance for painting's purposes and was, at times, exceedingly judicial, even edictal, provoking not only dissatisfaction but clamorous dissent. Such vigorous and various dissent was possible because of the successful coherence and substantiveness of Greenberg's formulation for Modernist painting that offered a body of thought consistent and real -- worthy of argument. This is something no one has accomplished as well -- even into the present.

The problems inherent in Greenberg's philosophy of painting are primarily sins of omission. Greenberg admitted to a "Mediterranean bias" that served to limit his view of Modernist painting. He was overtly Francophile in his admiration of French painting. In matters of taste, Greenberg's choices were often accused of being "value laden." Value choices in matters of taste should be allowed as part of opinion in critical determinations.

Greenberg refuses to explore the psychological content that exists in painting. When he ignores Freud, because of a formalist fear of excess and contamination of what he considers painting's pure purpose, he ignores part of what is significant in a work of art. Greenberg's
philosophy, in order to be consistent in its formalist aims, could not include psychological content as a factor in painting -- something that must be considered in an evaluation of his concept of Modernist painting.

Some of the problems attributed to Greenberg's definition of Modernist painting are misplaced and more fittingly belong to the Post-Modernist period. The participants in Post-Modernism must assume the responsibility of working toward some declaration of what Post-Modernism is or is not. The Modernist period that Greenberg helped to define is now a part of the history of art.

Two of Clement Greenberg's most worthy critics, Rosalind Krauss and Donald Kuspit receive a hearing. Both their negative and positive responses to Greenberg's philosophy are examined in order to see how they illuminate or challenge Greenbergian theories of Modernist painting.

It will finally be argued that Clement Greenberg's philosophy for Modernist painting, besides being correct for the period of painting it defines, has some continuing relevance for present painting as well as for the rest of art.
CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF A PHILOSOPHY

Clement Greenberg, when constructing his philosophy of Modernist painting, did not ignore historical precedent. He felt an obligation to continue the historical account of painting by describing how painting occurred in the first half of the Twentieth Century. In spite of the singular satisfaction he must have felt in helping to establish the first American School of painting, in the 1940's, through his sponsorship of the Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock, Greenberg did not mark this achievement as something apart from painting's history. He connected Pollock's Abstract Expressionist painting to Analytical Cubism as it was developed by Picasso and Braque in France in the early decades of this century.

It is evident that Greenberg was well acquainted with the writings of the German political philosopher Karl Marx. Most of Greenberg's early criticism reflects a Marxian influence, particularly the essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1938). In this often quoted and
controversial essay, Greenberg discussed culture within society and the relationship that existed between artistic preference and class. For Marx, art had intrinsic value apart from the rest of society. Art for art's sake was a dictum Greenberg accepted as being in line with his formalist concept of painting. He described in this essay how the avant-garde functioned within society and gave the avant-garde the responsibility for painting's advancement.

Even after Greenberg rejected the political side of Marxism during the cold war era, because of his disillusionment with Stalin's brand of Soviet socialism, he continued to quote Marx in an aphoristic manner as if recalling an apt and well remembered maxim to illustrate or emphasize a point he was making. When Greenberg discusses the problem of the object in Modernist painting, he invokes Marx in his explanation of what happened to the object in Cubist painting; "the Cubists inherited the problem, and solved it, but -- as Marx would say -- only by destroying it, willingly, or unwillingly they sacrificed the integrity of the object almost entirely to that of the surface."³ Greenberg continued to draw on Marxian support several times more in his critical writings.⁴⁻⁵
Hans Hofmann, the German abstract painter, and respected teacher, came to this country in 1932 and settled in New York City and Greenberg attended lectures at the school he established there. He gave Hofmann primary credit for educating him in the qualities of abstract painting and the importance of the medium to Modernist painting. Hofmann explained the contribution that the European painters, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Mondrian, Miro, and others made to Twentieth Century painting. He had an affect on Greenberg's philosophy of painting by helping to shape its formalist bias toward abstract painting. Greenberg referred to Hofmann as "the most important teacher of our time" and claimed that he "owes more to the illumination received from Hofmann's lectures than to any other source." This is not to say that he praises Hofmann without exception. In his reviews of Hofmann's paintings, Greenberg offered frank and detailed criticism centering around what he saw as incoherencies within the paintings and a tendency to go to extremes. Usually when Greenberg wrote about painting, his stance was one of objectivity in regard to the work he was considering apart from any feeling he might have had of admiration or liking for the artist. This was obviously a difficult position to
maintain when he wrote about Klee, Pollock, and others that he came to know personally, apart from their painting.

Greenberg turned increasingly to Kant rather than Marx as a source for his criticism in the late forties and fifties. According to Greenberg, Immanuel Kant, in the Eighteenth Century, established "the most satisfactory basis for aesthetics we yet have." Like Kant, Greenberg saw aesthetic judgement as an intuitive process arising out of the experience of art. Judgement of a painting, or other work of art, proceeds by way of the reflective mind as it explores and assesses the plastic values of a painting (form, design, spatial qualities, and color) in order to make an aesthetic determination. Both Kant and Greenberg saw painting as an autonomous activity and perceived the development of painting as historical in nature.

When Greenberg used the term "purity" his meaning was similar to Kant's concept of the sublime. Both of these terms have about them an uncertainty, a sense of something highly desirable yet not easily obtained. Greenberg and Kant both saw aesthetic determination dependent on some sort of universal agreement.

From Hegel, Greenberg obtained further confirmation of historical progression in art. The past
of painting is contained in its present and always needs to be taken into account. Greenberg was interested in Hegel's ideas about "inwardness" and how culture within society enabled individual inwardness to be manifested in some public way. It was probably difficult for Greenberg to reconcile this Hegelian view of culture with his formalist thinking. Greenberg eschewed the personal and the subjective in painting that such inwardness might convey if it were publicly revealed in a painting. Hegel's concept of the absolute, a guiding inwardness is something foreign to Greenberg's strictly formalist concerns for painting. Hegel, unlike Kant, seems to have had a diminishing influence on Greenberg as he became more certain of his own philosophical convictions.

Greenberg wrote literary criticism as well as his better known essays about painting. Among the literary critics of the Twentieth Century, T. S. Eliot was one that he admired most. Greenberg held Eliot in high esteem more as a literary critic than as a poet. He disagreed with Eliot in deeply significant ways about how culture progressed in a industrialized, technological society. Eliot's position was one of despair and pessimism for the future of culture within an industrialized society. Part of this pessimism arose from Eliot's view of society as
unchanging in its basic organization. Greenberg perceived industrialization's effects on society in a more positive and optimistic way. He had faith in society's ability for transformation and believed that industrialization benefited all of society by creating more resources for everyone; more leisure time to pursue higher culture, including advanced painting. This resulted in a closing of the gap that previously existed between much of society and the avant-garde. Greenberg insistently sees the fate of the avant-garde as being closely associated with society's fate. Greenberg's respect for Eliot allows him to see the poet as an honorable adversary, a fitting devil's advocate against whose clearly stated beliefs he could test his differing philosophical convictions.

* * *

Greenberg's criticism of painting in the early 1940's was dominated by a Marxian dialectic that continued to influence his intellectual perceptions if not his politics. His political stance became, in the late forties through the early sixties, increasingly that of someone well integrated into a democratic, capitalistic society. This changing viewpoint was reflected in his
criticism of painting -- that showed the growing influence of Kant. Hans Hofmann, through his knowledge of Modernist painting in Europe, and his emphasis on painting's medium, served to encourage and inform Greenberg in a choice that he had already made involving abstract painting. Greenberg considered abstraction to be the most important and representative form of painting within Modernism.

It was T. S. Eliot's literary criticism, that mattered to Greenberg. Eliot's style of critical writing served as a paradigm for Greenberg in the writing of his own criticism.

In the end, it was Immanuel Kant that proved most influential for Greenberg. Kant's aesthetic convictions were perceived by Greenberg as correct and fitting to his philosophy as it is presented in his two most definitive essays about Modernist painting; Toward a Newer Laocoon (1940) and Modernist Painting (1960). By realizing the progression of influences on Greenberg's concepts for painting, we can more readily understand the significance of his philosophy of Modernist painting to a continuing philosophy of art.
CHAPTER III

CAREFUL CHOICES AND NECESSARY REJECTIONS

*Toward a Newer Laocoon*

In *Toward a Newer Laocoon*, written in 1940, Greenberg began to construct a premise for his philosophy of Modernist painting based on careful reflection and logical reasoning. His intellectual considerations came from various sources: social, political, historical, and cultural. He took from this information whatever reinforced the intuitive perceptions that arose from his direct experience of painting -- an attitude that was Kantian in origin -- and proceeded in a selective and systematic fashion that maintained the consistency and cohesiveness of his philosophy.

The term "purity", with its variants -- pure, purism, and purist -- was of prime importance to Greenberg. He sometimes enclosed the word in quotation marks indicating a certain uneasiness with its use as if such an expression was charged with a signification he might not fully intend or be able to control.
The purist's position involved an exclusion of much that had adhered to painting in the past: subject matter, literature, sculptural effects, the illusion of spatial reality, and a recognition of nature as the only acceptable model for the object in painting.

Greenberg insisted on purity for the medium of painting and demanded of the artist a "surrender to the resistance of the medium". When he insisted on purity for the medium, Greenberg set the stage for abstract painting's claim to being the most advanced form of painting and relegated other forms of painting -- Surrealism, Expressionism, and Romanticism -- to a secondary status. He explained how a commanding role for a certain form of art occurred in the past and forced the rest of art to take on the qualities of the dominant art in order to succeed -- This was true of music in the Seventeenth and poetry in the Eighteenth Century. The dominant art in its turn, tried to absorb the function of the other arts and a confusion among the arts occurred. Such limiting conditions for art do not persist for all time, Greenberg explains, but are subject to change when a new art -- like abstract painting in the Twentieth Century -- arises to challenge the status quo.
Greenberg found there was an awareness on the part of the painter of abstraction that he was working to correct the problems of the past (nature as object, perspective etc.) When he made these claims on behalf of the painter, Greenberg challenged an historical view of art by seeing past art as something needing correction. He appeared to question the artist's right in each historical period to produce an art that was responsive to, and representative of, that particular period.

According to Greenberg, the avant-garde in the late Nineteenth Century assumed a leading role in preserving the arts by "demonstrating what is good and what is bad for art." He called Courbet the "first real avant-garde painter" because Courbet called attention to the opticality and materiality of painting. Courbet began to flatten the picture plane by focusing attention on the entire surface of the painting as he did in the *Stone Breakers*, (1849) Figure 1. He placed the two figures in his painting close to the front of the picture emphasizing the flatness of the picture plane. All that is of most interest to the viewer is placed forward in the painting.

Manet further flattened the picture plane by
bringing the background closer to the foreground and almost eliminating the middle-ground in such paintings as _Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe_ (1863), Figure 2, and his much discussed painting of 1882, _Bar at the Follies Bergere_, Figure 3, that demonstrated the qualities of flatness even more emphatically by conflating the mirror reflected background with the foreground on the surface of the painting. Manet's work showed a declining interest in subject matter, and the illusion of three-dimensional space -- accompanied by an increased concern for the medium.

Like Courbet and Manet, the Impressionists stressed the optical quality of painting through their use of color and light in a way that served to abstract outline and form. The Impressionists connected painting to science by stressing the optical nature of their work. They juxtaposed their short brush strokes of color mixed, not on the painter's palette, but in the eye and visual receptors in the brain of the viewer. Greenberg refers to the sensation brought about by such a process as "an exercise in color vibrations." The Impressionists continued the reduction of interest in subject matter (that started with Manet) in favor of an interest in the
medium. *Wild Poppies*, Figure 4, of 1873 by Monet shows how this process was carried along.

Greenberg's role as a philosopher for Modernist painting considered "The Impressionists" as a group whose commonalties were of prime usefulness to his philosophy. In other separate essays, Greenberg the critic was more obvious -- usually in reviews of exhibits or writings concerned with a single painter. The two roles, philosopher and critic, showed some inevitable overlapping, but Greenberg purposefully tried to keep them separate. This may be a root cause of some of the criticism aimed at Greenberg by his detractors. Greenberg seldom confused the role of philosopher with critic. Some of his readers appear not to have made this distinction.

Greenberg, in 1978, in a reprint of *Modernist Painting* added an interesting footnote in which he offered an apologia that was a defense of his philosophy against criticism. He explained that his outline for Modernist painting described, not necessarily what he advocated or believed in, but was an account of how the best of art of the last hundred years had come about. He claimed that more was read into what he said about art than he had ever intended.²
Greenberg told in his essay how Cezanne, in the latter part of his career, stopped painting as an Impressionist and began to show an increasing interest in form and volume. According to Greenberg, this resulted, unintentionally on Cezanne's part, in emphasizing instead the importance of the medium and the flatness of the picture plane. It was Cezanne's paintings after 1900 that Greenberg found most instructive to Modernist painting, The Great Bathers, Figure 5, and Mont Sainte Victoire, Figure 6, both of 1904-06. Cezanne, by placing his rectangular brush strokes of color at directionally different angles, tipped and tilted to follow the planes of the object in the painting, pushed everything toward the frontal plane and so emphasized the flatness of the entire canvas.

This resulted in a new perception of painting that gave the Cubist painters a direction for their work that coincided with their pictorial aims and dramatically changed the way painting proceeded in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Greenberg declared flatness to be the pictorial aim of Modernist painting. In an Old Master's painting, one sees what is contained in a picture first -- before one sees the picture because the illusion
of three-dimensional space is preserved. In a Modernist painting the picture is seen first and then what the flat plane of the picture contains. Greenberg called flatness "the guarantee of painting's independence as an art," and it was through the norm of flatness that abstraction was achieved. Any "recognizable entity" violated that flatness by suggesting a third dimension.

Picasso and Braque rehearsed, for a time, what Cezanne had taught them about painting before creating the highly original works that demonstrated a totally new direction for painting.

They accomplished this first through the early style of Analytical Cubism that employed the use of shifting and receding planes to rearrange the object drastically, almost destroying it as an imitation of nature. The Cubist painter was able to minimize shading and perspective by using these arrangements of planes and limiting his use of color. In this way, he rid his painting of three-dimensional pictorial space, and emphasized instead the flatness of the picture plane. Picasso's Portrait of Henry Kahnweiler, painted in Paris in Autumn of 1910, Figure
7, or Braque's painting *Composition With Violin*, 1911, Figure 8, demonstrated these changes.

Greenberg traced the rise of abstract painting by showing that artists, beginning with Courbet, centered their interest more closely on the medium of painting than on anything else. In so doing, they decreased an interest in subject matter and pictorial illusion and emphasized the optical nature of painting. After the Impressionists moved this process along, the Cubists made the most radical change in painting since the Renaissance by destroying the object through their use of shifting and angled planes that emphasized the flatness of the surface of the canvas and led toward abstraction in painting.

In the final statements of his *Laocoon*, Greenberg claimed an historical imperative for abstract painting that made it necessary for any artist wanting to proceed in another direction to first assimilate and work through abstraction. At the same time that Greenberg cited an historical imperative for abstraction, he admitted that his personal experience of art "... has forced me to accept most of the standards of taste from which abstract art has derived" -- an admission more Kantian than Marxian in origin. Greenberg seemed
to realize that when he admitted taste into his philosophical considerations, he invited a critical debate that would be hard to resolve. He temporized by claiming that standards of taste are valid "for the moment and not through eternity." 24

Greenberg frankly and openly displayed a kind of self-awareness that led to attempts at self-criticism and correction. This practice can be partially explained by his remark that he could be included as "one of those critics who educate themselves in public." Greenberg made this observation at the time he published his book *Art and Culture* (1961) when he claimed the right to revise or delete previously written material.25

*Toward a Newer Laocoon* showed a Marxian bias in Greenberg's thinking. His emphasis on purism came from a Marxian attitude toward painting and the rest of art that claimed an intrinsic value for the arts that assured them a special place, separate from the rest of society. Greenberg's form of Marxism was not absolutely orthodox. Marx, in his dialectic, allowed the artist a position separate from the rest of society so the arts could function in a way that would most successfully serve society. John O'Brian viewed this situation as "the
conceptual prizing apart of the economic and the cultural. 26

Greenberg claimed a detached position for the arts as necessary to protect the autonomy of painting from society's invasive demands. In a book review, written in 1951, Greenberg stated "what matters, however, is not so much that art illuminates society as that social factors help explain aesthetic aims." 27 Greenberg perceived culture and society as impinging one on the other in a way that caused painting to move constantly in the direction of its "area of competence" -- the medium and the flat picture plane. This centering on the medium created a position of detachment for the artist. The idea of separating advanced art from the rest of society is suggested when Greenberg invoked "Athene" -- "its Athene who we want: formal culture with its infinity of aspects, its luxuriance, its large comprehension." 28 Greenberg asked for a higher form of art -- Athene -- than the art wanted by "the masses," the sort of art Greenberg described as kitsch. 29 Along with a demand for a higher form of art that was autonomous and separate, came the necessity to create a responsible and advanced avant-garde to lead the way.
Greenberg's contact with Hans Hofmann served to reinforce his choice of abstract painting as the most important art in the Twentieth Century and influenced his selection of the leading artists in Modernist painting -- those artists most concerned with abstraction -- Picasso, Braque, Miro, Klee, and Mondrian. Greenberg's writing of criticism was partly inspired by the eloquence and clarity of T. S. Eliot's critical writing. Eliot was admired by Greenberg for his style, rather than for his opinions with which Greenberg often disagreed.

The Importance of Matisse

Greenberg did not include a mention of Matisse in Toward a Newer Laocoon. However, in 1946 he began to name Matisse, along with Picasso, as a painter of fundamental importance to Modernism.

Greenberg valued easel painting and was anxious about its future. The artists he singled out as the best Modernist painters were all easel painters -- Courbet to Mondrian. For Greenberg, Matisse was "an easel painter from first to last." In the middle of the 1940's,
Greenberg began to call Matisse the greatest painter of the Twentieth Century.31 Even though Matisse used representation in his painting, Greenberg found that his work possessed a hedonistic purity that was concerned with immediate sensation rather than with any kind of spiritual content. Matisse's detached and cool approach to painting celebrated the material facts of the painting -- the medium and the flat picture plane above everything else. Matisse's style of representation was never literary or sculptural in effect but demonstrated only the pure joy of painting -- the artist's fascination with, and pleasure in, his medium. Matisse was a consummate draftsman and achieved a great deal in his paintings by his use of rhythmic, decorative, but always definitive, line. Greenberg defended the decorative in Matisse's paintings by claiming that his use of monumentality corrected any errors created by his decorative tendencies.

Greenberg's increased optimism and faith in a materialistic culture, as exemplified by capitalism in this country after World War II, may have had something to do with the timing of his selection of Matisse as the greatest painter of the Modernist period. Matisse's hedonism fit in with Greenberg's optimistic view of the
postwar world of the forties. It was in 1946 that Greenberg first began to call Matisse "the greatest painter of the day."\textsuperscript{32} John O'Brian, editor of Greenberg's collected works, suggested that this choice of Matisse was made because Greenberg wanted to avoid being labeled as prescriptive in respect to his philosophy.\textsuperscript{33} It was obvious Greenberg took great pleasure in Matisse's painting and perhaps the explanation of his choice of Matisse as the "greatest master"\textsuperscript{34} of the Twentieth Century can be found in his comment, "I am willing to like anything provided I enjoy it enough."\textsuperscript{35}

Matisse's painting of 1911, \textit{Red Studio}, Figure 9, showed how the artist used color to delineate both form and space. The objects in the painting seem to lie on the surface of the painting which is covered with a monochromatic red paint. The overall redness of the painting seems little affected by the differing color of the objects that are in the studio (furniture, pictures, etc.). The color, the flat forms, and the arrangement of space emphasizes the medium and the flatness of the picture plane.
Modernist Painting

Twenty years after Toward a Newer Laocoon, Greenberg wrote the essay Modernist Painting that described painting as it took place within Modernism. Greenberg showed in this essay, as in his earlier one, how Modernist painting's development proceeded from Courbet, through Manet and the Impressionists, to its most definitive and important explication in the paintings of the Cubist artists, culminating in the almost total abstractions of Mondrian's paintings in Europe in the 1920's and 30's.

Mondrian's complete abstractions, like his Composition, 1933, Figure 10, illustrated how committed he was to the medium and to nothing beyond or in addition to it. Mondrian's painting testified to his conviction that abstraction was the highest form of painting and freed the painter from the natural world -- the ultimate detachment for the artist and his medium. Greenberg showed concern that Mondrian's work after 1917 exhibited an extreme discipline that threatened to undermine easel painting by excluding too much in the way
of form and color. Greenberg was concerned with the implications of a strict and severe abstraction in painting for the same reason he had felt uncomfortable with the term purity -- both might prove too restrictive for painting's future.

Greenberg, in a burst of Twentieth Century optimism for science and technology, claimed that self-criticism was as true for art as it was for science. He saw art and science as sharing the "same cultural tendency."³⁴ Now Greenberg looked to Kant rather than Marx to explain how Modernist painting manifested a self-criticism that arose, through the processes of painting, to define and test painting's norms in order to insure a commitment to its "area of competence," which was for painting -- the medium -- the flat picture plane. The norms of Modernist painting were personally chosen by the painter and not imposed on him by nature. Both art and science tested their theories by employing empirical methods and, in doing so, were able to avoid the mistakes each was responsible for in the past. Greenberg saw art as somewhat different from science: as more spontaneous and personal and reflective of the aims of the individual artist.
In *Modernist Painting*, Greenberg finally defined "purity" as self-definition in painting achieved through self-criticism. From this point on, he used the word purity less often preferring more exact terms to describe painting's medium like flatness, shape, and texture.²⁷ The flatness of the picture plane was the only condition painting shared with no other art. The other norms of painting, color, texture, and shape were norms shared with other arts -- like theatre or sculpture. The norms of painting were tested for their indispensability through the process of being exhibited.²⁸

Modernist painting, though it corrected the mistakes of the past, never broke with the past but, as Greenberg insisted, maintained the historical continuity of painting. He objected to the idea that each time a new form of art presented itself within Modernism that this meant a break with the past and "the start of a whole [new] epoch in art." It was Greenberg's belief in historical continuity for art that permitted him, in the 1940's, to connect the Abstract Expressionist paintings of Jackson Pollock, to the Cubist painters, to Miro, and to Mondrian as well.²⁹, ⑳
At the time the essay *Modernist Painting* was published, Greenberg had already achieved considerable recognition as an important critic. *Modernist Painting* extended this recognition by reaching a broader audience, both domestic and foreign, through its airing over *Voice of America* and by being disseminated through many mainstream publications as well as through the more esoteric journals of art and politics.

Public acceptance brought Greenberg acclaim and support for his philosophical construct of Modernist painting. However, voices were raised that disagreed, often strenuously, with his concepts. Both the adulation and the criticism of Greenberg may be interpreted as an indication of the success of his philosophy.

*   *   *

Greenberg's most definitive essays, *Toward a Newer Laocoon* and *Modernist Painting*, showed a consistency of viewpoint that contributed much to the cohesiveness of his philosophy. He was able, through the regular coherency of each of his concepts, to establish
abstraction as the most advanced form of painting in the Twentieth Century. Greenberg's account of painting as it developed in the first decades of this century included: the purist's position concerning art; his acceptance of a Kantian concept of self-criticism on the part of painting that insured a purity for the medium; the flatness of the picture plane; the leadership of the avant-garde; and a view of art and the artist as rightfully detached from society's concerns. These two essays showed how Greenberg's ideas changed over the decades as he turned from Marx to Kant as a source for his philosophical concepts.

The concepts put forth in these essays contributed to the formation of a philosophy that allowed for abstract painting's dominant position in Twentieth Century art but excluded much of the rest of painting. Following Modernist Painting, Greenberg's philosophy received wide attention and ready acceptance. However, the volume and intensity of critical assaults on his philosophy suggests it is necessary, for those wanting to understand all of Modernist painting, to investigate the other side of Modernism that Greenberg ignored as not essential to his philosophy.
CHAPTER IV

THE OTHER SIDE OF MODERNIST PAINTING

Max Ernst, the Surrealist painter, according to his leading biographer, Werner Spies, made a deliberate choice to deviate in his art from the "higher" art of the period (Cubism and Abstraction). He did this from a desire for artistic freedom fully aware that taking this different path would confer on him second place status as an artist.\textsuperscript{41} Other painters within Modernism -- the Dadaists, Surrealists, and Expressionists -- claimed a similar freedom of expression for their art.

The Dada artists acted from a common disaffection brought about by conditions of social, economic, and cultural upheaval that accompanied the first world war. Some of their dissatisfaction arose from a disillusionment with Western art which seemed to them to betray the humanistic values art professed to uphold since the Renaissance.
Dada

Beginning in Zurich in 1915-16 as an expression of discontent, on the part of writers and painters exiled from their countries for various reasons having to do with the War, Dada became international in scope reflecting a widespread restlessness within the arts. Barcelona, New York, Paris, and Berlin, Cologne, and Hanover in Germany became sites of Dada activity.

Dada reflected an anti-aesthetic attitude that seemed to reject every traditional notion of beauty in art. Rational thought was put aside in favor of chance and irrational expression. Dadaist products and performances were intended to shock the viewer and make him acutely aware of the Dada artists' urgent discontent.

The ambitions of the young Dada artists ranged from a desire for an entirely new means of artistic expression to outright political activism. The emphasis in Dada was often literary and intellectual, more than pictorial, and included all sorts of word play and experimental language making. The formal qualities of art were not so much totally ignored as they were altered and rearranged in innovative contexts and through original
manipulations that explored the use of chance or accident. In spite of the anti-art emphasis within Dada, artists like Hans Arp, and Kurt Schwitters produced works of art that showed undeniable aesthetic qualities which were difficult for these artists to repress or conceal.

Dada was antithetical in purpose and practice to Greenberg's philosophy for Modernist painting so, except for Arp and Schwitters whose collage works showed aesthetic awareness and the requisite influence of Cubism, Greenberg dismissed Dada from any serious consideration as art.

Greenberg labeled the anti-aesthetic manifestations of Dada as "artificial nonsense" and identified what appeared to be a real underlying despair on the part of the artist as "hedonistic pessimism."

The Dada contributions of Marcel Duchamp were not so easily ignored by Greenberg. Duchamp, whose pre-Dada paintings showed pictorial and aesthetic content moved increasingly toward an anti-art position that culminated in 1912 with his introduction of the ready-made in the form of a bicycle wheel upended on a kitchen stool.*2 The concept of the ready-made was a direct challenge to painting and to the formalist view of art that Greenberg's philosophy represented.
Greenberg understood Duchamp's anti-art activities as an attempt to go "beyond" the issue of quality in art. He deplored the efforts by Duchamp to erase the distinction between high and low art by disregarding such matters as quality and taste. Greenberg accused Duchamp of trying to protect himself from any perception that might arise that he had retreated from "difficult" to "easy" art by taking such actions.42 This sort of judgement about Duchamp was somewhat unfair in light of what seemed to be truly original and provocative insights into the nature of art in the Twentieth Century -- what it was and what it had the possibilities of becoming. It was these possibilities that continued to haunt Greenberg into the 1960's when he criticized the Minimalist artists for sins similar to those committed by Dada against art; an attempt to escape pictorial content, as well as an evasion of the issue of quality in art. Some of Duchamp's possibilities had become part of the actual conditions of Modernist art.
Surrealism

Surrealist artists continued the intent of Dada in their art by placing an emphasis on literature and protest and by continuing Dada's anti-aesthetic attitude. This resulted in a neglect of the formal qualities of art as expressed through the medium of painting and led to an increased interest in process as it applied to painting and the rest of art.

The poet Andre Breton, never content to let things lay, proceeded in 1922 to replace Dada with his own concept of what art should become in the Twentieth Century. He borrowed the name Surrealism from Apollinaire and appointed himself leader of this new movement in the arts. In 1924 Breton published a manifesto detailing Surrealism's purposes that was frankly literary in intent and definition and was signed only by writers and poets.

After the first Surrealist group Exhibition in 1925 in Paris, Breton reconsidered his original premise and recognized the importance of the plastic arts, especially painting, to the total concept of Surrealism. A second manifesto, published in 1929, affirmed the importance of the visual sign or symbol to Twentieth
Max Ernst, of all the Surrealist painters, most truly expressed the essential spirit of Surrealism through his art. His continuing acceptance of Dada principles, a strong Freudian emphasis apparent in his paintings, his close association and almost constant collaboration with the writers and poets of Surrealism, and his overriding interest in process to the neglect of the formal qualities of the medium, all attested to his being the quintessential Surrealist.

Ernst made good use of the lessons he learned from da Vinci who described how inspiration in painting could arise from such unexpected and mundane sources as stains on a wall. da Vinci's observations further aroused Ernst's already fertile imagination that now became open to all matter of stimuli from his immediate environment.

As Ernst progressed in his career as a Surrealist, he lost much of the interest in political protest that had been so evident in his earlier Dada activities and his art became progressively more personal and increasingly concerned with artistic expression. Ernst showed an innovative use of methods like frottage (rubbings) and grottagge (painting on canvas or other material laid over a textured surface) that was similar in effect to automatic writing. Ernst's
interest in process continued to develop and was especially evident in his collage based paintings of the 1920's and his collage novels of the 1920's and 30's that included much use of "ready-made realities," as Ernst called them, in the form of post cards, pages from catalogs, and other sorts of artifacts and texts he collected to be used in some way in his art. Ernst's interest in a wide variety of material and processes now seems prescient in view of the widespread participation of artists in the making of multimedia art in the Post-Modernist period.

Ernst always conceived of himself as a member of a group rather than as an artist working alone. This group awareness seemed stronger within Surrealism than in other art movements in Europe in the Twentieth Century. An evident bonding occurred among the artists within Surrealism in spite of the fractiousness that sometimes surfaced. This may have been due to Breton's ability to lead and define Surrealism or to a strong sense of mutuality, part political and part artistic in nature, that held the movement together for almost two decades. There may also have been some awareness among the Surrealists that their survival as artists depended on their significance as a group rather than as individuals.
This attitude seemed to disappear in the Post-Modernist period that followed as artists were thrown on their own resources and seemed no longer able to depend on group identity or support as the Minimalist artist and critic, Gregory Battcock, points out in his introduction to *Minimal Art*.

Greenberg perceived Dali's form of Surrealism as especially pernicious in its effect on Modernist painting. He called Dali "the Ossian of our day" linking him with the Gaelic poet Ossian who lived in the Third Century and whose poetry was perceived as bombastic and pretentious, rhetorical in style, and archaic as well as pagan in origin. Greenberg seemed, by this deliberate labelling, to imply that Dali's painting, as well as having all of the negative qualities of Ossian's poetry, was replete with images from a long ago, irrelevant and largely discredited past.

Greenberg recognized that Surrealism reinvigorated Modernism in the early twenties when interest in the Cubist and Abstract painters declined and the leadership of the avant-garde fell to the Surrealist and Expressionist painters. He refused to admit that Surrealism was of any lasting importance in defining Twentieth Century Modernism. He saw the Surrealist
painters as "revivers of the literal past and advance agents of a new, conformist, and best-selling art" who did little to effect a real change in painting through a new way of seeing or by new subject matter, as the Cubists had done, but merely provided additional anecdotal content for art."

In his essay of 1940, *Toward a Newer Laocoon*, Greenberg separated the "Mock" Surrealist painters from the "orthodox" Surrealists through the degree by which their work moved toward abstraction." Five years later in the essay *Surrealist Painting*, Greenberg seized upon automatism as a decisive factor in categorizing the various painters within Surrealism. Painters like Miro, Arp, Masson, Picasso, and Klee used automatism as a way to stimulate their painterly imaginations transferring the resulting imagery, that could be in the form of signs or symbols, directly to the canvas through the shapes and colors they chose. This "primary" use of automatism not only activated the painter's imagination but freed him from anything that inhibited his complete surrender to the medium of painting. This resulted in a new way of seeing that restored painting as painting -- and nothing else -- and allowed painting to again "rival the achievements of the
According to Greenberg, within this kind of painting automatism, as a function of the unconscious, was more complete, and it became increasingly difficult to judge when the conscious mind entered into the painter's calculations. In the work of the rest of the Surrealist painters -- Ernst, Tanguy, Dali, and others -- the point at which the conscious mind was used in directing the progress of the painting was more definite and noticeable because automatism was a "secondary" factor in their painting serving only to induce the original image, not to directly create a painting. For these painters the image chosen was a Surrealist image but one rendered in a completely academic way -- in the same way the academic painters in the near past of the Nineteenth Century had painted their three dimensional and detailed images on the canvas. The Orthodox Surrealists added nothing new to painting -- no new way of seeing nor any new subject matter.

Greenberg was able to make it seem that much of the success of the Surrealist movement lay not in any claims made by the Orthodox Surrealists, those painters deriving from Dada, but through the contribution of painters like Miro, Arp, Masson, Klee and Picasso who all,
to some degree, came out of the Cubist tradition of painting that put the concerns of the medium above everything else.

In his essay, *Surrealist Painting*, Greenberg made a rare acknowledgement of the role of the unconscious in painting as this was manifested through the use of automatism by the Surrealist painters. This could be interpreted as an indirect recognition of Freud's importance to Modernist painting. The only direct references made to Freud in Greenberg's *Collective Writings* was an inclusion of Freud's name along with that of Einstein and Marx in a book review.⁵¹ and, again, in a listing of those that shared in the optimistic "mood" of the post-nineteen hundred era of worldwide industrialization that was included in an essay on the artist Leger.⁵²

There was no reason for Greenberg to include any mention of Freudian ideas in his philosophy of painting that was based on formalist values concerned only with the medium of painting and the flat picture plane. For the same reasons, Greenberg was not required to include the unconscious or any other Freudian concepts in a view of painting -- that was strictly optical.
Expressionism

Painters like Chaim Soutine in France, and the German Expressionist painters, according to Greenberg, lost control of the medium through an excess of feeling and an almost total disregard for the decorative elements in painting. This affected, in an adverse way, the unity of their paintings and detracted from the aesthetic quality of their art.

Paul Klee, the fantasist painter, was identified with Expressionism through his close ties with the Blaue Reiter group in Munich. He was of more than passing interest to Greenberg who devoted considerable essay space to a consideration of Klee and his painting.

Klee was associated with both the Surrealists and the Expressionists by being a participant in some of their exhibitions and through close personal association with some of the artists, especially those who were members of the Blaue Reiter.

Klee exhibited his work in the first group exhibition of Surrealism in Paris in 1925. He shared with the Surrealists an interest in automatism and the unconscious, and like Miro, made frequent use of signs and
ideograms in his paintings that was interpreted by Greenberg as a rejection of representation and a move toward abstraction. Klee made no firm commitments to either the Expressionists or the Surrealists but remained throughout his career an independent artist.

Greenberg saw Klee, first of all, as a saviour of easel painting who respected the medium of painting and the "pure plastic qualities in a work of art." Easel painting was, it appears, synonymous in Greenberg's mind with a respect for the medium. The most successful painters within Modernism were, for Greenberg, easel painters. Greenberg leaves the impression in his reader's mind that the loss of easel painting would be irreparable to all of painting.

Klee's mastery of line, the obvious unity of his compositions, along with a judicious use of the decorative element in his work helped insure the unity of his paintings. Greenberg referred to Klee's use of the decorative as "ornamentation," a word chosen because it said something about the diminutiveness of most of his works. Because of their small size, his paintings evoked a special intimacy between the work and the viewer. Greenberg gave the Cubists special credit for Klee's development as a painter. Cubist influence provided Klee
with the guidance and discipline necessary for an artist, and freed him from representation and illusion making it possible for his art to move in new directions.

When Greenberg wrote of the Nordic nature of Klee's art he included the best of German culture; the idealism of German philosophy, and the use of the dialectic method to persuade and inform. Greenberg accepted the combination of the pictorial, literary, and musical elements in Klee's work that made his painting so intriguing and comforting for the viewer -- comforting because of the gentle irony found in his paintings that relieved them of bitterness and destructive overtones present in some Expressionist paintings. Greenberg believed the elements in Klee's painting were due to the artist's tolerant and good humored view of the human condition -- another way of demonstrating the attitude of detachment Greenberg found necessary for the painter within Modernism.
Greenberg decided that Dada, Surrealism, and Expressionism failed to add anything new to painting in the first half of this century. However, certain artists within these movements were credited by him for making significant contributions to Modernist painting on an individual basis. Painters like Arp, Schwitters, Miro, Masson, and Klee whose work showed sufficient aesthetic content to demonstrate, on their part, a proper respect for the medium of painting and the formal qualities of art. These artists shared in common some sort of direct association with Cubism and Abstraction, during their development as painters, that Greenberg counted as an important and positive influence on their art.

Cubism and Abstract painting were the two most important developments in art during the first half of the Twentieth Century as Greenberg's philosophy for Modernist painting correctly and successfully demonstrated. Still, many critics and art historians found such a philosophy too restrictive to the rest of painting and presented
critical opinions that differed extensively from the official Greenbergian view of painting in the Modernist era.
CHAPTER V

DIFFERING VIEWS

Greenberg's philosophy for Modernist painting occasioned much debate and various kinds of criticism. Following are the views of two well known critics of Modernism, Rosalind Krauss and Donald Kuspit. Krauss and Kuspit were selected not only for their reasoned and well articulated criticism of Greenberg's beliefs about painting, but for their informed explication of the contributions made to painting by the Surrealist and Expressionist painters. Their writings complement what was presented in Greenberg's philosophy about the Cubist and Abstract painters making for a more complete understanding of how painting proceeded within Modernism.

Rosalind Krauss

Rosalind Krauss is the author of many critical writings about Modernist art in book and essay form.
Presently she is Professor of Art History at Columbia University and a editor of the journal *October*. Krauss's view of Modernism proceeds from a Greenbergian perception of Modernist painting to something quite different arising from a view of painting that is Post-Modernist in spirit and strongly Freudian in its interpretation of art.

Krauss wanted a "broader vision" of painting than Greenberg's formalist philosophy allowed. She included in this vision what she claimed "has been repressed but, nevertheless exists, the unconscious." She defined, in her book, *The Optical Unconscious*, her new kind of formalism that combined the optical with the unconscious in an interpretation of a work of art. She showed how her differing vision of Modernist painting, that included the unconscious, was synonymous with the aims of the Dada and Surrealist painters as evidenced in their work.

Krauss collected the iconography of Dada and Surrealist paintings to help in her interpretation of these works. This iconography was often erotic, sometimes violent, irrational, or showed the results of chance or accident. The sources of her information were mostly contemporary, not pre-Modernist, and included writings on
philosophy, criticism, and psychoanalytic method.

The work of the Surrealist painter Max Ernst held a special importance for Krauss acting as a model for her psychoanalytic approach to painting. Ernst, like Duchamp, used the ready-made in his art but, unlike Duchamp who used the ready-made itself as art, Ernst combined the ready-made with the process of his art to create his paintings and the other and varied art forms originating from his fertile imagination. Krauss used Ernst's overpainting the *The Master's Bedroom*, (1920), Figure 11, to show how the unconscious operated. In *The Master's Bedroom* two different surfaces were apparent to Krauss. The first surface was the strictly optical, Greenberg's flat picture plane, whereon all the visible features of the painting appear. These are the items from the ready-made catalog page that the artist had allowed to remain free from the skin-like gouache covering he brushed over the rest of the surface of the page. The second surface, as important as the optical to Krauss, contained the unconscious. This second surface lay behind the painted surface of the picture plane and was represented in *The Master's Bedroom* by the remaining inventory of the catalog page which, even though painted over, was still apparent as a "pulsatile periodic kind of
stimulation that was a sort of flickering up and passing away of consciousness in the process of perception" -- as Sigmund Freud had described the unconscious in his *Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad.* For Krauss, this pulse-like motion or beat depicted a sense of the "gap" -- the site of the unconscious.

Krauss found this beat or pulse is individual to each artist and evidenced in his work. For Duchamp the beat was "corporal and carnal," for Dalí a sort of "formlessness" and with Picasso the pulse was "erotic." Krauss saw Picasso as trapped -- a captive of that erotic beat so apparent in his work of the 1960's.

Greenberg presented this capture in a different sense when he wrote that Picasso became committed to "a certain notion of picture making in which nothing remains to be explained, in which everything is already given. Herein spontaneity and inspiration can no longer play a part." Picasso was a prisoner of his own art which had become derivative and lacked the creative strength of his earlier painting.

According to Krauss, what Greenberg accomplished when he connected Jackson Pollock's painting in the 1940's to the Cubists, to Mondrian, to Miro -- to the whole
tradition of painting -- was an act of sublimation. Krauss observed how the critics of that time "... reversed themselves on the subject of Pollock's work" by recognizing, what they earlier failed to see -- the significance of his painting. In calling attention to this change in judgement, Krauss emphasized, not only Greenberg's influence on the artist and his work, but on critical opinion as well.

This gesture, the raising up of Pollock and his painting to uprightness and verticality, Figure 12, *Cathedral*, (1947) marked out the difference between Greenberg's and Krauss's view of Pollock as a painter. For Krauss, there would always be found in Pollock's painting "an indexical mark ... that sets up a thematic of the sexual and the rivalrous ..." which was for her something beyond the formal facts of Pollock's work. This mark was the evidential sign of the workings of the unconscious in Pollock's painting.

Rosalind Krauss's concepts of painting are interesting, provocative, and perhaps prophetic of the future for both painting and art writing. A sense of the gap is discernible, not only in her view of painting, but in her writing as well. The gap may be perceived as the ceasura, the break, between art history writing before the
1960's and what it has now become. Krauss provided a radically different view of painting that included the unconscious in its figuring and so offered an alternative to Greenberg's strictly formalist view of Modernist painting.

Donald Kuspit

Donald Kuspit is a well known critic and Professor of Art History and Philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He shared with Krauss a psychoanalytic approach to painting -- but with a different purpose in mind. Krauss described the features of a painting through her use of psychology whereas Kuspit explored the artist's psyche as it is revealed in his painting in order to best understand his intent. Kuspit was interested more in the subjective and expressionist content of painting than in the formal facts of the medium.

In a book written in 1979, Clement Greenberg, Art Critic, Kuspit praised Greenberg's philosophy of Modernist painting as the "single most important theory of modern art." Greenberg's importance owed as well, Kuspit claimed, to his encouragement of artists like Arshile
Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Adolph Gottlieb, and most significantly, Jackson Pollock, all of whom gained national and international fame as painters.

Kuspit defended Greenberg against some of his most strident critics by claiming that they did not really pay attention to what Greenberg had to say in his critical writing and failed to understand the statements they ridiculed. His critics, Kuspit declared, acknowledged Greenberg by the intensity of their response and their "prejudiced polemics" showed a deliberate misunderstanding of Greenberg's theories. Kuspit believed that Greenberg's outline for painting was "a model of criticism that is deliberately philosophical." It did not rely on taste alone and was logical and coherent in presenting a point of view. This point of view showed how some of art worked within Modernism -- that part of painting, Cubism and Abstraction that was concerned primarily with the medium of painting. It was not meant to "rationalize the development of modern art or exhaust all its possible meanings." This was an important recognition on Kuspit's part of a fact that Greenberg repeatedly called attention to in his writings, but a recognition many of his critics either failed to
gain or chose to ignore. A critic or philosopher who tries to define too much or explore too many concepts in his writing -- be it an essay or a completely structured philosophical statement -- invites confusion and contradiction into his work. Greenberg realized he could not be responsible for including all of what happened in Modernism in his philosophical construct. He chose to restrict his definition to Cubism and Abstract painting, which were for him, the most significant forms of art in the Modernist period. Why, then, should he be held responsible for more than was accounted for in his philosophy. He presented his concepts in a clear and consistent body of work that made it easier for those who disagreed with him to understand and express the terms of their disagreement. This was no small contribution on Greenberg's part for those who followed and wrote about the rest of Modernism.

In spite of a very real admiration for the consistency and clarity of Greenberg's philosophy, Kuspit disagreed with Greenberg's view of Modernist painting in many significant ways. Kuspit found Greenberg's overriding concerns for the medium too limiting for the rest of painting. Painting for Kuspit, was grounded in life and not, as Greenberg insisted, in the medium of each
art. The subjective and expressive content of a painting Kuspolit referred to as "life reference" or "life meaning." He noted how the Expressionist painter was criticized by Greenberg for an excess of feeling that caused him to lose control of his medium. The Expressionist artists, Kuspolit explained, did not accept the limitation of means inherent in Greenberg's philosophy as did the Cubist and Abstract painters. For the Expressionist painter, art served life rather than life enriching and adding to art. The essence of life was feeling and art existed to mediate that feeling within the medium of painting. The medium must, in some way, convey the artist's feeling -- his intent -- even at the expense of the formal requirements of the medium. Life needed an "abundance of means" within art to express its own abundance and diversity. Kuspolit declared that art influenced life more than Greenberg was willing to admit. Abstraction and the concerns of the medium in painting were only part of the truth about painting and the intent of the artist and his personal feelings must be taken into account when interpreting a work of art.

Kuspolit faulted Greenberg for assuming a Godlike omnipotence in the delivery of his edicts on taste that admitted to no fallibility. Greenberg's pronouncements of
taste, Kuspit stated, were issued forth like a "last judgement." Kuspit objected to the terms Greenberg used to express his taste particularly as they applied to color in painting; spicy, sweet, saccharine, etc. -- terms that might be used when describing cuisine. In Greenberg's case, Kuspit stated, "the best dishes were served by French art." This metaphorical comparison seems inappropriate for the point Kuspit was attempting to make. What of Kuspit's preferences for German art. The same sort of assessment could be made of the psychological jargon Kuspit used to describe his taste for this kind of painting if anything were to be gained by such criticism.

Kuspit found that, for Greenberg, unity was the first requirement for a work of art. Greenberg discovered this unity, particularly in the medium of Cubist painting, and so Cubist painting became for him "the style with which an artist must make contact." This was unfortunate, in Greenberg's view, for an artist like Kandinsky whose abstract paintings were not grounded in Cubism but came out of German Modernism.

Unity in painting was essential for Kuspit too, but moved beyond the medium into "the life-world." Art unity was seen as not being significant to life and
the Expressionist painter, finding the medium
"intractable" to his needs for expression, sacrificed
unity for a intense and direct expression of life."

*     *     *

Both Krauss and Kuspit wanted more for painting
than Greenberg's philosophy would allow. Both, for their
own purposes, wanted the unconscious acknowledged as an
important element in any interpretation of painting.
Krauss insisted that, along with the optical, the
unconscious must be included in any consideration of a
work of art. For Kuspit, the artist's psyche should be
included in a psychoanalytical inquiry used to describe a
painting. Both Krauss and Kuspit took a position that can
be defined as anti-painting in its ramifications --
because of their refusal to deal with the formal facts of
the medium of painting. Both presented a view of painting
closer to Post-Modernism than the Modernism defined in
Greenberg's philosophy of painting. Their critical
perceptions raised questions of primary, even vital,
importance for all the plastic arts -- questions that will
most surely occupy writers and critics for the rest of
this century and into the next.
CHAPTER VI

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Pure Art in an Impure World

Clement Greenberg was consistent throughout the philosophy he systematically and, with clarity of thought and strong conviction, constructed for Modernist painting. Through his critical writings, he was able to show the importance of Modernist painting to the rest of art and to the general culture. He did this with a passion controlled by an inherent logic of thought and an attitude of responsibility that he felt toward all art.

Through the aptness of his critical acclaim, Greenberg advanced the painting of Jackson Pollock in the 1940's. By his espousal of many American artists in the fifties, mostly Abstract Expressionist painters, Greenberg was able to help establish the first indigenous school of Painting in this country, the New York School.

The realization of the supremacy of abstract painting over other painting being produced during this period was not a Greenbergian realization alone, but part
of a general consensus arrived at by many critics, art historians, and artists, and by much of the general public. Greenberg was able to realize this situation and use it as a basis for his philosophy for Modernism, especially as it applied to painting.

Greenberg saw himself, directed by the philosophic concepts he had formulated for Modernist painting, as one absolutely committed to the defense of painting's medium. He never faltered in that commitment even though, at times, he was tempted by some new and interesting, inventive, and skillfully made, almost perfect, work of art.

Greenberg ignored Freud for the same reasons he refused to recognize Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism, and the Romantics; his concern for painting's medium. It is not difficult to understand why Freudian theories regarding the unconscious, the interpretation of dreams, and psychoanalysis had little importance or relevance to Greenberg's formalist view of art. Freud did not fit into a Greenbergian vision for Modernist painting that kept the strictly optical separate from any other kind of imagined vision.

Neither did Freud enter into any consideration of the detached role Greenberg saw as proper for the painter
in Modernism. Matisse, alone, of all the Modernist painters, was able to maintain the kind of detachment Greenberg demanded of a painter. He was a representational painter, but in spite of this, it was Matisse, rather than Picasso, who Greenberg found was able to continually sustain the excellence of his painting and the purity of his medium. He remained apart from events going on around him to the benefit of his painting. Picasso, on the other hand, "... was incomparably sensitive to his age and milieu". This reactivity paradoxically caused Picasso's art to be great (when he produced Cubism) and later to become derivative and expressionistic (after 1926).

By now we can understand why Greenberg's options were limited as to what concepts could rightly be included in his philosophy for Modernist painting. By starting with Cubism and Abstract painting as the touchstones for his philosophy, and by realizing the need to make his philosophy logical and consistent, Greenberg was able to make the correct and necessary choices.
Present Day Confusions

Painting today seems to need a wider vocabulary to describe itself and a broader choice of medium to demonstrate its possibilities than a formalist view of art has to offer. Painting still claims its share of gallery space but in an uneasy coexistence with other, newer forms of art that constantly challenge painting's very existence. Abstract painting is still seen but expressionist elements in painting are more and more evident in the form of protest or problem art of both a personal and public nature. Few paintings anymore adhere to Greenbergian requirements for the medium of painting. Materials used in painting are of an endless variety that serves the artist's creative needs, not always with regard for the unity of the painting. Often the support of a painting serves these needs by not being limited to canvas and a rectangular frame but by being sometimes shaped, torn, or otherwise added to or altered in order to suit the individual painter's personal demands for expression.

Much has changed since Greenberg formulated his
definition for Modernism. Present day avant-garde is hard to define and the term is no longer valid or meaningful. Each new art and a succession of emerging artists have made a claim for avant-garde status, that carries with it a scant perception of what that term once signified for painting. Many artists desire the seeming advantage of being avant-garde and thus perceived as new and original in their art. They want the notoriety that the shock value of avant-garde art carries with it. Few are willing to accept the commitment to, and the responsibility for art's welfare along with what is seen as an onerous obligation to maintain high standards for all of art. In the past, these responsibilities were understood and accepted by the avant-garde.

The proliferation of new materials and technology available to the artist today has enriched, but at the same time, confused his art making. Too many artists, in their eagerness to incorporate these new constituents into their art, depend solely on the effects of the material or the process itself to do the job for them with little or no regard for the requirements of form, unity, and aesthetic content important to any art. Often the shock value of the material or of the idea presented replaces any other requirement for the artist and for the viewer as
well.

There is no scarcity of art. A wide variety of art is being produced at a rapid rate and a gallery or exhibition space appears almost immediately to accommodate it. Art writers come to the fore to elucidate its virtues or its faults.

There is a constant stream of printed commentary concerning art -- news stories and reviews of exhibitions. Almost every magazine, journal or newspaper contains an article about art regardless of that publication's size or substantive content. In spite of all the writing and discussion concerning art, no one seems quite sure how to tell good art from bad art or if the distinction really matters. Everyone is equipped with a ready vocabulary of adjectives to praise or condemn art but when asked about the criteria or standard on which their evaluation of a certain work of art is based, they are struck dumb. The old norms do not seem to apply and new ones are not yet established.

The present period is one of transition for the arts. This situation occasions a mixture of excitement, anticipation, some regret, and considerable dismay. Nonetheless, it is also a hopeful time with new talents emerging and new possibilities presented for art through
fresh concepts as well as through the materials and technologies already mentioned. Art seems to be progressing to some future not yet clearly envisioned.

The wrong directions that are taken by some art and artists today arise out of an apparent unwillingness to accept any standards for painting even those that are basic to any art. Some artists are reluctant to acknowledge the historical significance of painting past and present to their own art -- a serious and sometimes fatal ignorance.

The course of art does seem to proceed in something like the manner Greenberg outlined in his description of a dominant art that arises, advances, and affects the status of all the other arts as abstract painting did in the early part of the Twentieth Century.

Painting has become therapy, as Greenberg had explained could happen, with some galleries appearing to exhibit product from a group therapy session in the form of plastic art. Entertainment, or what was once considered entertainment and took place within a theater, is now part of the exhibition program of an art gallery, museum, the street, or other public space. The various forms by which art has presented itself are legion, and to list the names of these endeavors is a confusing, almost
endless task: Minimalism, Conceptualism, Color-Field Painting, Hard edge Painting, Op-Art, Pop-Art, Super-Realism, Photo-Realism, Performance Art, Happenings, Appropriation-Art, Funk Art, Earth Art, etc. A psychoanalytic approach to painting, outside of Abstraction, was inevitable given the many forms painting has assumed and the purposes it professes to follow -- that makes much of contemporary painting resistant to formalist interpretation. Kitsch, as Greenberg defined it, abounds for those who prefer that way of seeing.

Greenberg's "official" version of Modernist painting was one view of how painting proceeded in the first half of the century. Krauss's description of Surrealism and Kuspit's account of the Expressionist painters, were two distinctly different views of painting's development in the same period. All were valid recountings of how painting occurred within Modernism. The essential difference was that Greenberg was able to present his concepts of painting within the structured form of a philosophy that established norms, fixed limits, was clear in its meanings, and consistent throughout. Such fully enunciated concepts about painting were more persuasive to acceptance and offered more claims to rightness than any other view.
Clement Greenberg died this year at the age of 85. His philosophy for Modernist painting was his legacy to painting and to criticism. The concepts which structured his philosophy are still important to painting and will endure. For many, the most important part of Greenberg's legacy was establishing that American painting was mature enough in the 1940's to stand on its own merits and be recognized worldwide.
APPENDIX A

FIGURES
Figure 1. Gustave Courbet. *The Stone Breakers*, 1849, Oil on Canvas. 65" x 94"
(Painting lost during World War II)
Figure 2. Edouard Manet. *Le Déjeuner Sur L'herbe*, 1863, Oil on Canvas. 84 1/4" x 106 1/4"
The Louvre, Paris.
Figure 3. Edouard Manet. *Bar at the Follies-Bergere.* 1882. Oil on Canvas, 37" x 51" Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.
Figure 5. Paul Cezanne. *The Great Bathers*, 1904, Oil on Canvas. 81 7/8" x 98"
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.
Figure 6. Paul Cezanne. *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1906, Oil on Canvas. 28 3/4" x 36 1/4"
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.
Figure 8. Georges Braque. Composition With Violin, 1911, Oil on Canvas. 50 3/4" x 26"
Figure 9. Henri Matisse. *Red Studio.* 1911, Oil on Canvas, 71 1/4" x 86 1/4" Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Figure 10. Piet Mondrian. *Composition.*
1933, Oil on Canvas, 16 1/4" x 13 1/8"  
Modern Museum of Art, New York.
Figure 11. Max Ernst. *The Master's Bedroom.*
1920, Overpainting. 6 1/2" x 8 1/2".
Private Collection.
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