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A

THE ART CRITICISM OF HAROLD ROSENBERG
THEATERS OF LOVE AND COMBAT

by

ELAINE O'BRIEN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1997

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4/22/97
Date

RCW Lowe
Chair of Examining Committee

4/22/97
Date

RCW Lowe
Executive Officer

Dr. Mona Hadler

Dr. Marshall Berman

Dore Ashton

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Abstract

THE ART CRITICISM OF HAROLD ROSENBERG
THEATERS OF LOVE AND COMBAT

by

Elaine Owens O'Brien

Advisor: Professor Rose-Carol Washton Long

This dissertation situates the art criticism of Harold Rosenberg within his entire body of criticism and within the history of his time. It asserts that Rosenberg's art criticism had the same radical purpose as his political, social, and literary criticism: to combat the institutionalization of independent critical culture in the United States.

Part I, "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium," explores the social, literary and philosophical origins of Rosenberg's bohemian modernism, and concentrates on the vital importance of his "theater of love" - his intimate community of artists - the bonhomie, and especially the continuous dialogue.

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Plato's Socratic dialogue, the Symposium, is proposed as a model for Rosenberg's criticism and life.

Part II, "Making Harold Rosenberg: Self, Community, Conflict" overlays the ideal world of the Symposium presented in Part I with the personal and political realities of Rosenberg's downtown Manhattan bohemia in the nineteen thirties. Beginning with Rosenberg's first publications in little avant-garde magazines in 1930 when he was twenty four, it displays the transforming dynamic between Rosenberg's bohemian modernism and his marxism by way of his contributions to little avant-garde magazines like transition, Blues, Poetry, Symposium, and his own The New Act, as well as Communist Party magazines like the early Partisan Review and The New Masses. Rosenberg's experiences on the Federal Art Project and as editor of Art Front, the Artists Union magazine, and American Stuff for the Writers' Project are discussed at some length because of their impact on his later art criticism.

Finally, Part III, entitled "Aesthetic Assault," is about Rosenberg's "theater of combat." It documents his commitment to anti-bureaucratic intellectual culture from the thirties to the personal manifesto, "On the Fall of

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Paris," of 1940, to 1962, his first year as "The Art World" columnist of The New Yorker, to his death in 1978. "Aesthetic Assault" represents and situates Rosenberg's attacks on institutional art critics and curators in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Michael Fried, Henry Geldzahler, Rosalind Krauss, Hilton Kramer, and Robert Rosenblum and William Rubin.

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To my children, Laura and David
To my parents, Virginia and Dave
To my sister and brother, Kathleen and Jim

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation owes a lot to the help and encouragement of many people. First of all, I am indebted to Harold Rosenberg's daughter, Patia Yasin, for her trust and friendship, for her patient assistance through the two years it took to organize and catalog her father's papers, for her generosity in allowing me to draw constantly from her memory, and for her scrupulous, evenhanded review of this text. "My father is your father," Patia has assured me more than once - a joke that has helped me not to feel too ashamed of my avid curiosity.

I owe special thanks to Rosenberg's literary trustee and devoted friend, Michael Denneny, and to Dore Ashton for sponsoring and guiding my way into Rosenberg's world. Professor Rose-Carol Washton Long, my dissertation chair, read several drafts of this project. She helped temper, order, and cut an excessively long and tangential work, and I am grateful to her. Much gratitude goes also to the other members of my dissertation committee, professors Mona Hadler, Marshall Berman, and Dore Ashton, for their conscientious and expert readings.

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Nothing could be more just, nor give me greater pleasure, than to dedicate this dissertation to my children, Laura Hart and David Thomas, together with my brother and sister, Jim O'Brien and Kathleen Stark, and my parents, Virginia Owens and Dave Owens.

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Handley, Dick Howard, Irving Howe, Mike Kanemitzu, Vera Klement, Jerome Klinkowitz, Theresa Konsal, Hilton Kramer, Norma Kramer, Diana Liben, Nancy Macdonald, Cynthia Navaretta, Annalee Newman, Philip Pavia, Meyer Schapiro, Peter Selz, Rose Slivka, Leo Steinberg, Hedda Sterne, Melvin Tumin, Esteban Vicente, Naomi Vine, Joan Washburn, June Wayne, and Arthur Zachmary. I am especially indebted to Saul Steinberg for handing me the necessary key.

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The Art Criticism of Harold Rosenberg: Theaters of Love and Combat

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The Art Criticism of Harold Rosenberg: Theaters of Love and Combat

Introduction

What was written about history became history.

Claude Cernuschi[1]

"A packed, driving, brilliant, and effective piece," was Clyfford Still's appraisal of Harold Rosenberg's 1950 introduction to Marcel Raymond's From Baudelaire to Surrealism. But Rosenberg's introductory essay, "French Silence and American Poetry," had inspired the artist to more than praise. Why not, Still suggested, write the same kind of analysis of the new American abstract painting? *"With a comparably serious and understanding approach to the work of a few painters a body of significant criticism might appear for the first time on the American scene."*[2] After all, he reasoned,

> *The painters are fully as aware as the poets of their position and purposes. Indeed have we not all come through the same mill?* Name one? *I give you Mark Rothko, William Baziotes, Robert*

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Motherwell, all your good friends.[3]

Still's proposal was not sent to an art critic,[4] but to a poet and a literary and political New York Intellectual.[5] Though Rosenberg had written on art, what mattered to Still was the fact that Rosenberg had been at the heart of New York's downtown bohemia since the beginning of the nineteen thirties, and indeed was intimate with the *"positions and purposes"* of the artists of Abstract Expressionism. The appeal was made on the basis of friendship and shared attitudes. *"Certainly,"* Rosenberg agreed, *"something exists here that is well worth talking about."* Nevertheless he deferred: *"Perhaps if I live long enough,"* he told Still, *"I will get around to writing about that."*[6]

Two years later, after further requests from the editors of Les Temps Modernes who had been publishing his essays on other subjects, Rosenberg did get around to writing the kind of article Still had in mind. When "The American Action Painters" (never sent to Les Temps Modernes) appeared in the December 1952 issue of Art News,[7] it immediately and overwhelmingly *"went over,"* as Clement Greenberg recalled in 1990: *"They put it up on the mast and it flew. Everybody wanted to be an Action Painter."*[8]

At forty-six years of age Rosenberg came to sudden fame

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as an art critic: the kind of art-world celebrity that Andy Warhol would definitively represent in a few years - not the Everyman's fifteen minutes (Rosenberg has been "The Action Critic" interminably), but a presage nonetheless of the kind of American culture-industry packaging of radical art and ideas that Rosenberg's art criticism would tirelessly oppose.

By the early nineteen sixties Rosenberg's art criticism had been reduced and reified - shrink-wrapped - to the format in which it remains today with remarkable fixity. For the fifties art world, "The American Action Painters" became *"the manifesto of Abstract Expressionism."*[9] Tenaciously resisting every effort to undo it, it continues to represent Rosenberg almost entirely: a critic *"transformed"* observed Adam Gopnik in 1985, *"into [a] legendary, even mythological"* art world figure."[10] *"It is no mean accomplishment to have floated a cultural myth,"* was William Rubin's sardonic concession to Rosenberg at the conclusion of a 1967 Artforum quarrel.[11] In 1975 Lawrence Alloway complained that De Kooning criticism had still not escaped Rosenberg's imprint.[12] Indeed, in 1994 "The Last Action Hero" was Adam Gopnik's title for a New Yorker review of the most recent De Kooning retrospective.[13]

The myth of Action painting has proved so impassable

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that in 1992 Jackson Pollock's critical biographer, Claude Cernuschi, assigned it the status of a Kuhnian paradigm and concluded that its interpretive excess or accuracy *"no longer is the issue: what was written about history became history."*[14] One finds no sign that this situation is in any way changing. As I write this introduction at the end of 1996, Thomas Crow can still get knowing chuckles from a Museum of Modern Art audience with casual references to "the de Kooning orthodoxy" and "Cedar Bar dogma."[15] Crow was right to assume that the New York art world has always already known exactly what that means.

Something of what is meant by "Cedar Bar Orthodoxy" was captured by Red Grooms in a 1986 construction, The Cedar Bar *(figures 1 and 2)*. An insider art-world joke like a mock-up for a movie set, Grooms's piece represents the notorious nightly gatherings of Rosenberg's Abstract Expressionist circle in the early to mid-fifties, the beginning of its fragmentation, and the onset of its decline: the years when the popular version of Action Painting became the theoretical equivalent of the Cedar Bar, that is, saloon bravado raised to the level of myth, "dogma," or "orthodoxy." Here, as if cast in a gunfight scene for a grade-B Western, the Rosenberg figure enters the bar, his distinctive features and height caricatured by

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Grooms. Jackson Pollock, the only figure larger than Rosenberg, mounts the seat back of his booth belligerently, one foot braced on a table that is artlessly dripping with ketchup, mustard and maybe liquor. (One imagines it is also studded with cigarette butts and somewhere bears Pollock's hand print.) In Grooms's burlesque-house Cedar Bar, the scene, the painter, the painting, and the concept of Action Painting (with Rosenberg as its avatar) become metaphorical equivalents.

Reception

> *Once he has acted he can never return to himself....From now on he will be falsified; each institution of society will draw out his identity, like children playing with chewing gum, into a shape of its own.*
>
> Rosenberg, 1942

The climate of critical opinion in the American art world is the condition that most shaped Rosenberg's art criticism and has shaped his art historical reputation up to the present. It is thus the ground of this dissertation and the subject of this introduction. But Rosenberg in fact has

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had two nearly separate reception histories. He figures in every one of the numerous studies of both the New York Intellectuals and the New York School artists. And while it is usually (but not always) noted that Rosenberg the New York Intellectual was Rosenberg the art critic, rarely have serious connections been made between his literary, social, political and art criticism, or between his criticism as a whole, the intellectual life of downtown Manhattan in the thirties and forties, and the global concerns with which he was preoccupied. One of the principal goals of this dissertation is to retrace these connections.

Rosenberg has not lacked serious attention - some of the best minds of his time admired and debated his work - but understanding of his criticism has suffered seriously from the increasing segregation of intellectual life into academic specializations after the 1950s. His critics have looked at his work from the point of view of literature, politics, society, or art, but very rarely all of them and the significant overarching relations between them where Rosenberg's criticism was positioned.

Another obvious limiting condition of Rosenberg's reception has simply been one of length. His reception bibliography, over 140 pages long,[16] consists entirely of short pieces - reviews and articles, chapters and

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discussions in books - that inevitably treat his thought in an introductory and incomplete form. Among these the following are the most relevant to this project.

Stephen Foster's 1980 The Critics of Abstract Expressionism,[17] Annette Cox's 1982 Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society,[18] and The Political Origins of Abstract-Expressionist Art Criticism (1985) by James Herbert,[19] attend specifically to Rosenberg's art criticism and place it against its political background. These three studies focus on Rosenberg's concept of Action Painting, as does Fred Orton's essay, "Action, Revolution and Painting"(1991) - the most recent and sophisticated reading. By linking "The American Action Painters" to the marxist critical tradition and the history of American communism in the 1930s, Orton hoped to replace what he called *"the lazy existentialist-humanist reading that has become paradigmatic."*[20] Although I do not take Action Painting *per se* as my subject, like Orton I approach Rosenberg's art criticism historically through his global concerns as a public intellectual and biographically through his experiences with the cultural politics of the nineteen thirties; and like Orton's, my ambition is to open up the puny packaged readings of Rosenberg's thought. However, Orton's conclusions (and it seems his attitude toward

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interpretation) are different from my own. I would argue, for example, that Rosenberg's "marxism" was inextricable from his "existentialism" and "humanism." And overall I believe that the need is to allow Rosenberg's criticism to display its own unique shapes - its perpetually transforming dialectics - rather than to replace one "ism" with another.

The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985 (1987) by sociologist Diana Crane[21] depicts with empirical precision the institutionalization of contemporary vanguard art in the United States during the postwar decades: the circumstances that Rosenberg's art criticism opposed. Although Crane cites Rosenberg, among many others, there is no mention of his unique intervention. In fact, J. Hoberman's 1986 article, "Harold Rosenberg's Radical Cheek," for the Voice Literary Supplement,[22] is the only piece on Rosenberg that asked outright the most salient question of reception that this dissertation addresses - the question of why Rosenberg's many essays on the impact of cultural institutions like art criticism, museums and universities on independent American artists have gone uncited.

Marjorie Welish's essay for Art Criticism, "Harold Rosenberg: Transforming the Earth" (1985), dissected Rosenberg's critical corpus intricately, and there is little

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with which to quibble in her findings, except the difficulties that arose from an insufficiency of space for the author to display the great tumble of complex ideas, situate them historically and socially, and establish an integrating perspective on Rosenberg's thought.[23] Jonathan Fineberg's 1995 textbook survey, Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being, in a few scattered paragraphs and pages briefly but knowingly reintroduces a three-dimensional Rosenberg - art critic, public intellectual, and member of the Abstract Expressionist milieu - into the history of contemporary art.

This dissertation places great importance on Rosenberg's attitude toward his Abstract Expressionist community. Rosenberg has too often been considered exclusively a philosopher of the Self; he was equally a philosopher of community who advocated a "true collectivity" as the only means by which authentic individuality was possible. Two contextual histories of Abstract Expressionism have paved the way for my project. First is Dore Ashton's 1973 The New York School, A Cultural Reckoning, and then also Serge Guilbaut's 1983 How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Like this dissertation, both accounts presuppose the primary significance of the intellectual, political, and cultural environment and the interrelationships among New York intellectuals - artists

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and writers - especially in the nineteen thirties and forties, though in neither does Rosenberg play more than a minor role as one of many actors on the scene. This study puts him in the center of the downtown Manhattan bohemia that Ashton, like Rosenberg, perceived as an insider to have been an indispensable source of each individual's creative energy and development. It also shows Rosenberg's active critical engagement with his New York group's embattled international cultural/political situation from its beginning in the thirties through its canonization and institutional appropriation in the postwar decades: determining historical conditions that Guilbaut excavated carefully. How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art expanded the historiography of Abstract Expressionism out to the global and the political; it generated productive debates and new perspectives, and thus made the discursive field ready (as I believe it was not before) to see how Rosenberg's criticism functioned. Unfortunately, the author's anti-Americanism and moral dualism led him to what are to me implausibly simple interpretations. This narration of Rosenberg's odyssey through decades of critical engagement with the cultural politics of his era - engagements in which fair was often foul; and foul, fair - represents a more tragically complex and conflicted picture

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than Guilbaut's.

With perhaps less real enmity, Michael Leja's chapter on "The Formation of an Avant-Garde in New York," in Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s (1993), also underlines the crucial importance of the artists' milieu - the premise that *"the collective dimension of avant-gardism has often been ignored,"* and should not be.[24] In Leja's eyes, however, the New York "avant-garde" did not come together until after 1944-45 when it appeared to him that *"the driving force"* to collective identity was *"the logic of the market."*[25] By shifting the formation of the group forward more than a decade from the interwar to the postwar period, Leja is better able to impose what has been called "the terror of the present" on the past[26] - that is, he can thus more convincingly assert his own strong contemporary faith in the universality (and near exclusivity) of the profit-motive retroactively back on the artists of Abstract Expressionism. Leja's single answer to the complex question of why these artists created their famous community is to me unhistorical. Since my effort has been to maintain as much as I can of the historicity of Rosenberg's values, my depiction of his attitude toward his bohemian milieu as a "true collectivity" - a necessary source of moral courage and creative inspiration - will

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appear romantic and anachronistic against Leja's picture.

*

Because Rosenberg's dialectical critique always functioned against background, this dissertation concentrates on his attitude toward the situations that engaged his commentary. In the New York art world - his intimate everyday world - he performed both with and against the grain. As he himself defined it, his twofold task was on the one hand to expand and enrich the intellectual environment in which the artist makes art, and on the other to defend that space against what he saw as an aggressively encroaching mainstream culture. Rosenberg's double engagement structures this dissertation. Throughout I will be employing a diversity of terms that designate situation - location, place, stage, arena, background, theater, etc., and terms denoting situational postures of opposition and affirmation. Together they will define the polemic that I call, in an allusion to Rosenberg's dramatism, "theaters of love and combat."[27]

The "theaters" were concurrently social and ideological. As a way of life the theater of love was the Abstract Expressionist bohemia of downtown Manhattan that

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began for Rosenberg in the early 1930s and culminated between 1946 and 1952 - 1953. The theater of combat was the American art establishment of the sixties and seventies. The two communities represented two contending ideological perspectives that were dialectically related; both were stages for Rosenberg's art critical performance.

The reception of Rosenberg's art criticism remains predominantly the opinion of his antagonists in the theater of combat in the sixties and seventies. To identify that interpretive history's most significant misshapes, my strategy in this introduction is to document the fate of Rosenberg's identifying idea, Action Painting, using it as a kind of synecdoche to represent the reception as a whole. From a wide perspective, "action" as creative process is an ordering and validating principle of Rosenberg's criticism. Therefore, although it is not the subject of this dissertation, it is present throughout. Some sense of its meaning and misprision in the form of Action Painting is needed.

Questions generated by the reception literature are introduced as motives and as topics to be displayed in the chapters that follow. Further background material and brief chapter summaries will conclude this introduction.

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The Avatar of Action Painting

> *The critic...is thrown into the arena of conflicting interests and philosophies, and in order to make his way his criticism will have to become, in Baudelaire's now famous definition, 'partial, passionate and political'....Poetic criticism puts the critic in the same boat as the artist.*
>
> Rosenberg, 1968[28]

With "The American Action Painters" Rosenberg stepped fatefully into that Baudelairean boat with the Abstract Expressionists. They, and the independent artist type they exemplified, would always be the only art world figures that counted with Rosenberg. The same stormy conditions have battered them all in what David Anfam has aptly called *"this most contentious 'movement' of the twentieth century."*[29] In the same way "The American Action Painters" was, as another art historian of the period has observed, *"perhaps the single most controversial piece of critical writing to come out of the fifties, and certainly the most quoted."*[30]

No two-dimensional map could trace the vicissitudes of Action Painting. Symptomatic of the confusion and conflict it generated are the many diverging efforts to locate its source, which have ranged from Barbara Rose's assertion that Rosenberg was inspired by Hans Namuth's photographs of

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Jackson Pollock painting,[31] to Bryan Robertson's that it came from a conversation with Pollock himself,[32] to David Anfam's that the idea originated in World War II "action" photography,[33] to Robert Motherwell's that the source was Richard Huelsenbeck's "En Avant Dada,"[34] to Max Kozloff's that it was a grafting together of *"ideas from Sartre, something of Dada, and more conventional Expressionist notions of empathy,"*[35] to Pierre Restany's understanding that it was *"une supersynthèse de tout le volontarisme de l'art du XX siècle exporté par l'Europe."*[36]

Many have believed that with Action Painting Rosenberg imposed an entirely alien "literary" or "political" idea on the painters. David and Cecile Shapiro, for example, have argued that even first generation Abstract Expressionists used "The American Action Painters" as a program, *"so much so that those artists explaining themselves and their works frequently sounded like quotations"* of the critic.[37] To Michael Leja, these *"shrewd and ambitious artists"* of the forties were willing to *"fit the mold,"* of Rosenberg's concept of Action Painting and *"perhaps came to believe such readings of their work's importance and congruence."*[38] Other art historians, like Stephen Polcari, have dismissed Action Painting as an altogether misleading interpretation of the art. In his search for the historical and

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intellectual roots of Abstract Expressionism, Polcari has made a point of bypassing Rosenberg.[39]

*

From 1953 on attacks on Abstract Expressionism were attacks on its critic. Taking on a task that fit his confrontational intellect, Rosenberg became the artists' polemicist. When the painting was maligned, Rosenberg was attacked as the Elmer Gantry of a pseudo-tragic/sublime art - the emperor's tailor. With the appearance of "The American Action Painters" there began a tradition of criticism based on the assumption that this painting was a hoax (sometimes a dangerous one). Such attacks came from many angles - high and low, right and left. The best-known, Tom Wolfe's 1975 The Painted Word, caused a tempest in the art world when it first appeared in Harper's Magazine, and was well-received by reviewers who admired the critic's *"ability to spot a phony or pretentious trend."* It would, the blurbs still assure the prospective reader, *"confirm your darkest suspicions about modern art."*[40]

The Painted Word has been understood mostly as an attack on the critics, but it was the painting that was dismissed peremptorily. *"To say that Abstract Expressionism*

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was a baby that only its parents could love," Wolfe mocked,

> *...is not to downgrade its theorists in the slightest. Quite the opposite. For a good fifteen years, with nothing going for them except brain power and stupendous rectitude and the peculiar makeup of the art world, they projected this style, this unloved brat of theirs, until it filled up the screen of art history.*[41]

Hilton Kramer called his review of The Painted Word "The Revenge of the Philistines," but he shared Wolfe's attitude toward the painters and the critic who Kramer had opposed from the start. In 1995, Kramer would recall that his first attack on "The American Action Painters" in 1953, in which he belittled Hans Hofmann, Adolph Gottlieb and other artists for The Partisan Review, had "*opened every door for me. Suddenly the entire New York world considered me an important art critic.*"[42]

Another New York Times art critic, John Canaday, had so tirelessly persevered in his attacks on Abstract Expressionist painters and their critics as *"cheats, greedy lackeys, and senseless dupes,"*[43] to give the most egregious example, that in 1961 forty-nine New York artists, poets, art historians and intellectuals, including Rosenberg, Barnett Newman, Meyer Schapiro, Thomas Hess, John Cage, Irving Sandler, Stanley Kunitz and Robert Motherwell sent a now-famous letter of protest to the paper. Six hundred Times

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readers responded, 550 of whom backed Canaday.[44] It should be noted that this overwhelming vote against Abstract Expressionism and its critics did not come from a mob of philistines. On the contrary. It included artists like William Zorach and Isabel Bishop; Edward Hopper stood up for Canaday *as "the best and most outspoken art critic The Times has ever had."*[45]

Eminent conservative cultural critics Jacques Barzun and Daniel Bell have both accused Rosenberg of trumpeting the end of Western culture with the concept of Action Painting. In 1961 Barzun called it a late Romantic nihilism that would culminate in *"the elimination ...of all the high art of the last five centuries."*[46] Bell argued similarly in 1971 that Rosenberg, a "highbrow" critic, must be blamed for undercutting his own cultural tradition. Rosenberg's Action Painting essay had made him a *"formidably accurate prophet"* of the sixties' post-object performance art culture that Bell opposed.[47]

From another direction, prominent popular culture partisans and marxian revisionist historians of Abstract Expressionism continue to dispute the merits of the art and its critics for reasons of cultural politics familiar since the twenties: the political-moral issues of proletarian versus bourgeois culture, realism versus abstraction,

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marxism versus formalism.

One of the earliest of such attacks on Abstract Expressionism came in the spring of 1953, a few months after Art News published "The American Action Painters," from artists associated with Reality: A Journal of Artists' Opinions, formed specifically to counter the influence of Art News magazine. An editorial statement signed by a number of famous American realists, including John Sloan, Jacob Lawrence, Milton Avery, Edward Hopper, Guy Pene du Bois, and Philip Evergood, was a vehement polemic against Abstract Expressionism as *"a disease that is destroying the artistic life of the present,"* and that is promoted by *theories...fixed in a ritual jargon."*[48]

To these major American realists Abstract Expressionism was antihumanist because it took the formal means of painting as *"the true end of art, even to equate disorder with creation,"* rather than the depiction of *"man and his world."*[49] In the next issue of Reality Joseph Dodge wrote an essay entitled "A Reaction to Action Painters" in which he complained that though *"There is no audience for this kind of painting,"* Rosenberg *"pleads for more and better understanding."*[50]

The same month that Dodge's article appeared in Reality, March of 1954, Rosenberg felt obliged to defend

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both the art and his allegiance to it against a long vitriolic attack by Geoffrey Wagner in The Antioch Review, a literary quarterly. Wagner also targeted Clement Greenberg, Art News, and *"the new American painting"* he called the *"the drip, splash, gouge, spray, or rub-a-dub school"* - to him antihumanist and transparently fraudulent. But what Wagner most loathed were *"the 'action' directives so monotonously disseminated by the Gaulentern of Art News."*[51]

Rosenberg's response to The Antioch Review reasserted his unequivocal commitment to the painters. Countering Wagner's claim that contemporary American literature was incomparably superior to the new American painting, Rosenberg declared that the Action Painters possessed a vitality that had been missing from American literature for fifteen years.

> *"The literary avant-garde! Whom, in the name of Irving Babbitt, is Wagner talking about?....Actually the only creative movement in America in the past fifteen years has been in painting and sculpture....As a writer, I'm not happy about this, but it happens to be the case."*[52]

By this time Rosenberg had concluded that the literary avant-garde in America was almost completely absorbed into establishment cultural institutions, and until as late as 1957 the bohemian independence of the artists would be the

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stick with which he beat institutionalized writers:

> *Young painters and sculptors share a mood quite different from that of the* paterfamilias *of the universities, the quarterlies and the editorial offices; they neither look nor feel dull nor are they excessively 'mature.' It may be that many of them neglected either to go to college or to look for signals from the Partisan or Hudson Review.*[53] *(1957)*

*

The history of American art and art criticism has shown little interest in the critical tradition of The Painted Word. Yet (if nothing else) a knowledge of that tradition is a prerequisite for understanding the origin and evolution of Rosenberg's role as the artists' polemicist. The rhetorical space in which he operated, Abstract Expressionist criticism, appears less embattled and complex than in fact it was when the arguments of these critics are unrecorded. *"The history of postwar art in the United States has been told the same way again and again,"* Michael Kimmelman complained in 1994:

> *...Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and their fellow Abstract Expressionists took charge, first of New York, then the World. End of Story. We do well to remember that the art stars of the period, besides (Grandma) Moses, included Ben Shahn and John Marin. In exalted circles, praise was lavished on them during the postwar years. In 1950, Marin had a retrospective at the Venice*

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Biennale; in 1954 Shahn had one (as did de Kooning).[54]

A 1984 painting by Mark Tansey, Triumph of the New York School *(figure 3)*, lampoons the legend of triumphal imperialism that Kimmelman disputes. On a suitably mock-epic scale of 74 by 120 inches, Tansey's big cartoon-painting is surely a satire sparked by Serge Guilbaut's 1983 How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art and the academic war it incited.[55] Like Red Grooms's The Cedar Bar, Tansey's painting represents the cliché which, however tiresome to scholars of Abstract Expressionism like Guilbaut and Kimmelman,[56] still resists yielding completely to a more complex art history. On the left side of the vast monochrome canvas, dressed in the uniforms of the First World War, the School of Paris - Matisse, Picasso, Breton, et al. - surrenders to the New York School. Wearing the uniforms of the Second World War, Rosenberg (as General McArthur) stands behind Clement Greenberg (the Eisenhower figure) while the Abstract Expressionists look on.

The Academy of the Erased de Kooning

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> ***Almost two decades after the reign of Greenberg and Rosenberg art criticism was still haunted by their shadows....The repudiation of Abstract Expressionism in the 1960s was correlative with the repudiation of the concepts used to comprehend it.***[57]
>
> ***Donald Kuspit, 1993***

> ***From the perspective of today, American art of the 1960s - precisely because of its successful attack on abstract expressionism - shines as the colorful death mask of a classical avantgarde which in Europe already had been liquidated culturally and politically by Stalin and Hitler.***[58]
>
> ***Andreas Huyssen, 1986***

What has not been left out of American art history, indeed, what has been thoroughly documented, were the attacks on Abstract Expressionism from the post-Abstract Expressionist avant-garde. So much is this the case that at least through the nineteen seventies contemporary American art and art criticism can be read almost entirely as essays in the negation of Abstract Expressionism and its critics. In obvious and well-known ways this turned out to be a very successful enterprise. As Stephen Polcari has put it, *"In their wake an entire American art establishment has emerged. There were few American artists, critics, or modernist art*

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historians of the 1950s and early 1960s who did not cut their teeth on Abstract Expressionism."[59]

Only months after the December 1952 publication of "The American Action Painters," Robert Rauschenberg produced his famous emblematic obliteration of Action Painting, the Erased de Kooning Drawing, *"trying,"* he wrote, *"to purge myself of my teaching and at the same time exercise the possibilities."*[60] Rauschenberg's effort to liberate himself from the influence of his precursors marked the inauguration of what Rosenberg once dubbed "The Academy of the Erased de Kooning."

During these years the turbulent course of Action Painting was such that by 1971 poet, critic, and performance artist David Antin could joke with Rosenberg that the original version of it was still the best. Though Antin's improvisation theory was itself a de-dialecticized translation of Action Painting, his wit was to the point. From the beginning Action painting has been more or less equated with automatist gesture and thrown paint. In 1956 the poet, novelist and critic Randall Jarrell, inspired by a chimpanzee painter on television, wrote an Art News spoof entitled *"The age of the chimpanzee." "In the case of*

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Action Painting," Jarrell wondered, *"is it anything but unreasoning prejudice which demands that the painter be a man? Hath not an ape hands? Hath not an animal an Unconscious?"*[61]

Most commonly Action painting has been interpreted as an emotion-laden expressionism, *"according to which,"* explained a 1988 Art Journal survey of Abstract Expressionist historiography and criticism, *"the artists theatrically expressed their personal anguish on a blank canvas with little attention to form, style, and subject matter."*[62] Typically the "emotion" was virile and violent. *"What I saw, what I liked,"* explained Frank Stella, for example, of his origins in Action Painting in the mid- to late fifties, *"was the openness of the attack."*[63] In 1965, Barbara Rose summarized this development:

> *The worst excesses of self-indulgence and inept art that resulted from the elevation of mindless 'action' over self-conscious and critical deliberation were encouraged by [Rosenberg's] approach....It strikes me now as difficult to exaggerate how much art was produced under its influence.*[64]

For Rosenberg the passion of the intelligence subsumed physical and emotional passion, form making and thinking

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were a dialectical unity, and art was *"an act of the mind in which the body has its part."*[65] Thus he saw the popular anti-intellectual caricature of Action Painting as an inspiration for vacuous paintings - nothing more than *"mere stroking and slopping of paint."*[66] But at the same time he recognized that "*the fake and the real grow together and feed each other.*"[67]

Post- or dematerialized object art, performance art, and conceptual art have all been linked to Action Painting,[68] however these movements all collapsed one or more of the creative dialectics between making and thinking - the sine qua non of Rosenberg's art theory - and he repudiated them. When David Antin suggested that Robert Morris's concept of "formless" art - *"the detachment of art's energy from the craft of tedious object production"* - was a "déjà-vu" of Action Painting, it was Antin's own post-craft extemporaneous version of Action Painting that he had in mind.[69] To Rosenberg the various non-dialectical relaxations of the new art distinguished it fundamentally from Action Painting. In a 1975 interview, for example, he plainly stated why Conceptual art failed to measure up:

There's a reciprocal, or dialectical activity that

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> ***takes place in regard to all valid responses to painting. That's the trouble with pure conceptualism - that there is no backward play from the object to the ideas, and ideas very often need a manual confirmation, because when we use a medium, we add to our thinking.***[70]

Rosenberg's unceasing attempts to explain Action Painting failed to make a difference. There is no little mystery in this since on this point his definitions were unquestionably explicit enough. One wonders if Rosenberg's interpreters read him, or if for some reason they were not *able* to read him. To give one example of the directness of his many efforts, in 1967 he praised the precept of Henri Focillon's The Thinking Hand as something that should be posted *"on kiosks prominently placed throughout the art world"*[71] because "*with art thus defined no aesthetic premise is accepted as valid that does not anticipate that it will undergo alteration by the artist's engrossment in the sensuousness of his medium.*"[72] There is no ambiguity in such position statements; here the artist's manipulation of materials - at once sensual and conceptual - is laid out as axiomatic.

Rosenberg recognized that the notion of Action Painting *"keeps coming back"*; the problem for him was that it usually

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returned "*in a very vulgar form,*" which meant non-dialectical, most often neglectful of indispensable aesthetic struggles, like the effort to fit style to content.

> *...I mean, it came back in vulgar form in the Happenings, for example. And if I had wanted to be dogmatic about it I could have hailed this as a great logical development of Action Painting....but it struck me as a crude application of this notion, and why should we become advocates of our own ideas?*[73]

Just as the pivotal point of Action Painting as a dialectical creative process requiring both mind and hand was passed over, Rosenberg's critics in the post- Abstract Expressionist decades focused on his disregard for the new art and ignored his reasons. The long and passionate battle he waged against the institutionalization of contemporary critical-creative production, if mentioned at all, was dismissed as the roar of an old modernist lion unable to appreciate the new art. Here is a typical commentary from the International Herald Tribune in 1976: "*Rosenberg's fame, which coincided with abstract expressionism - or action painting - has not subsided, but now he has been stalking the scene as if waiting for the art of inner necessity to*

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reassert itself."[74]

Rosenberg complained in 1975 that,

> *Every time I write a book, The New York Times manages to find a reviewer who says, 'This fellow used to be an important critic, but in the past 10 or 15 years he doesn't know what is going on. We have video art, we have earth art, we have minimal art, and he doesn't like any of it, so there is something wrong with him."*[75]

In 1976, commentary on the English edition of Rosenberg's Art on the Edge - with the significant exceptions of Peter Fuller and Michael Baxandall[76] - likewise missed or trivialized the main point of the essays in this collection: the negation of the American cult of the object and the art establishment. Consensus opinion went instead with Tom Wolfe's The Painted Word, which was published and reviewed concurrently with Art on the Edge. Rosenberg's art criticism had had, as one writer put it, *"an exaggerated influence"* on two decades of art in America: *"an auto-destructive process in which the producer has taken over from the product, then the thinker from the producer and finally (in Conceptual Art) the thought from the thinker."*[77] As for Rosenberg's critique of the United States art world, *"he himself must take some of the blame,"*

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wrote Norbert Lynton for the Times Literary Supplement, for the affirmative culture he deplores.[78]

Rosenberg admitted his culpability on this to a Partisan Review interviewer shortly before his death:

> *Some of the worst art around today is definitely owing to my theories. No question about it. I can make a direct line from some of the works that I can least stand to a concept of action painting and various other ideas that I have let loose....I'm not sore. It's just that you can't tell what the logic of your ideas is in the minds of others.*[79] (1978)

The outstanding paradox of Rosenberg's reception is this tragic and comic irony of misinterpretation and influence that made him a force in creating the situation he condemned.

Rosenberg's Modernism

> *To be modern is basically to be timeless, to look not toward a future but toward Utopia, toward, as Rimbaud said, 'the happiness that none escapes,' a higher condition of man, the 'revolution in permanence,' that still-living dream conceived by the nineteenth century.*
>
> *Rosenberg, 1974*[80]

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Rosenberg's meaning is lost if his art criticism is not read as a dialogue with his time, particularly its controversies over the nature of modernity and modernism. However, to precisely single out Rosenberg's modernism from a hypothetical lexicon of modernism imagined by Fredric Jameson as *"a four- or five-dimensional affair,"*[81] cannot be my goal in this introduction. Instead I will quickly trace its silhouette here, allowing a more three-dimensional portrait to emerge from the chapters that follow.

First, Rosenberg's modernism is axiomatically an independent stance - that is, it is on principle unaffiliated with any collective ideology. Its radical purpose, however, is far from unique. Indeed, it overlays with some remainder what Jameson has agreed with Perry Anderson is *"the deepest and most fundamental feature shared by all the modernisms"*:

> *...their hostility to the market itself. The centrality of this feature is then confirmed by its inversion in the various postmodernisms, which even more wildly different from each other than the various modernisms, all at least share a resonant affirmation, when not an outright celebration, of the market as such.*[82] (1991)

While many would argue with Jameson and Anderson as to

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whether or not hostility to the market is the common ground *"shared by all the modernisms"* (and affirmation of the market the fundamental principle of the various postmodernisms[83]), their marxian paradigm of modernism as a culture critical of prevailing social conditions suits Rosenberg's modernism. This dissertation is in fact structured on Rosenberg's negative dialectic, at once opposing the status quo and affirming the future-seeking creative present. For him to be modern was essentially

> ...a *willingness to go as far as was necessary into nothingness in order to shake off what was dead in the real. A negation of the negative.*[84]

The conceptual relationship between Rosenberg's modernism and his marxism as it matured in the 1930s is examined at length in the second part of this study. What I want to point to here as distinctive is that Rosenberg's marxian[85] and bohemian repudiation of capitalism and consumer culture was from the mid-thirties the ground of an antitotalitarian metacritique of the bureaucratization of intellectual culture. That is, Rosenberg's ongoing critique of cultural officialdom ultimately did stand on a hostility toward the prevailing socio-economic conditions of postwar America. His increasingly desperate concern was the fate of

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the independent artist trying to work in such circumstances. Always occasional, even at the height of his enthusiasm for revolutionary communism in 1935-36, his essays never took as their object group abstractions like "class," "masses," or "market," except to condemn such thinking. Rosenberg's target was specific establishment intellectuals (who were infallibly named) acting in particular institutional circumstances, whether the Communist Party U.S.A., the university, or the art museum. He never wrote for "the workers" or "the cultural elite"; his essays were reciprocal dialogues with like-minded individuals.

For the purposes of this dissertation Rosenberg's modernism can be understood as synonymous with the avant-garde,[86] generally regarded, as by Renato Poggioli, as a *"culture of negation"*[87]: the political and aesthetic permanent revolution stemming from the era of Henri de Saint Simon. Rosenberg's modernist artist is alienated from, and constantly critical of middle-class society and its commodity ethos. Rosenberg's own oxymoronic formulation, "the tradition of the new," captures the inherently paradoxical nature of his oppositional modernism - its defining Baudelairean dialectic of continuity *and* change.[88]

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In his essays modernism is both an historical period - loosely the century between 1848 and 1946-1953, and a radical critical posture that, as he explained in 1974, *"overlaps upon the art of today."*[89] Throughout this dissertation I will employ adjectives such as "radical," "adversarial," "vanguard," and occasionally "classical," to characterize Rosenberg's modernism, in particular to set it against the contemporaneous Greenbergian modernism, by which I mean the aggregate of academic appropriations of Greenberg's postwar modernist criticism - affirmative,[90] apolitical, historicist, formalist, official - that dominated so many university art history classrooms and studios in the United States in the sixties and seventies. The adversarial, anti-institutional stance of Rosenberg's modernism might in fact be overstressed for readers outside Anglo-American art history.[91] However, I have felt it necessary to repeatedly underline the point of Rosenberg's negative culture critique because it seems the rubble (it has long been a ruin) of the art establishment monolith, Greenbergian modernism, still makes many art historians stumble over the idea of an oppositional, anti-establishment modernism.

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An understanding of the tragic nature of Rosenberg's late avant-garde modernism - a perpetual opposition to the way things are with no expectation of changing them - is crucial for critical commentary that spans the cultural crisis of the third quarter of this century - between Abstract Expressionism, the last modernist art movement, and the postmodernist reactions against it. As intellectual history, Rosenberg's art essays document the shift from bohemian European modernism to its canonized de-radicalization in American cultural institutions in the postwar decades, and the emergence of an affirmative postmodern art and criticism.

Operating within the American art world at the height of its international prestige, Rosenberg's negative critique shared the concerns and critical strategies of Western marxists associated with the Frankfurt School, the French left, and his own group, the New York Intellectuals. It acted as a foil to postmodern critics like Susan Sontag, who called for an affirmation of the autonomous, apolitical culture of the sixties, and rejected the modernist and marxian equation of form and content that, in Sontag's words, reduced works of art to "*sociological, cultural,*

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moral or political documents."[92]

The Crisis of the Mind

> *We later civilizations...we too now know that we are mortal....And we see now that the abyss of history is deep enough to hold us all. We are aware that a civilization has the same fragility as a life. The circumstances that could send the works of Keats and Baudelaire to join the works of Menander are no longer inconceivable; they are in the newspapers.*
>
> Paul Valéry,
> "The Crisis of the Mind," 1919

> *It is generally conceded that Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting were manifestations of genuine creative strength. It has never been decided, however, whether this grand surge emanating from New York represented an end or a beginning.*
>
> *Rosenberg*
> *Interview for New York/Paris exh.*
> *Opening of Centre Beaubourg, 1975*

What most separated Rosenberg's art criticism from that of the art critics who appeared in the sixties was an attitude toward the status quo. But it was the deeper

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motivational difference *behind* the attitude - Rosenberg's essentially eschatological apprehension of his era's crisis of the mind - that made nonconformist culture a moral imperative to him, and gave his essays a dissonant sound in the American art world of the sixties and seventies. In 1966 Rosenberg represented the situation this way:

> *By the middle of the 1950's the pervading acridity of the years immediately following the War, brought on by memories of the war dead, the return of the mutilated, the images of the death camps, of Hiroshima, had been largely dissipated. The feeling of crisis was no longer pressing, no longer popular....Amid the lasting American prosperity, the displays of national power, the moratorium on politics, to act in the tone of the critical issues of the epoch demanded a steady historical outlook possessed by few.*[93]

Rosenberg was an intellectual of the thirties. When the sixties began he was in his mid-fifties and had been a public critic for a quarter of a century; he had long-since acquired an *"eagle's eye view of the twentieth century,"* as Mary McCarthy described it,[94] from which to view the situation for contemporary American art. Like his admired precursor Paul Valéry, Rosenberg was first of all an advocate of independent creative intelligence, and he worried about its chances for survival. What if *"the*

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***circumstances that could send the works of Keats and Baudelaire to join the works of Menander*" - the circumstances that so concerned Valéry after World War I - were the conditions of culture that prevailed by the 1960s in the United States? Since Rosenberg's exceptionally ambitious sense of his critical task is basic to an understanding of all that follows, I want to devote a few pages to underscore it here.**

In other circumstances there would have been nothing remarkable about Rosenberg's Valérian vision of the fragility of civilizations. It is, after all, the sense of urgent cultural crisis that accounts for the close relation between Rosenberg's thought and that of social philosophers of the interwar and immediate postwar period like Buber, Bakhtin, Sartre, Adorno, and of course others. It is a venerable idea and an *idée fixe* of American intellectuals - artists and writers - of Rosenberg's generation.[95] In 1948, for instance, Felix Frankfurter expressed his own deep concern for the fate of the intellect in the United States by quoting Alfred North Whitehead's striking formulation:

> *The Aegean Coastline had its chance and made use of it; Italy had its chance and made use of it; France, England, Germany had their chance and made*

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> *use of it. Today the Eastern American states have their chance. What use will they make of it? That question has two answers. Once Babylon had its chance, and produced the Tower of Babel. The University of Paris fashioned the intellect of the Middle Ages.*[96]

Frankfurter then concluded with the question that troubled Rosenberg: *"The awful question that confronts American universities is, What are they doing with their power and their duty?"*[97]

But there seemed to be little concern in the American academic art world of the sixties and seventies for *"the awful question"* of the duty and power of the university. It was within this disjunction of values and historical perspectives that Rosenberg's art essays were positioned and took on their eschatological fire, their characteristic cadences of prophecy meant to magnify the task of intellectual culture in the imaginations of American artists and the new generation of art historian critics and curators.

By the seventies he was worrying that the crisis of the mind might extinguish culture altogether. *"It is possible for an epoch to be struck dumb,"* he jotted on a note to himself.[98] In 1975 he cautioned a university audience that,

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> *...there's a fundamental faith in the ability of the human mind to conceive something significant all over again regardless of how black any given situation is. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that many cultures have died out! They've become incapable of creating anything.*[99]

Writing to John Nef, a colleague on The University of Chicago Committee on Social Thought, about Nef's book, The United States and Civilization, an analysis of this question, Rosenberg revealed the depth of his concern:

> *Today, the U.S. has taken over the leadership of the Western World in literature and the arts. Are we up to enhancing this heritage, or even preserving it? (A society that cannot create valid forms becomes the graveyard of those it inherits from the past).*[100] (1971)

The question of the whether the United States would become the graveyard of Western culture was posed over and over again. In a 1976 talk on American Art for the Smithsonian Institution he presented it this way:

> *That the rise of American art coincided with the decline of Europe has placed the United states in a pivotal position in regard to the future of culture. If excellence in the arts - and all that this signifies for societies - depends in great measure on the creative capacities of the United States, is there reason to believe that the values that have descended to us from the tradition of the West are safe in our hands?*[101]

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From this perspective the intransigence of Rosenberg's dedication to his own bohemian milieu appears fitting, as does his corresponding hostility to the institutional appropriation of the avant-garde. His theaters of love and combat emerged in the early sixties from a historical situation that was, I think, pervaded for him not just with a sense of lateness, but with a sense of being too late. As if he believed it could (though he did not) he tried to make his art criticism affect what seemed the fated course of things, and raised the pitch of his irony to an often brilliantly colored hyperbole. His singular essay style was the formal equivalent of his message, changing in response to the theater in which he was acting.

*

Rosenberg expected to be falsified, as he put it. Moreover, it might be said that in other ways he got the reception he anticipated and even invited. An ironic fragment epitomizes his view of the absurdity of historical immortality:

The meaning of life is to attain the intoxication

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> ***of floating in the shining aspic of potential lastingness while being conscious that one has already been changed into a phantom.***[102]

More than absurd, I think the ambition to stay in history was to him a failure of existential nerve and antithetical to the critical task he set for himself because it sacrificed the present for the future and was therefore potentially authoritarian:

> ***The success of totalitarian movements has owed much to the philosophy that all party members escape the organic context and enter into that of History.***[103]

"The inevitability of its doom keeps Tenth Street pure,"[104] he remarked elsewhere with easy graveyard humor about his own ontological location; and the same tragic consciousness of historical annihilation would keep the public intellectual pure - in the way that Tenth Street was pure.

Rosenberg's principle of intellectual independence was antithetical to the idea of creating disciples. To correctly follow Rosenberg would be to follow oneself. Perhaps for this reason his own words - *"No one stays in History forever"*[105] - were selected by his students at the University of Chicago for his epitaph in the school paper.

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The epigone as a type was too redolent of the bureaucrat for this ardent enemy of apparatchik intellectualism. It is not surprising to read his irritable response to Partisan Review interviewer, sociologist Melvin Tumin, an admirer who pressed Rosenberg with the question of influence. Rosenberg insisted: "*I don't want them to become like me....I don't want to create a crowd of art critics. I don't want them to write about art.*"[106] In 1993 Tumin still thought that "*Harold made a mistake....It won't last because he wouldn't formulate. He didn't care about disciples.*"[107]

Rosenberg's prejudice against the younger Ph.D. art historian critics precluded any desire to win them over. The passive persona of the bureaucrat and follower in which he cast them was the opposite of the independent artist type with whom he identified and to whom he was dedicated. These were the adversaries who played their parts in Rosenberg's theaters of love and combat.

*

"Harold Rosenberg's Symposium," Part I of this dissertation, begins with Rosenberg's "ideal world," as he

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called it. It explores the social, literary and philosophical origins of Rosenberg's bohemian modernism, and concentrates on the vital importance of his intimate community of artists, the bonhomie, and especially the continuous dialogue.

Part II, "Making Harold Rosenberg: Self, Community, Conflict" overlays the ideal world of the Symposium with the personal and political realities of Rosenberg's downtown Manhattan bohemia in the nineteen thirties. Beginning with Rosenberg's first publications in little avant-garde magazines in 1930 when he was twenty four, it displays the transforming dynamic between Rosenberg's bohemian modernism and his marxism by way of his contributions to little avant-garde magazines like transition, Blues, Poetry, Symposium, and his own The New Act, as well as Communist Party magazines like the early Partisan Review and The New Masses. Rosenberg's experiences on the Federal Art Project and as editor of Art Front, the Artists Union magazine, and American Stuff for the Writers Project are discussed at some length because of their impact on his later art criticism.

Finally, Part III, entitled "Aesthetic Assault" after a 1937 Rosenberg polemic for The New Masses, documents his

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commitment to anti-bureaucratic intellectual culture from the thirties to the personal manifesto, "On the Fall of Paris," of 1940, to 1962, his first year as "The Art World" columnist of The New Yorker, to his death in 1978. Among other things, I hope to show that the art criticism had the same radical purpose as the political, social, and literary criticism: to combat the institutionalization of independent critical culture in America. "Aesthetic Assault" overlays the first two parts of the dissertation in an effort to complete, in his theater of combat, a display of the full polemical sweep of Rosenberg's art criticism.

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Endnotes:

1.Claude Cernuschi, Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance (New York: HarperCollins, 1992):308.

2.Clyfford Still letter to Rosenberg, 5 January 1950. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

3.Ibid.

4.On contemporary American art Rosenberg had written *"Introduction à la peinture modèrne Américaine"* for the 1947 Galerie Maeght exhibition in Paris, an essay that appeared again two years later in possibilities 1 (Winter 1947/8) with a prose poem, "Shapes in a Baziotes Canvas." The single-issue artist-run magazine, in the tradition of the independent avant-garde "little magazine," represented new currents in art, literature, music, and architecture. Rosenberg's joint statement as writing editor, with Robert Motherwell, art editor and general editor, is frequently cited by scholars of Abstract Expressionism.

5."Intellectual" is capitalized here and throughout this dissertation to distinguish a particular group of intellectuals defined by Irving Howe as *"The intellectuals of New York who began to appear in the thirties, most of whom were Jewish. The leading critics were [Philip] Rahv, [William] Phillips, [Lionel] Trilling, Rosenberg, [Lionel] Abel, and [Alfred] Kazin. The main political theorist was [Sidney] Hook. And the recognized scholar, and also inspiring moral force, was Meyer Schapiro."* See Howe, "The New York Intellectuals," Decline of the New, note p.215, and p.228. For a more complete list of New York Intellectuals, see Neil Jumonville, Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991):239-240, note 19.

6.Rosenberg, Letter to Clyfford Still, 14 January 1950, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

7.According to Rosenberg, he refused to give "The American Action Painters" to Les Temps Modernes because Sartre had misrepresented his views on Marx in a previous issue of the magazine and refused to publish a correction. He preserved a

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friendship in these years with Simone de Beauvoir and with Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose antitotalitarian postwar Marxism was close to his own. According to Claude Lefort, Merleau-Ponty maintained *"une grand estime intellectuelle pour lui,"* and in 1956 asked Rosenberg to write the essay on Marx for Les Philosophes Célèbres because he thought Rosenberg *"la seule personne...capable d'écrire quelque chose de neuf et de libre sur Marx."* [Claude Lefort letter to me, 16 September 1993].

Elaine de Kooning took "The American Action Painters" to Thomas Hess for Art News, and edited it for the Art News readership. See Paul Cummings interview of Rosenberg, The Archives of American Art, New York.

8.Clement Greenberg interview, New York, 22 June 1990. As it turned out, Clyfford Still took Rosenberg's essay as a personal insult and reacted with outrage.

9.Barbara Rose, "Hans Namuth's Photographs and the Jackson Pollock Myth," Arts Magazine 53 (March 1979):113.

10.Adam Gopnik, "The Anxious Critic," a review of Art & Other Serious Matters, Art in America (September 1985):17.

11.William Rubin, Letter to the editor, Artforum 5 (April 1967) Rosenberg responded in this issue to Rubin's revisionist essay, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition" (Artforum, February 1967). He agreed with Rubin that the idea was "non-applicable" to Pollock or to any one painter; he had stated as much in the first line of the original piece. Rubin did not respond to Rosenberg's effort to explain the "dialectical function of such a non-applicable definition or myth."

12.Lawrence Alloway, "De Kooning: Criticism and Art History," Artforum 13 (January 1975):46-50.

13.Adam Gopnik, "The Last Action Hero," The New Yorker (23 May 1994):83-88.

14.Cernuschi, Jackson Pollock, p.308.

15.Comments of Thomas Crow following his lecture, "The Fifties Avant-Garde and the American Interior," The Museum

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of Modern Art, New York, 4 November 1996.

16.I refer here to my annotated working bibliography.

17.Stephen Foster, The Critics of Abstract Expressionism (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Research P, 1980).

18.Annette Cox, Art As Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Research P, 1982). Cox's interpretation of the relationship between Rosenberg's art criticism and his politics is based on fundamental empirical errors and is entirely different from my own. For example, Cox asserts wrongly that Rosenberg had been a member of the CPUSA, a Stalinist who *"believed that the cultural program of the Communist Party offered him the means to join American cultural life"*(131), that he had once *"demanded that painters use their art to further socialist revolution"* (132), and that his 1940 essay, "On the Fall of Paris," was about New York having replaced Paris as the culture capital of the world, which Cox also claims Rosenberg celebrated.(139)

19.James D. Herbert, The Political Origins of Abstract-Expressionist Art Criticism: The Early Theoretical and Critical Writings of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, Stanford Honors Essay in Humanities, (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1985). This dissertation contests Herbert's view that Rosenberg, like Clement Greenberg, did an about-face turn from a political to a depoliticized cultural politics after World War II(15), that Rosenberg did not create a theory and method of politics and art until around 1948, and that Rosenberg detached Action Painting from history and from modern art.(30)

20.Fred Orton,"Action, Revolution and Painting," The Oxford Art Journal 14, no.2 (1991):3. Reprinted in Orton and Griselda Pollock, Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1996):178.

21.Diana Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987).

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22.J. Hoberman, "Harold Rosenberg's Radical Cheek, Voice Literary Supplement (May 1986):10-13.

23.Marjorie Welish, "Harold Rosenberg: Transforming the Earth," Art Criticism 2, no.1 (1985):10-28.

24.Michael Leja, Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s (New Haven: Yale U P, 1993):note 10, p.334.

25.Ibid, p.31.

26.Leja does present behavior that does not fit his image of artists whose primary ambition was to get into the *"network of institutions they wanted to enter."*(22) For example, he found it striking that none of them were *"willing to work in concert to develop a set of stylistic features and formal innovations that would serve as a basis for collective identity."*(29)

On the historiographical fallacy of "*subjecting the past to the terror of the present,*" see David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen, "Modernism and the Experience of Modernity," in Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism (New York: Columbia U P, 1989):3-6; citation, p.5.

27.Rosenberg's "dramatism" is his Action philosophy - an anti-structural cognitive model, and the elastic thread that runs through his work and life. The coherence between his dramatism, his biography, and his criticism should be evident throughout this dissertation.

28.Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," The New Yorker (10 February 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.172.

29.David Anfam, "Of War, Demons and Negation," Art History (1993):479-485.

30.Phyllis Rosenzweig, "The Fifties: Aspects of Criticism in New York," in The Fifties: Aspects of Painting in New York, exh.cat., The Hirshorn Museum, Washington, D.C., May 22 - September 21, 1980, p.15.

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31.Barbara Rose,"Hans Namuth's Photographs and the Jackson Pollock Myth: Part One: Media Impact and the Failure of Criticism," Arts Magazine 53 (March 1979):112-16. Reprinted in Barbara Rose, ed., Pollock Painting, Photographs by Hans Namuth (New York: Agrinde Publications Ltd., 1980):np.

32.Bryan Robertson, Jackson Pollock (New York: Abrams, 1960). See Rosenberg's response to Robertson's claim in his review of Robertson's book, "Search for Jackson Pollock," Art News 59 (February 1961):35. Parker Tyler wrote a letter to the editor of Art News (March 1961) corroborating Rosenberg's version as a witness to the conversation between Pollock and Rosenberg in which the idea of the act in painting was discussed.

33.David Anfam, Abstract Expressionism (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1990):13.

34.For Motherwell's remarks on the origin of Action Painting, see Max Kozloff, "An Interview With Robert Motherwell," Artforum 4 (September 1965).

35.Max Kozloff, "The Critical Reception of Abstract Expressionism," Arts Mazazine 40 (December 1965):30.

36.Pierre Restany, L'autre face de l'art (Paris: Galilee, 1979).

37.David and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," (1977) in Francis Frascina, ed., Pollock and After: The Critical Debate (New York: Harper & Row, 1985):140.

38.Michael Leja, "The Formation of an Avant-Garde in New York," in Michael Auping et.al., Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987):29.

39.See Stephen Polcari's introduction to Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1991).

40.These are comments by John Barkham and Judson Hand, reprinted on the inside cover of Tom Wolfe, The Painted Word (New York: Bantam, 1976).

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41.Wolfe, The Painted Word, p.69.

42.Kramer, quoted by Charles Kaiser, "He Bites," New York Magazine (13 February 1995):75.

43.John Canaday, quoted by John O'Neill ed., Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990):124. Barnett Newman, in a review for Art News (vol.61, September 1962) of Canaday's collected Times reviews, Embattled Critic, claimed that the popular success of the letter had inspired Canaday with the *"brazen purpose"* of *"playing to the gallery"* by publishing the book. Newman: *"I am told... [Canaday] asks and gets $1,000 a lecture to tell his sad story of the letter - a high enough price for a moralist."*(125)

44.David and Cecile Shapiro, eds, Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990):122-125.

45.Edward Hopper quoted by David and Cecile Shapiro, eds, Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990):editors' note, p.125.

46.Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961):141.

47.Daniel Bell, "Sensibility in the 60's," Commentary 51 (June 1971):63. A version of this article is chapter three, "The Sensibility of the Sixties," in Bell's The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

48."Editorial Statement," Reality: A Journal of Artists' Opinions 1, no.1 (Spring, 1953). Reality only ran three issues, and for the most part was comprised of vitriolic letters complaining about abstract art and its supporters. It was clearly a moral issue. Contributors to Reality wrote anti-abstraction articles with titles such as "Man is the Center" by Jack Levine or "Humanism in Art" by Honore Sharrer.

49.Ibid.

50.Joseph Dodge, "A Reaction to Action Painters," Reality 1 no.2 (Spring 1954):10.

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51.Geoffrey Wagner, "The New American Painting," The Antioch Review 14 (March 1954):3-12.

52. Rosenberg, "Letters: 'New Painting: Old Song and Dance," The Antioch Review 14 (Summer 1954):251-252.

53."Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer 1957). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.257.

Insight into how the changing cultural tides - the ebb of American vanguard literature and the rise of American vanguard painting - determined Rosenberg's own choices, comes from the literary critic and public intellectual Irving Howe:

> *Greenberg and Rosenberg were very lucky....They had come along at a time when there was a major new movement in American art....In literature we had no equivalent. By the time he came up with the Action Painters the literature of Modernism was already...a finished product pretty much. There's nothing better for a critic....I envied him that very close relationship that he had with the painters.* [Irving Howe interview, 21 August 1990].

54.Michael Kimmelman, "Painting by Numbers: How Bad Was It?" The New York Times Sunday "Arts and Leisure" section (9 October 1994):34. See also Kimmelman's "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," a contribution to John Elderfield, ed., The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994):38-55.

55.On the disputes over How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, see Kimmelman's "Revisiting the Revisionists," cited above.

56.Though Kimmelman's revision answers and opposes Guilbaut's, both question the triumphalism of Abstract Expressionism.

57.Donald Kuspit, "Critics, Primary and Secondary," catalog essay, American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913-1993, Cristos Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal, eds., David Anfam, coordinating editor. (Munich: Prestel-

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Verlag, 1993):148,149.

58.Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1986):168.

59.Stephen Polcari, "Abstract Expressionism: 'New and Improved,'" Art Journal (Fall 1988):174.

60.Robert Rauschenberg quoted by Mary Lynn Kotz, Rauschenberg, Art and Life (New York: Abrams, 1990):82.

61.Randall Jarrell, "The age of the chimpanzee," Art News 56 (Summer 1956):35. This piece was followed by Meyer Schapiro's "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," a counterstatement to Jarrell's.

62.Stephen Polcari, "Abstract Expressionism: 'New and Improved,'" Art Journal (Fall 1988):174.

63.Frank Stella quoted by William Rubin, Frank Stella (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970):9-10.

64.Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," Art in America 53(October/November 1965), in Gregory Battcock, Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (New York: E.P.Dutton & Co., 1968):282.

65.Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," The New Yorker (25 May 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.219.

66.Rosenberg, "Image as Counterforce," Art News 66 (February 1966):48.

67.Rosenberg, "From Pollock to Pop: Twenty Years of Painting and Sculpture," Holiday 39 (March 1966):104. Not collected.

68.The link between Action Painting and the "theatrical" tradition in post-Abstract Expressionist art is well-documented. See, for example, David Antin, "Déja-vu," Art News 70 (Summer 1971):50-53, 63-65; William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," Artforum 5 (February 1967):14-22; Barbara Rose, Claes Oldenburg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970): 33, note 3; Henry M. Sayre, The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989); Pamela Lehnert, An American

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Happening: Allan Kaprow and a Theory of Process Art, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill dissertation (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1989). Allan Kaprow affirmed the influence of "The American Action Painters" on Happenings in conversation with me (La Jolla, California, 23 September 1992). See also correspondence between Kaprow and Rosenberg in the 1960s, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

69.David Antin, "Déja-vu," Art News 70 (Summer 1971):50-53, 63-65; and letter to Rosenberg from David Antin, 24 May 1971, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

70.Rosenberg, James and Caryn Walker interview, 1 January 1975, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York

71.Rosenberg, "Hypothesis for Criticism," The New Yorker 43 (23 September 1967). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation p.130.

72.Ibid., p.127.

73.Ibid.

74.Vivien Raynor, Review of Art on the Edge, by Harold Rosenberg, International Herald Tribune, 15 January 1976.

75.Rosenberg, "All About Everything," an edited version of a public interview conducted by Howard Conant at an NYU Art-Critics-in-Residence public lecture, Craft Horizons (August 1975). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.219.

76.See Peter Fuller, "Reflections on Art Criticism," Studio International 193 (September/October 1976); and Michael Baxandall, "Marketeers," a review of Art on the Edge, New Statesman (16 January 1976).

77.Nigel Gosling, "Modern Art in the Mortuary," review of Art on the Edge (London: Secker and Warburg), The Observer (London), 1 February 1976.

78.Norbert Lynton, "Drums Along the Hudson," review of Art on the Edge (Secker and Warburg) and Discovering the Present (Chicago), Times Literary Supplement (16 April 1976).

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79.Rosenberg, "What is Art? An Interview by Melvin Tumin with Harold Rosenberg," Partisan Review 45 (Fall 1978). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.267.

80.Rosenberg, "The Old Age of Modernism," The New Yorker (5 August 1974). Reprinted in Art on The Edge; this citation, p.282.

81.Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke U P, 1991):304.

82.Ibid., pp.304-305.

83.For an opposing view of the cultural politics of "postmodernism," Hal Foster, for example, in his editorial preface to The Anti-Aesthetic, a much-read anthology from 1983, called for a *"postmodernism of resistance,"* because *"in the face of a culture of reaction on all sides, a practice of resistance is needed."* See Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983).

84.Rosenberg, "On The Fall of Paris," Partisan Review 7 (November-December 1940). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New as "The Fall of Paris"; this citation, p.212.

85.I intend the term "marxian" (rather than "marxist," "postmarxist," or "antimarxist," etc.) to distinguish Rosenberg's anti-totalitarian marxism, and also to suggest the lifelong integrity of his admiration and use of Marx. For an expert discussion of Rosenberg's marxian tradition that stems from Rosa Luxemburg and includes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, see Dick Howard, The Marxian Legacy, Second Edition (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988). Howard was at work with Rosenberg at the time of the latter's death on a collection of Rosenberg's marxian essays. Dick Howard interview, New York, 13 July 1992.

86.Rosenberg used "avant-garde" and "modern" as near synonyms, but he made crucial distinctions between "avant-garde" and "avant-gardism," avant-gardism being the dogma of

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the idea of the avant-garde. Furthermore, he was never interested in art "movements" as connoted by "avant-garde," but in independent artists. Sometimes "avant-garde" is used ironically, meaning avant-gardism. The contradictions and historical inversions are displayed in his own formulation of the modern and the avant-garde: "the tradition of the new." This is picked up several times for different reasons in the dissertation.

87.Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U P, 1968):107.

88.Compare Charles Baudelaire's famous definition of "modernity" in his definitive essay, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863): *"the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable."* Rosenberg's debt to Baudelaire, will be evident throughout this dissertation.

89.Rosenberg, "The Old Age of Modernism," The New Yorker 50(5 August 1974). Reprinted in Art on the Edge; this citation, p.282.

90.I will refer to "affirmative" intellectual culture throughout this dissertation. A classic definition of "affirmative" culture is Herbert Marcuse's 1937 "The Affirmative Character of Culture," a response to Max Horkheimer's remarks on the subject in Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 5(1936). For Marcuse affirmative culture meant fundamentally an idealist bourgeois culture that - having lost its original revolutionary character, its concern for the freedom of the majority - set itself apart from and above the inequitable conditions of social life, which it *"affirms and conceals."* Affirmative culture contains *"the justification of the established form of existence."* See Marcuse, Negations: Essays in Critical Theory, (London: Free Association Books, 1988):88-133; citation p.98.

Marshall Berman has distinguished 1960's "pop modernism" from modernism on the basis of the "affirmative" character of the former, which lacked the "moral imagination" and "critical bite" of modernism. [Berman, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity

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(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982):31-33.] For the debates around affirmative culture for the New York Intellectuals after the war, see Alexander Bloom, Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World (New York: Oxford U P, 1986), Chapter 10 "The Postwar Mentality: Imagination & Affirmation." For continuing debates on affirmative culture in art history, see commentary by Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock (regarding Kurt Forster's 1972 critique of "affirmative" or "compensatory" art history) in "Memories Still to Come...An Introduction," Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1996):ix-x.

91.David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen have pointed out that German and Austrian modernist literature has not been institutionalized - "homogenized" and pressed into the rigid formats of a hegemonic "modernism." See "Modernism and the Experience of Modernity," in Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism, Bathrick and Huyssen, editors (New York: Columbia U P, 1989):3.

92.Susan Sontag, "Postscript" to "The Literary Criticism of Georg Lukács" (1965) in Against Interpretation and Other Essays (1966, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988):92.

93.Rosenberg, "From Pollock to Pop: Twenty Years of Painting and Sculpture," Holiday 39 (March 1966):104.

94.Mary McCarthy, "An Academy of Risk," Partisan Review 26 (Summer 1959):476.

95.See, for example, Daniel Aaron, ed., America in Crisis, New York, 1952, an anthology of essays on this subject by eminent American critics and scholars, including "Rebellion in Art" by Meyer Schapiro. Crisis consciousness also linked Rosenberg to the artists of Abstract Expressionism, for whom, as David Anfam put it, "a traumatic zeitgeist" was the "one primary matter." See Anfam, Abstract Expressionism, p.20. Dore Ashton has recently noted that in European and American art magazines between 1935 and 1939 the word "crisis" appeared incessantly. [Ashton, "Two Responses to the Unspeakable: Morris Louis and Rico Lebrun," public lecture at the Jewish Museum, New York. 25 March 1997.]

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96.Alfred North Whitehead quoted by Felix Frankfurter, The New York Times (8 January 1948). Reprinted as a foreword to Whitehead, The Aims of Education and Other Essays (1929, New York: The New American Library, 1955). This citation, p.vii.

97.Frankfurter, Ibid.

98.Rosenberg, undated note, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

99.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

100.Rosenberg, letter to John Nef, 6 June 1971. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

101.Rosenberg, Lecture on "American Art: Form and Exploration," for the Nelson Doubleday lecture series, "Frontiers of Knowledge." The Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of History and Technology (8 January 1976). Typescript, notes, correspondence in Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

102.Rosenberg, undated fragment from "Themes" section in Discovering the Present, p. 214

103.Ibid., p.213.

104.Rosenberg, "Tenth Street, A Geography of Modern Art." Art News Annual (New York: Macmillan, 1954). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.164.

105.Ibid., p.212.

106.Rosenberg, "What is Art?" interview of Rosenberg by Melvin Tumin, Partisan Review 45 (Fall 1978). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical, p.258.

107.Melvin Tumin interview, Princeton, New Jersey, 3 March 1993.

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PART I

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HAROLD ROSENBERG'S SYMPOSIUM

Plato's Symposium is the ideal world, that is, the world in which jovial fellows sit around and drink wine in a mild way and talk about lust....I have a picture of this discourse which will conceive ideas about love...and you're drinking, and there are friends around,...and metaphors...[1]

Rosenberg *(1967)*

As I consider my own activity, it's really a kind of...extension of what artists keep talking about among themselves. That is, they get up in the morning and go to work in the studio and there is a whole kind of environment of ideas which surrounds their activity, and as I see it, a critic is valuable insofar as he enriches that environment of ideas in which artists work....Now, that's what I consider to be the major function of a critic, that is to improve the intellectual environment in which the creation of art takes place.[2]

Rosenberg (1975)

The perfect interlocutor, the friend, is he not the one who constructs around you the greatest possible resonance? Cannot friendship be defined as a space with total sonority?[3]

Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse

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Art Criticism as "A Lover's Discourse"

By juxtaposing as epigraphs to this chapter Harold Rosenberg's conclusions about Plato's Symposium, and the purpose of his art criticism with Roland Barthes's definition of perfect friendship, I hope to suggest an affinity between Plato's Socratic dialogues and Rosenberg's art criticism. I wish to advance the analogy between them to a shared ideal of community, and propose that Rosenberg viewed his own late bohemian milieu backwards through the "ideal world," as he called it, of Plato's Symposium. These Platonic and bohemian rhetorical and social values intersect in Rosenberg's quest for authentic community, the "true collectivity" in which the individual could be realized. It is at this intersection that I believe one finds answers to the question of why Rosenberg's art criticism was so devoted to the figure of the independent artist, and at the same time so hostile to establishment art intellectuals, critics, and curators of the nineteen sixties and seventies. What follows is a discussion of Rosenberg's ideal world of creative friendship and community; subsequent chapters will

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concentrate on the evolution of Rosenberg's thought within his New York milieu from the late nineteen twenties through the thirties, and his battle against those who were to him the enemies of that ideal world, the institutional intellectuals of the sixties and seventies.

*

"A critic is valuable," Rosenberg said, *"insofar as he enriches the intellectual environment of ideas in which artists work."* This enrichment was to be achieved by dialogically extending the artists' own *"talk"* - the translation and transformation of the painter's discourse by way of the poetic and political consciousness of the art critic. The process is camaraderie.

Similarly for Roland Barthes the "lover's discourse" is a situation of words within which the ideal friend acts as the *"perfect interlocutor,"* one who *"constructs around you the greatest possible sonority."* I think the origins of both, that is, Rosenberg's understanding of the role of the ideal art critic and Barthes's concept of the perfect friend, can be located in Plato's Socratic myth of Western

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love as a mutual strenghtening and nurturing process.

The concept is a venerable one. Walt Whitman, for instance, exhalted adhesive love - *"manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown"* - as the sine qua non of American democracy and culture.[4] A classic definition from Rosenberg's time of the kind of loving friendship I have in mind is found in Denis de Rougemont's Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love. To represent Platonic love, de Rougemont employs Plato's dialogical method. In conversation de Rougemont responds to "a Brahman" who subscribes to quite another myth of love. *"I was saying,"* he tells the Brahman,

> *...that true love means to discern in another person - having recognized it in oneself first of all - the true Self, subject of love, and to help it become conscious of what it is or can become....To love is to help the other person locate himself in such a way that the light sees itself in him, but so that the lover's true Self discovers itself there at the same time, differently illuminated and thereby subtly changed, a little more itself than before.*[5]

In 1967, when Rosenberg was sixty one, he reconstructed his intellectual autobiography for an Archives of American Art interviewer. His story of himself was a "tale," he

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said, of diverse intellectual phenomena held together by a "mythological substance."[6] Rosenberg's narrative emphasized the primary influence of Plato's dialogues on his intellectual development. In his late teens, he remembered, he had been especially fascinated by the personality of Socrates:

> *I was...ultimately, I would say almost to the most complete degree, influenced at that time by Plato since I read all of the Platonic dialogues over and over again and developed after a while a feeling about the...what you might say...the dialogue character of philosophy, which led into the notion that thinking is essentially dramatic....I was very fascinated by Plato in relation to both his thinking and the personality of Socrates, and the* mis en scene *of these discourses. That is, the fact that you had a situation where people developed ideas.*[7]

Listening to the recording of this interview, one hears Rosenberg's laughter punctuating every word of what Plato's Symposium had held for him *"as an adolescent kid."* The genial tale delighted him:

> *That was like an ideal world. That is, Plato's Symposium is the ideal world...the world in which jovial fellows sit around and drink wine in a mild way and talk about lust....I have a picture of this discourse which will conceive ideas about love and you're drinking, and there are friends around, and metaphors....So this is a very powerful image...*[8]

The "ideal world" of Plato's Symposium seems to have

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had permanent significance as a model for Rosenberg's life and work, one that he would subsequently realize and strive to sustain. I think that Rosenberg took Plato's dialogues as a primary cognitive model, the character of Socrates as a kind of personal and pedagogical model, and The Symposium as the model of an ideal community: an intimate inner circle.

Rosenberg dedicated his first book "To My Companions." The book, Trance Above the Streets (1942), was a collection of poems he had written in the thirties. But in a sense Rosenberg's work would always be for his companions. Each of his books on art published before his death was "to" or "for" a friend: Arshile Gorky: The Man, The Time, The Idea (1962) was "to" Elaine and Willem de Kooning; The Anxious Object (1964) was "for" Hans Hofmann; Artworks and Packages (1969),"to" Tom Hess; Art on the Edge (1971),"for" Ben Raeburn; The De-definition of Art (1972),"for" Saul Steinberg; and finally, Barnett Newman (1978), published eight years after the artist's death, was "For Barney."[9]

Clearly it was because, as Herbert Read wrote in 1958, *"Mr. Rosenberg knows these painters intimately"* that he was *"able to establish complete sympathy with their creative ideals."* To Read, Rosenberg was "The Apollinaire of Action

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Painting"; his insights into Action painting *"had the same explanation"* as Guillaume Apollinaire's insights into Cubism: namely, it emanated from *"an intimate friendship with the artists."*[10] For the same reason, Dore Ashton, speaking for Rosenberg's community, positioned him as *"one of our highly visible extroverts, our own Baudelairean flâneur (and also causeur)."*[11]

Rosenberg thought that intimate community was absolutely crucial to his own education and the life of the mind in general. He claimed that his early intellectual development had been shaped by family and friends, just as in the future he would say his artist friends had given him his ideas about painting and sculpture.

As for school, Rosenberg enjoyed saying that it had only made him lazy; not one formal instructor is ever mentioned as an influence. *"This is all community life,"* he insisted about the education he received within his youthful "cabal" in Brooklyn after high school:

> *By the time I was say about twenty we had quite a society. You know, it was a very strange society of poets, painters, philosophers we always had.... Everything is collective: the true collectivization.*

By 1967 and the Archives of American Art interview,

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Rosenberg had long distinguished this ideal "true collectivization" of individuals in art from the mass-minded collectivization of both the Soviet Union and the academy:

> *You know the one thing that's missing in the Soviet Union is collectives - collectivity in art. When you get the academy what you get is vanity. The fact that everybody does the same thing doesn't prevent them from being totally egotistical and separated from each other.*[12]

For the mature critic, both Soviet Communism and the academy were joined as the antithesis of the artistic community he felt had formed him in his youth, an intimate community of friends where

> *...everything came from one to another in a magical and flamelike way. You'd meet a fellow, and he had an idea, and then that passed into you and you passed it to the next guy. Everything was going around like this. So in that neighborhood in Brooklyn there began to show up individuals...poets, painters, you know....They were all around there; you found yourself with them.*[13]

The painter, Harold Baumbach, was one of the young individualists in that Brooklyn neighborhood. He met Rosenberg around 1925 or '26 when he was in law school and Baumbach was working as an upholsterer in his father's shop. The two frequented Village coffee houses with their

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"congregations of poets and painters,"[14] and remained close companions through their time together on the Art Project. *"They called us Big Harold and Little Harold,"* Baumbach remembers. He credits Rosenberg with having given him the encouragement he needed to be a painter, and especially to go against his parents' expectations that he go into the family upholstery business. It was Rosenberg who brought Baumbach his first box of paints and who once directed a barber not to cut Baumbach's hair too short because his friend was an artist.

Another member of Rosenberg's first inner circle was the writer Harry Roskolenko, who met Rosenberg in 1928 when the latter was twenty two. In the obituary essay Roskolenko wrote for Rosenberg in 1978, the force of the Greek myth of male intellectual culture is evident in the choice of metaphors, but also in the ardent admiration for Rosenberg. He remembered *"Harold, so tall, so skillful, so Socratic as the universal man."*[15] These young men gathered on the steps of the Main Branch of the New York Public Library,

> *...our Roman circus and our Greek forum....our Athens...and there was Harold, towering, talking dialectics in the Manhattan manner; informed, discursive, critical, satirical....so that by the end of the hot afternoon, Harold had the Athens-*

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> *on-Fifth Avenue, 'Where I learned everything', all to himself.*[16]

The Symposium's famous *mis en scène - "the situation"* Rosenberg had said, *"where people developed ideas"*[17] - was a banquet at the house of Agathon. Plato emphasized that only a few intimate friends had been invited into an intellectual, creative and sensual world of male companions, drink, and discourse. The brilliant rhetoric consciously depended upon the pleasure of companionship, and the competitive and cooperative love the friends had for each other. The Symposium dramatically enacts and takes as its subject the myth of love incomparably more meaningful - like Montaigne's love for Boetie, or Tennyson's for Arthur Hallam - than more ordinary bonds based merely on sexual desire or social convention.

This Platonic love - a manly love that *"seeks to beget spiritual children"* - is a foundation of classical philosophy and culture.[18] In Plato's text it was the seer Diotima's wise council to Socrates on the nature of true love, and the council that Socrates takes back to the guests at Agathon's banquet. As Diotima tells Socrates,

> *Those who are pregnant in the body only, betake*

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> *themselves to women and beget children - this is the character of their love;...But souls which are pregnant - for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies - conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions? - wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor.... And he who in youth has the seed of these implanted in him and is himself inspired, when he comes to maturity desires to beget and generate. He wanders about seeking beauty that he may beget offspring....when he finds a fair and noble and well-nurtured soul....he brings forth that which he had conceived long before...and they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children....Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones?*[19]

*

Appealing as it does to the manly authority of the Greeks, love that begets spiritual children - the intellectual situation that had so impressed the young Rosenberg - had occurred, up to his time, with significant but rare exception, only between men. Rosenberg's bohemian New York milieu twenty three and a half centuries after the death of Socrates was not fundamentally different.

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Although it must be a subject for another study, in the light of the nearly consensual feminist censure of the Abstract Expressionist social milieu, it seems necessary to look for just a moment at Rosenberg's myth of creative friendship from the point of view contemporary feminist criticism. There is no doubt that Plato's Socratic dialogues on love, Phaedrus and Symposium, are generally prejudiced against women, and the value of manly love the Greeks promoted has been associated with the abasement of women.

To fairly evaluate the role of Platonic friendship in Rosenberg's art criticism as a "lover's discourse" from a feminist perspective, much would have to be considered, but one might begin with Eve Sedgwick's fundamental distinction between "patriarchal" male culture and "homosocial" male culture in her investigation of the force of male love in literary history, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. Sedgewick uses Heidi Hartmann's definitions that emphasize partriarchy's material base, its domination of women, and its homophobia. By contrast, according to Hartmann and Sedgewick, homosocial culture, which has so influenced the arts, does not aim at material

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success; it does not seek to dominate women; and it is not homophobic.

By the measure of Sedgewick's Between Men, in "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium" it will be apparent that Rosenberg's attitude toward creative friendship is best described as homosocial, and not patriarchal.[20] Anti-materialist, anti-authoritarian, and far from homophobic (Rosenberg, wrote his close friend Parker Tyler, fancied himself "*as an intellectual mentor and physical disciple of the homosexual*"[21]), Rosenberg's ideal of community was essentially the fraternal utopia central to his tradition - the lush dream behind so many of its manifestations, like the following lines from Wallace Stevens, an influential poet for Rosenberg and the artists of his circle:

> ...a *ring of men*
> *Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn*
> ....
> *Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,*
> ....[22]

This study makes much of this myth of love, but none of it will be to say that Rosenberg did not appreciate women as his intellectual equals. Rosenberg enjoyed reciprocal dialogue with his wife, May Tabak, his daughter, Patia

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Yasin, his friends Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine de Kooning, Susan Sontag, Renata Adler, and others. The nature of Rosenberg's friendships with gifted intellectual women is not my subject, but some sense of their seriousness can be gained from a couple of examples.

First, Rosenberg loved to talk with Hannah Arendt, a close friend and colleague in the University of Chicago Committee on Social Thought. Michael Denneny, a student of both Arendt and Rosenberg, remembers their elation on first greeting each other at the start of a new term - with the candid joy of children, Denneny thought.[23] According to Arendt's biographer, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, when Rosenberg profoundly disagreed with key points of Arendt's controversial Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (1963), the friendship remained strong because both valued it highly.[24] Patia Yasin, Rosenberg's daughter, recalls that when Arendt died in 1975, her father's spontaneous cry of lament (both moving and telling in this consideration of creative dialogue) was: *"Now who will I have to talk to?!"*[25]

Finally, a 1963 letter to Rosenberg from a significantly younger Susan Sontag shows an intellectual

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misalliance caused as much by fundamental axiological and stylistic disparities of generation and individual vision as by gender stereotyping and the always confusing erotics of dialogical intercourse. Rosenberg had yelled at Sontag about an article she had brought him to read in 1962. Sontag felt Rosenberg had been *"intolerably rude."* Furthermore, she added, *"I've found a number of your pals and ex-pals - I'm thinking of Paul Goodman, Dwight MacDonald, Lionel Abel, and Philip Rahv - also incredibly rude."* Men as well as women were insulted by the "rude" style of Rosenberg and other New York Intellectuals, as I will show. In fact, it seems Sontag was treated as roughly as the older male New York critics characteristically treated each other. But what most infuriated Sontag was that Rosenberg had told someone she had been flirting with him: *"Do you think a woman is flirting with you because she likes you personally, admires you intellectually, and is pleased to get to know you and your wife?"* Sontag's spleen ends, however, and she closes with some words of gratitude that suggest Rosenberg had been a serious influence: *"I have learned a great deal from your writing, and shall always be in your debt."*[26]

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Encomiums: Creating Paradise

> *You are still the center of my gaze....in converse with you I have always felt my life was being lived importantly.*
>
> William James to Josiah Royce

The essays Rosenberg wrote in praise of his artist friends are the most obvious parallel between his art criticism and Plato's Symposium. These extraordinary essays on exemplary artists are, I think, well-defined as encomiums: speeches made in high praise.[27] In the Symposium each of the guests at Agathon's banquet was an encomiast for the god of Love, and the encomium in honor and exhortation of the beloved was customary. Writing on this subject in The Use of Pleasure, Michel Foucault quotes Xenophon on the traditional function of encomiums: *"in the very act of flattering Callias, you are educating him to conform to the ideal."*[28]

Like his Greek rhetorical model, Rosenberg's essays praised and at the same time educated the artist by positioning his creative processes at the highest level of

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artistic practice. By situating the artist within the dynamics of larger historical and cultural contexts, Rosenberg mirrored the artist to himself as an actor on the world historical stage. He gave the artist - his friend - the most ambitious scale possible by which to measure himself.

Robert Hughes recalled the powerful impression Rosenberg's essays had made on him as a young Australian in the 1950s. *"The hagiographic tone was clear,"* Hughes wrote.

> *Except for the titans of the history books...from Michelangelo and Leonardo down to Picasso and Matisse - we had never read the kinds of claims made for <u>any</u> artist that Harold Rosenberg... made for figures such as Barnett Newman and Willem de Kooning.*[29] (1990)

Rosenberg's extraordinary essays in this genre made no secret of those who fit the measure of the "most beautiful man." They were Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Saul Steinberg, Barnett Newman, Philip Guston; followed by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, Lester Johnson, and others in descending order. As Hughes pointed out, many have written hagiographically about *"the titans of the history books."* But in the history of modern art criticism, which has concerned itself with living

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artists, these essays are uncommon. They might best be compared to Ruskin's praise of Turner or Baudelaire's of Delacroix.

Most significantly, the subjects of Rosenberg's encomiums were all close companions. This handful, their intimate community, and the threatened cultural values they embodied, were a commitment, told by his loyalty, that gave purpose to his work.

But these community values were not exclusive to Rosenberg. In 1950 Barnett Newman similarly explained the relationship between painting and community for the New York abstract painters:

> *The thing that binds us together is that we consider painting to be a profession in an 'ideal society.' We assume the right of insisting that we are creating our own paradise.*[30]

For Rosenberg, as for his friend Barnett Newman, a creative community was an "ideal society"; his work, like Newman's, was about "*creating our own paradise.*" To borrow Donald Kuspit's Shakespearean allusion to Harry the king's heroic *"band of brothers,"* their Abstract Expressionist milieu was a *"community of the happy few, with its argumentive intimacy and its unwilling yet inescapably*

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artistic role."[31]

I will return to the Symposium as a model for Rosenberg's view of "ideal community," and the conceptual link he made between his classical Socratic ideal and his own life within the actual bohemian community of lower Manhattan from the thirties to the mid-fifties.

Thinking as Dialogue: Rosenberg on The Socratic Dialogues

> *The dialogue, which is speculation within the mold of individual behavior and hence itself a mode of behavior, is the necessary form of philosophy.*[32]
>
> Rosenberg, 1946

The theoretical basis of Rosenberg's admiration for the Socratic dialogues emerges in a 1946 article for View magazine entitled "Notes on Identity: With Special Reference to the Mixed Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard." The essay unites the Oedipus myth, Kierkegaard, Plato, and Hamlet; all achieve Rosenberg's moral objective by way of his own critical approach: thinking, talking, and writing as dramatic enactment - which is to say, as dialogue and dialectic.[33]

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Rosenberg explains in "Notes on Identity" that *"the link between philosophy and drama"* is self-identification: "Know Thyself," the challenge of the Oracle and of Socrates. Rosenberg thought that without the dramatic enactment of dialogue philosophy could only fail as a means to self-knowledge because it could not escape the abstract. In non-dialogical philosophy the individual is lost in the general category: "Man." In drama, however, the individual can be represented in his unique particularity. Traditional philosophy threatens individual freedom of thought because, unlike dramatic literature, it inevitably creates a master plan to which the individual must then "adjust":

> *...which means that philosophy replies to the [Oracle's] question of 'Who?' with an ethic of adjustment by which the individual is trimmed to fit the needs of some social or moral scheme without regard to what he might discover about himself as a unique being.*[34]

By 1946 the "ethic of adjustment" had become for Rosenberg as for other Western intellectuals a Weberian nightmare of reason: the demon of ideological state apparatuses and the functionaries who sacrificed their individuality to serve them. Total philosophical systems like Plato's, Hegel's and Marx's had become retrospectively

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suspect. But "Notes on Identity" pointedly distinguishes the Socratic dialogues from such inherently imprisoning philosophical systems. "*In Plato,*" Rosenberg writes,

> *...'adjustment' is represented by the vision of harmony between the right and left horses of spirit. But despite Plato's so-called anti-tragic outlook, his ideal of rational self-curtailment is ironically contradicted by the dramatic image of Socrates, who embodies, fulfills and surpasses the theoretical presuppositions of virtue; who knows himself by 'a species of madness,' as well as by speculating about man; who grounds knowledge in recollection and the act of thinking in love.*[35]

The figure of Socrates redeemed Plato's "*so-called anti-tragic outlook*" because Socrates refused to 'adjust' to Plato's own rational (anti-tragic) ideal: "*Plato's...ideal of rational self-curtailment is ironically contradicted by the dramatic image of Socrates.*" Through dialogical thinking Plato had found the means for philosophical self-critique. In his irrationalism (reliance on memory, madness and love for insight) and particularity, Socrates' role was to demonstrate how to think about the contradictions of actual individual existence that fit no system and refuse to adjust - indeed, must not adjust. In the last dialogue Socrates will accept death rather than adjust to the demands of the state or life outside his community. Only by

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embracing the paradoxes of individual existence within an authentic collective could Plato (through Socrates) approach the essential philosophical question of individual identity.

Plato's philosophy, Rosenberg's essay concluded, *"is dramatic...it develops its concepts through the conflicting notions of specific human beings."* Thus, for Rosenberg, in Socrates Plato created something like the archetypal radical democrat, a dramatic model of how the intellectual can enact himself within a mutually maturing collectivity. So for Rosenberg Plato's greatest wisdom was the Socratic method, the dialogue.

> *...hence the dialogue, which is speculation within the mold of individual behavior and hence itself a mode of behavior, is the necessary form of philosophy.* [36]

Dialogue *"is the necessary form of philosophy"* because in fact for Rosenberg it was the only means by which the thinker can freely pursue the truth without creating obstacles (in the way of new determinisms, ideologies) to his or her own object. To work with and not against itself and the world, thinking must be situated in society and remain an open process of discovery. Otherwise:

> *When philosophy abandons the dialogue, when it*

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> ***becomes the voice of a single speaker, it cannot avoid asserting an absolute.***[37]

Rosenberg's dialogue and dialectic (whether oral or written) were not *"the voice of a single speaker,"* so to speak; they were, like the Socratic dialogues, non-authoritarian strategies to *"avoid asserting an absolute."*

Begetting Spiritual Children: Platonic Dialogue in Practice

> *Finally we read together the speech of Socrates in Plato's Symposium.*
>
> Gershom Scholem
> Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship[38]

> *Conversations with Harold are blooming like slow fireworks in formal gardens.*
>
> Parker Tyler (to Charles Ford, 1939)[39]

"Harold used to say that every true conversation is about love," said Saul Steinberg, *"I think you'll find that*

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in the Symposium....He would present himself around 5:00 and we would have a symposium."[40] Steinberg's recollections of Rosenberg focused entirely on the unique freeform shape of the conversations they enjoyed, conversations which Steinberg likened to the flight of heavy cranes spiraling up on chance currents of air, or the swinging of Tarzan through the jungle grasping whatever nature brought to hand.

"The only people an artist can talk to are the other artists," Steinberg said. *"Harold was an artist; there is no question he was":*

> *....He was able to talk and I was able to talk to him, one of the few people I could talk to this way....It was a way of speaking...about things without any plan....I had confidence in him to understand what I was talking about and he knew that I was helping him the way two people can play a fast game of ping-pong guessing each other's reflexes, and outwitting and outflanking and so on. It was teamwork...the art of fabricating thinking while speaking...the discovery while speaking.*[41]

Plato's *"dramatic image of Socrates,"* Rosenberg had written years earlier, *"grounds...the act of thinking in love."*[42] For Rosenberg, Socratic dialogue required a bond of love; for Steinberg this love was *"very powerful"* yet little known:

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> *...the most unknown, unspoken about, virtue and quality. People have spoken about love and love and sex and so on. No, this is a very powerful and very discrete love because there is nothing else but that.*[43]

Steinberg was careful to distinguish his dialogues with Rosenberg from the conversation of academic intellectuals on the formal grounds that the ideal interlocutor *cum* artist (like Rosenberg) has no predetermined "agenda." There is only the free pursuit and the mutual transformational process. According to Steinberg:

> *...one of the worst things about conversation between intellectuals, between academics especially, is they are accustomed to a plan,...and while they are talking about it they follow the plan, and that's paralyzing. You are not free....They call it an agenda I think.*[44]

Steinberg explained that for example Irving Howe and Lionel Abel, unlike Rosenberg, knew what they were going to say. *"They had made up their minds like all these intellectuals."* Howe and Abel were too near academia, Steinberg said, *"They didn't understand the spirit of Harold,"* who thought while talking. Furthermore Rosenberg thought as a poet, in metaphors. To Steinberg, Rosenberg's poetic sensibility set him apart because the poet, like the visual artist, translates the chaos of experience through

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metaphor. Poetic thinking was essential to the ideal world of the Symposium for Rosenberg.

Rosenberg once explained the poetic vocabulary of his art criticism to John Gruen, who had just complained about "the problem of dismantling your terminology." It was not, Rosenberg retorted, intended as a terminology for art critics:

> *The artists understand my terminology very well. The art critic is bugged by it because it's not useful to specialists. Hofmann never had trouble with my term "depth" as meaning depth of feeling. Space in painting is a metaphor. Painting is through and through metaphor! [Rosenberg's emphasis]*[45]

It was metaphor - not the logical agendas of rational thinkers - that was the mental guide that directed and connected dialogical thoughts in free pursuit of self-knowledge.

Rosenberg's gift for metaphor, according to Steinberg, made it possible for the artist to communicate with him. In contrast, talking to an intellectual like Dwight Macdonald, whom Steinberg otherwise praised, was often frustrating because Macdonald insisted on logical explanations. Steinberg recalled that,

Every time I said something that was tailored to

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> ***my taste, invented by me, something original, he would say: 'What do you mean by that?' I would say: 'Fuck you.' It's heckling. If you get it, you get it; if you don't, forget it. No, I would say, 'Dwight, I will tell it to you later in my spare time.'***[46]

In all this Steinberg was illuminating the quality of his talks with Rosenberg. Ideal conversation was a value they spoke of and consciously shared between themselves and with a few other friends. Of course it wasn't all the time, Steinberg explained, but sometimes: *"just when we were lucky."* Steinberg called these cocktail-hour conversations in East Hampton their "symposiums," meaning, I think, what Rosenberg had meant when he called Plato's Symposium *"this discourse which will conceive ideas about love...and you're drinking, and there are friends around,...and metaphors."*[47]

The capacity to engage in polemical, mutually transformative dialogue, I think, characterized Rosenberg's closest friends. Such men were first among his true artists. This kind of conversation also formed the bond between Rosenberg and Barnett Newman. According to Annalee Newman, Barnett Newman's widow, her husband and Rosenberg had known each other from the early thirties. *"It would be right to*

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say they loved each other."[48]

> *...Harold and Barnett Newman talked a lot. Both of them were great talkers. Barnett would say, 'Well, I met Harold. We disagreed a lot but what a lot of action!'*[49]

With amusement, Annalee Newman gave an account of one particular endless conversation between her husband and Rosenberg. The conversation is an often-told, and clearly emblematic, story in the artists' circle; though the versions do vary, it's always told with laughter, like a joke,[50]

The Newmans had been to a dinner party at the Rosenbergs' on Tenth Street. It got late and time to go, but Barnett Newman and Rosenberg were too deeply into a discussion to stop, so Rosenberg walked the Newmans home. The verbal exchange as they walked the eight blocks or so to the Newmans' place on East 19th Street was noisy and impassioned, and far from over when they got to the Newmans'. So Newman walked Rosenberg back to Tenth Street. Unable to end their possibly interminable dispute, they continued to walk each other home - back and forth - for hours longer; there are those who say it continued throughout the entire night. Finally, someone along the

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route, obviously exasperated with the ceaseless peripatetic polemic, opened a high window and threw a pail of water on their heads.[51]

Newman must have felt understood by Rosenberg. A letter he wrote in appreciation of Rosenberg's laudatory Vogue profile, "Barnett Newman: A Man of Controversy and Spiritual Grandeur"(1963) is evidence that he did.[52] Newman's letter to Rosenberg expressed gratitude that the critic had been able to show *"that I and my work are one."* Showing that an artist and his work are one has seldom been the aim of art criticism. It is an approach that requires intimate and empathetic knowledge. Newman recognized the achievement of his friend's aspiration as an art critic: the performance of what Rosenberg, quoting Baudelaire, believed to be *"the duty of criticism...to penetrate deep into the temperament and activating motives of each artist."*[53] It is the work of a "perfect interlocutor." This is Newman:

> *Not only have you presented my work with succinct clarity and on the highest level but you have moved from my work to me with great style to show that I and my work are one* [Newman's emphasis]*....What touches me most is the feeling that I get that you wrote the article with some affection for me personally.... Nothing I shall ever read about myself will, I am certain, move me any more deeply.*[54]

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Feeling understood in this way is feeling loved. What touched Newman most, he said, was the feeling that "*you wrote the article with some affection for me personally.*"

*

Besides artists of his New York milieu, Rosenberg had this kind of friendship with the novelist Saul Bellow. According to Bellow's biographer, James Atlas, Rosenberg was an important early mentor.[55] It was Bellow who brought Rosenberg to the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago in 1966. His strong feeling for Rosenberg is evident in the 1984 story "What Kind of Day Did You Have?" The protagonist, Victor Wulpy - "*transparently modeled on Rosenberg,*"[56] is described by Bellow with a kind of ironic esteem:

> *...Victor was personally so impressive - he had such a face, such stature; without putting it on, he was so commanding that he often struck people as being a king, of an odd kind.*[57]

Here is another striking portrait of Bellow's Rosenberg character in his last years:

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> ***He was still one of the most dramatic-looking men in the world....A face like Victor's might have been put on the cover of a book about the ancient world: the powerful horizontal planes - forehead, cheekbones, the intelligent long eyes, the brows kinky with age now, and with tufts that could be wicked. His mouth was large, and the cropped mustache was broad....His cheekbones were red, like those of an actor in makeup...***[58]

Bellow was not the only one to describe Rosenberg's personality and appearance in heroic terms. His fictional Victor Wulpy is accepted by most as an accurate portrait of Rosenberg. Though Wulpy does not lack the typical endgame pathos of a Bellow character, he is clearly a creation of admiration.

The ardent interest these friends took in each other is remarkable. It goes without saying that they were intellectual lovers only, but enthusiasm for ideas and knowledge always carries an element of seduction that was as important, I think, for these American artists and intellectuals, as it was for the guests at the Symposium. Brilliant conversation was impelled by an affection that did not rule out the physical pleasure of the friend's company; rather it required and subsumed it. Rosenberg thought it a loss that,

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> ***seduction is in bad repute among people who fear being carried away by pleasant sights, sounds, activities, or arguments...[n]evertheless, Plato made it clear that Socrates used seduction as a means for teaching philosophy.***[59]

Here is Saul Steinberg's description of Rosenberg. It is much like Bellow's portrait of Victor Wulpy in the level of praise and pleasure it conveys. Both Bellow and Steinberg seemed to think that the outstanding physical presence of their friend - his appearance, his voice, his bearing - revealed crucial insights into who he was that could never be gained by merely reading his writing:

> ***His aspect was sensational...epic. He was an Homeric personage. He had the eye of the Greek or Etruscan statues who had the orbit worked out with precious stone - luminous white for the white of the eye. Harold had red cheeks and red lips and very black hair to the end. His hair was nearer to blue - a blackbird black. His eyebrows were fierce like his jaw, and he had a perfectly Jewish ear: long.... He was 6'4". This is the most important thing; it is essential... because one acquires a Lincolnesque quality...."***[60]

Thirty-six years before Bellow's "What Kind of Day Did You Have?" Ralph Manheim had written a satirical story about Rosenberg's youthful friendship with Lionel Abel. It was, Manheim explained in a letter to Dwight McDonald, about "a

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time in Lionel's distant past when he pretended to be Rimbaud."[61] Presumably Manheim meant that Abel was playing Rimbaud to Rosenberg's Verlaine. Kenneth Burke remembered the two men had been inseparable in the early thirties when he met them regularly for all night drinking and talking at Village speakeasies. "Mutt and Jeff" Burke called Abel and Rosenberg.[62]

McDonald was eager to publish Manheim's "hilarious" story in his Politics magazine, but Manheim withdrew it because Abel, a longtime friend, had objected that the "Partisan Boys" had gotten hold of it first and were already gossiping about it.

Manheim titled his story "The Perspectors" to mock the voracious intellectual prospecting for new perspectives by Rosenberg and Abel.[63] It is mostly a story about a relationship between men who adore their ideas and conversation rather more than anything or anyone else. Between the two men Manheim placed the hapless wife of the Rosenberg character, who in the story comes to realize and accept her fate as domestic adjunct to her husband's intellectual life. As the story goes, Norman (Abel) has settled in with Rupert and his wife Nellie (Rosenberg and

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May Tabak, his wife). Nellie, driven to a kind of frenzied desperation, tries to get rid of Norman by proving he has been stealing from her purse. Her plan backfires, however. She had underestimated Rupert's single-minded love of "perspecting," which prevails over his wife's hysterical demands that he oust his friend for petty theft. The story ends with Nellie whimpering outside the door as inside Rupert and Norman ardently discuss "*materialism, idealism, dialectic and mauvaise foi*"[64] over a bottle of whiskey. But finally Nellie good-humoredly resigns herself to the fact that she has lost to her husband's need for intellectual dialogue, and always would lose to it. "*To the business man all is business,*" she sighs, "*to the perspector all is perspective.*" Manheim satirizes the conventional gender stereotyping of "perspectors" and their wives:

> *...The sounds from the adjoining room were like manly music,...No it was not an accident that she had married a perspector, it was her destiny, in sickness and in health, in exasperation and woman's pride....Calmly, majestically, she rose and went to the kitchen and made sandwiches....Smiling with womanly dignity, she entered the thundering arena and said: "I thought you Titans might be hungry."*[65]

Parker Tyler's romantic recollections of saying goodby

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to Rosenberg "high in the summer" of 1940 indicate, as does Manheim's story, that Platonic love between friends surpassed love between man and wife. Here are Rosenberg and "Fell" (a pseudonym signaling Tyler and his homosexuality) together under the Brooklyn bridge:

> *Harold, and two others loitering, the river quiet, high over the river, the Bridge somewhere, but the non-sexual bridge between Harold the woman-lover and Fell the fell lover. There...his wife not too close...never so close...as close-up as Fell....Ah, friendship! Brother and brother. It exists.*[66]

Rosenberg and most of his bohemian friends were married men and for the most part their marriages did not interfere with the bonds among them.[67] This is well-established in the social history of both groups with which Rosenberg is identified - the Abstract Expressionists and the New York Intellectuals.

June Wayne, artist, writer, and friend of Rosenberg and May Tabak, explained that Tabak greatly enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of her husband, but,

> *She was furious that it would immediately be dissipated if anyone else arrived for Harold to perform for....*
> *Harold's milieu was a male milieu....They were not really very different than the guys on the baseball team roughing around in the locker*

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> *room.... He was male oriented. I could easily have imagined him a basketball player...*[68]

The Spoken versus the Written Word

Plato privileged speaking over writing. Significantly, his great teacher, the historical Socrates, left no writing, and developed the "art of dialectic" from conversation alone. Socrates's living dialectic between minds - the dialogue - was the philosophical and pedagogical method Plato employed in the Academy. So unequivocal was Plato on the first importance of oral over written discourse that in Phaedrus he has Socrates tell Phaedrus that

> *...when [the philosopher] is in earnest he will not take a pen and write in water or sow his seed in the black fluid called ink, to produce discourses which cannot defend themselves* viva voce *or give any adequate account of the truth.*[69]

Writing is disparaged by Plato's Socrates as at best a fine pastime, whereas the *"art of dialectic"* conveys truths *that "are not sterile, but contain a seed from which fresh truths spring up in other minds."*[70]

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Oral dialogue undoubtedly fit the undirected, contradictory motion of Rosenberg's thinking process more readily than writing did, with its requisite unilinear syntax and inscribed, unalterable words. "*No intelligent man,*" Plato asserted, "*will ever dare to commit his thought to words, still less to words that cannot be changed, as is the case with what is expressed in written characters.*"[71]

But unquestionably Rosenberg did not privilege the spoken over the written word as Plato did. Theoretically, in fact, it was the converse: thinking must be realized in a concrete art making process, like writing or painting. The dialectical necessity of the material object is at the crux of Rosenberg's art criticism, and the basis of his idea of Action painting. In an article on "The Concept of Action in Painting,"(1968) he explained that,

> *If someone asks me a question my answer will come from the surface of my mind. But if I start to write the answer, or paint it, or to act it out, the answer changes....The materials I use - words, paint, gesture - become the means for reaching new depths, for unveiling the unexpected. Thus, the activity that transforms materials is essential to thinking.*[72]

It is indeed the very concreteness of art that makes it superior to abstract thought:

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> *In art, ideas are materialized, and materials are manipulated as if they were meanings. This is the intellectual advantage of art as against disembodied modes of thought, such as metaphysics.*[73]

Only the dialectical tension between ideas and materials - the creative process itself - could mature the mind as it simultaneously discovers and creates itself:

> *The current attempt in art to allow either the words or the materials to have their own way sacrifices the advantage of concrete thinking...*(1969)[74]

Here Rosenberg sanctions concrete thought - art, in other words - as a cognitive imperative. It follows that this would have meant the art of writing rather than talking. And at a public forum sponsored by the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago in 1969, Rosenberg said exactly that:

> *Whether it's painting, or writing, or music, [art] requires that you do something besides just get good ideas....it's for that reason that in my classes in Chicago, I insist that my students write papers!...A lot of these guys can get up and deliver a glib talk at the drop of a hat. I want to see what they can do! When somebody starts to write a sentence another dimension of his personality or his mind begins to appear on that paper, and then he can, through that, begin to understand himself in an active way....How subtle can you get?...What images can you conceive? What*

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> *angels are you in touch with?...That's where art comes in, and becomes, I think, as indispensible as it ever was.*[75]

There are other substantial reasons why Rosenberg's attitude toward the written word was diametrically opposite to Plato's. What stands out is their different attitudes toward the unavoidable misinterpretation of written texts. Though Rosenberg regularly expressed vehement frustration over the deformations and omissions of readings that he thought diminished the intellectual environment around artists, and ceaselessly tried to correct them, he was not otherwise troubled, as Plato was, by releasing his writing into the world of unknown readers to a fate of its own. As an essayist with a predilection for ambiguity, paradox, irony and polemic, he clearly did not aim to be universally understood, and might even have counted on misinterpretation. Although Rosenberg's writings are silent about his personal feelings, one might easily imagine that like Saul Bellow's fictionalized Rosenberg, Victor Wulpy,

> *He didn't count on... comprehension; he couldn't....[incomprehension] was a fixed condition, a given.*[76]

And, as such - "*a fixed condition, a given*" - it was never a

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subject of Rosenberg's commentary.

Plato also expected to be misread, but his attitude was different; he wished to protect the truth. His deep *"reverence for truth,"* he wrote, would not allow him to write it down and thus *"expose it to discredit in a world with which it is out of tune."*[77] Though one might doubt Plato's lack of ambivalence about the good of writing given the evident care he took with his own, as a statement of principle, it is not imaginable that Rosenberg would take Plato's position, if only because he was so thoroughly a man of his time.

Rosenberg's dialectic did not aim at any essential truth. As for Wallace Stevens such "truth" was for him the supreme fiction, although he also believed, like Stevens, and like René Char, whom he quoted, that *"It will be a bad night when, lacking truth itself, man suppresses the superstition of truth."*[78] This unsettling truth was closer to the laughter of Silenus: an ironic affirmation. Not aiming to find and protect the absolute truth, Rosenberg's essays, like his dialogues with his friends, were verbal impulses towards discovery of present possibility that in the process opened up the discursive field to multiple

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perspectives and meanings. Since words, whether written or spoken, are of the same substance as the individual author/speaker, they are, like him, axiomatically situated in history and in the world. It is only to be expected - indeed it is to be hoped for purposes of enrichment and chance inspiration - that, like their author, they will be (creatively) misinterpreted.

Rosenberg hoped that the misinterpretations might be fruitful, since each individual reading of a text might generate new creative acts. The goal of critical thinking was not truth[79] but discovery, fecundity, and the multiplication of possibilities. Speaking admiringly of Leo Steinberg's interpretation of Picasso's Demoiselles d'Avignon, Rosenberg raised his voice to interrupt questions about Steinberg's accuracy with an emphatic exclamation: *"Steinberg has an interesting mind! I don't care if he's right!"*[80] [Rosenberg's emphasis] It was quite obvious to him that *"the amount of great art that has been produced out of misunderstood ideas is practically unlimited."*[81] On another occasion, a 1953 review of Herbert Read's The Philosophy of Modern Art, he wrote that

> *...in art confusion is not necessarily bad.*

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> *On the contrary, the history of art could be written in terms of the evolution of images arising from misunderstood ideas - the idea of perspective, for instance....*
>
> *The chaos resulting in the twentieth century from the concept of revolutionary art has equalled in fertility the most vigorous misunderstandings of the past. Nor is there visible any limit to what may still come out of it.*[82]

Rosenberg's attitude about the way ideas pass from mind to mind in new forms - *"begetting spiritual children"* - was due much more to his objective observations on the nature of thought than it was to his intellectual generosity or to his desire to secure creative community. I think Rosenberg assumed that misinterpretation is simply natural - a theory of mind that has, of course, a substantial place in his own intellectual tradition. In "A Fond Note on Myth,"(1928) for example, Paul Valéry (to whom Rosenberg would always mentally tip his hat on the subject of the life of the mind[83]) went so far as to see falsification as not just natural but necessary to the truth:

> *It is a kind of absolute law that everywhere, in every place and every period of civilization, in every belief, in every discipline and every relationship...the false supports the true; the true takes the false as its ancestor, its cause, its author, its origin and end, without exception or remedy - and the true engenders the false, from which in turn it requires to be engendered.*[84]

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It is Rosenberg's Valérian attitude toward interpretation, then, that probably explains why, at the end of a frustrating public debate with Ernst Gombrich - in which neither seemed to understand the other - Rosenberg, exasperated, could finally assert that after all, *"one is not compelled to read Gombrich according to the latter's instruction."*[85]

The Spoken versus the Written Word in the Jewish Oral Tradition

Recalling his intellectual genesis, Rosenberg recognized that his adolescent appropriation of Plato, which is the focus here, was *"probably related to my earlier study of the Old Testament in Hebrew."*[86] When he was five years old Rosenberg began a daily study of the Hebrew Bible under the supervision of his orthodox father Abraham, a poet and scholar in Hebrew:

I started out with herculean volumes of the Old

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> *Testament, and then got in among the Greeks that way and tossed certain basic ideas around, you know....*[87]

Although Rosenberg's relation to the Jewish intellectual tradition is for another investigation, it is worth-while in this context to consider briefly its clear influence on his attitude toward interpretation and the written versus the spoken word, because it bears directly on the question of a disparity between the respective positions of Rosenberg and the Platonic oral tradition.

Since the Torah is traditionally taught orally, Rosenberg doubtless *heard* Torah from his orthodox father, which means that his earliest formal exposure to language would have been the consecrated word as simultaneously spoken and read.

Harold Bloom has explained that the Jewish oral tradition is as dialectical and fearful of writing-down as the Platonic tradition. But the two traditions differ at the root level of language.[88] According to Bloom, in Hebrew almost every noun can be traced to a verb, and the word for "word," *Davhar*, means "word-act," whereas the Greek "logos" bears no connotation of action. To Bloom this

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etymological difference is decisive because the word in Hebrew is already in itself *"a moral act, a true word that is at once an object or a thing and a deed or act."* The root meaning of *Davhar*, he asserts, is intrinsically concerned with oral expression whereas Plato's *Logos* is not.[89] Commentary on the first chapter of Genesis in the Pentateuch and Haftorahs explains that *"The phrase 'God said' must be taken as a figurative equivalent of 'God willed.'"*[90]

Bloom's comparison of the two powerful oral dialectical traditions that formed Rosenberg's attitude toward language suggests an explanation as to why the relationship between speaking and writing was not as hierarchical for Rosenberg as it was for Plato.

For Rosenberg, I think, language was the *Word*, that is, the creation and the beginning of life and society. His life was lived and created in a sea of words, spoken and written. According to Rosenberg's daughter, Patia Yasin, at home her father frequently recited from the wide range of literature he loved, with equal pleasure and enthusiasm, were it colloquial doggerel or Shakespeare and the Bible, all of which he had memorized *"chapter and verse."* His

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passion for words and ideas was such that it recalled his dead poets to life. *"He loved Dostoyevsky,"* Yasin recalls. *"It was as if Dostoyevsky were a friend he'd just talked to on the street."*[91]

Officially, on forms and such, Rosenberg identified himself as "a writer," but on other occasions he said he was a "word artist": a title which evades the distinction between speaking and writing, and is therefore more fitting. Rosenberg seemed to move between the oral and the written word, merging them; his practice of reading to himself as he wrote his essays and reading them aloud to May Tabak at various stages of composition is one such merger.

Rosenberg's appreciation for the interplay between the spoken and the written word is also evident in his poetic and dialectical essay style, which simulates the open-ended form of Socratic conversation. His closest and best readers have recognized this. Saul Steinberg's caricature of Rosenberg for the cover of Discovering the Present (1972) shows labyrinths of (simulated) written words emerging from his mouth: spoken words transcribed into linear passages around him.*(figure 4)* Some word-passages end, while others branch off and out of the frame. One imagines Rosenberg's

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word labyrinth continuing endlessly.

William Shawn, Rosenberg's editor for eleven years at The New Yorker, admired the critic's "Art World" essays as on-going discussions:

> *Rosenberg's essays on art had a way of not ending. They had a beautiful inconclusiveness. It was almost as if he were telling us that the subject was still open for discussion, for elaboration, for amendment. As one stopped reading, in fact, the discussion did continue in one's mind.*[92]

Another friend related Rosenberg's entire being to his writing. Parker Tyler thought of Rosenberg as the physical embodiment of words, the intellect and the essay:

> *Harold the epitome of the essay...The man whose veins are as the rivers of reason in the landscape of the sensibility, a sketch by Leonardo of the essayist under the skin....*[93]

Going further, Tyler affectionately developed his metaphor of the essay into a caricature of Rosenberg's body, his identifying height and crippled leg:

> *Things for an essay. So the sky of the essay opens....Tall, tall, the essay, one leg unbending, obstinate. Handsome as a building. Dark, impersonally masculine,...empty of folly.*[94]

Lionel Abel also thought that Rosenberg's verbal

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artistry was an integration of the oral and the written word. When asked by André Breton if Rosenberg were an artist, Abel had replied yes. "*As an artist, Harold was neither a lyricist nor a dramatist; I think his art was oratory.*" As an orator, Abel implied, Rosenberg bridged writing and speaking through the concept of action:

> *Let us not forget that an oration, in a real context, is often not merely an instance of skillful rhetoric or profound pronouncement; it is also, or can be, an action. I am thinking of Cicero's oration against Cataline...*[95]

As Cicero's orated against the nihilistic political system that threatened to destroy the Roman Republic, Rosenberg's New Yorker articles, Abel thought, were "*a single massive oration against the triviality, nihilism and intellectual folly*" threatening to destroy the art world.[96]

Talking as an Art

Although Rosenberg did not privilege talking over writing, to Saul Steinberg Rosenberg's writing was but a

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"pale ghost" of his talk.[97] Most who knew Rosenberg agreed. William Phillips, editor of the Partisan Review, remembered that,

> *He was one of the great talkers of our time, at the beginning more of a talker than a writer, though later his verbal gifts became more and more evident in his writing. Sylvia Marlowe, the harpsichordist, once said Rosenberg was a verbal magician, which was not a reference to a prose style but to a phenomenal articulateness. I rarely saw Rosenberg in a conversation he did not dominate in some way, by doing most of the talking, or designating the subject, or setting the tone.*[98]

It's important to note that here Phillips represents Rosenberg's conversation quite differently than Steinberg did. Steinberg enjoyed the equal give and take based on friendship that I am claiming was the ideal for Rosenberg. For Steinberg, Newman and other artist friends, Rosenberg was more often Barthes's "perfect interlocutor." For Phillips, a New York Intellectual, Rosenberg's "phenomenal articulateness" always dominated conversation; he was the monologist or orator rather than the Platonic dialogist. Many others, including Irving Howe, thought of Rosenberg as a brilliant monologist:

> *I found myself ...dizzied by the hammerings of Rosenberg's mind. I attended Harold Rosenberg as*

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> *audience. Never have I known anyone who could talk with such unflagging manic brilliance, pouring out a Niagara of epigrams....As Harold rasped along in his high-pitched voice, did he ever so much as notice who stood before him? I used to think, when visiting his studio: suppose I were suddenly to drop dead, would he stop talking? All the while he was the most ingenuous of democrats, one ear being as good as another. I would leave his studio gasping from overstimulation. If only I could 'bottle' all that I had heard, there'd be enough to work with for a year. But his ideas could not be 'bottled,' they had a curious way of evaporating into the upper air. It was as if they came alive only through his voice.*[99]

Not just New York Intellectuals, but others, like Eleanor Handley, Rosenberg's secretary at the Advertising Council from 1951 to 1963, experienced his talk as Howe did. *"That's exactly right!"* she said. Handley was nineteen when she began working for Rosenberg, but nonetheless he would talk to her about everything as if she were at his level and understood all of his references. There was no dialogue:

> *Sometimes I didn't understand him. I mean, quite honestly, he was on a different plane on some subjects, and that was fine. Harold assumed that you knew everything he knew, which was really weird. He would mention names, and allude to things, and he would just expect that you knew what he was talking about....it didn't matter whether you understood him or not...or whether you commented or not...he was just going to talk.*[100]

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Friend and enemy, all agree that it was in conversation that Rosenberg was most impressive: brilliant and inexhaustible. Describing her first meeting with Rosenberg, Simone de Beauvoir wrote to Sartre on May 8, 1947 that,

> *...At 7 I met up with Bernie W. [Bernard Wolfe, Leon Trotsky's secretary], who was taking me to dinner at the house of some homosexuals from Kiev, with Harold Rosenberg who's a very intelligent guy, an art critic and former Marxist, with whom I argued about politics and philosophy till I was half dead from exhaustion and exasperation.*[101]

Clement Greenberg remembers that around 1937, when he and Rosenberg were both young literary intellectuals living in Brooklyn, he *"sat at Harold's feet....I'd sit enthralled by him. Yeah, he was a great conversationalist, a great monologist. I can't remember many of the wonderful things he said."*[102] Greenberg's younger brother Martin, who had introduced the two future critics of Abstract Expressionism to each other, said, *"I remember Clem and Harold in my father's living room in Brooklyn...*

> *It was around 1937 or '38. Harold was the more advanced intellectual - he'd already published poems and so on - and Clem really admired him. They talked and talked....Harold's conversation was always enjoyable.*[103]

Max Kozloff, who didn't meet Rosenberg until the sixties, described the older critic's conversation this way:

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> *In personal terms he was rather fascinating to see at work....he'd engage in conversations with people he didn't know and so on, and perhaps from different walks of life....He was a very fast talker and full of ideas, charging ahead all the time: very, very promiscuous. But if you got a word in edgewise, the chances are that he would stop and listen to what you had to say....After a while you would be astonished and delighted to hear him say, 'That was an interesting thought!' And then suddenly you realized that this man who very clearly did not suffer fools lightly was nevertheless very open because he had a very liberal attitude towards what thought was.*[104]

Michael Denneny, Rosenberg's student, editor, literary trustee, and devoted friend, thought that "*Talk* was *Harold's supreme ability; he was a virtuoso at it.*" May Tabak had asked Denneny to speak for Rosenberg's students at his memorial service at the New York Public Library in 1979. Denneny's eulogy focused on the significance of conversation in Rosenberg's teaching at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought:

> *He didn't actually teach in any way that we were used to. Rather he drew you into a conversation and somehow you became more intelligent through this talk....This thinking-as-talking made of intelligence an act, a performance.*[105]

Denneny thought Rosenberg's willingness to engage in conversation with anyone was due to Rosenberg's "*radically*

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democratic spirit." "Harold," said Denneny, *"would talk to anybody. His interlocutors didn't have to be bright or even well-informed."* Denneny viewed Rosenberg's conversation as a performance, *"and like all performance it was an attempt to share,"* to engage *"his comrades in serious talk about serious things."*[106]

It seems, then, that Rosenberg's conversation varied with individuals and situations; sometimes the perceptions are contradictory. The painter Esteban Vicente, for example, remembered that Rosenberg only talked about art.[107] Yet Vicente's experience was not believable to Max Kozloff who said that he had only heard (younger) artists complain that Rosenberg would never, or could never, talk about art at all, though he could talk endlessly about everything else. Paul Brach confirms Kozloff's judgement. *"Harold was always wanting to talk about the 'situation.'"*[108]

There is ample evidence of Rosenberg's extraordinary range of interest and knowledge. From Irving Howe one heard astonishment over the "hammerings" of his mind. Perhaps Rosenberg's conversational style was best summed up by a friend who is a master of biographical tragicomedy. In "What Kind of Day Did You Have?" Saul Bellow described with

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humorous exaggeration Victor Wulpy (his Rosenberg character) talking to a billionaire Berliner who "*asked the right questions.*" In a half-hour ride downtown, from Seventy-sixth Street to Washington Square, the subjects covered were:

> *...the politics of modern Germany from the Holy Roman Empire through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; what surrealist communism had really been about; Kiesler's architecture; Hans Hofmann's influence; what limits were set by liberal democracy for the development of the arts. Three or four other wonderful topics....Various views on the crises in economics, cold war, metaphysics, sexaphysics.*[109]

Unquestionably, from the impression he made on everyone who knew him, from taped discussions with orthodox and reform rabbis about Jewish identity, or with students in seminars on Marx or Dostoevsky,[110] and so on, Rosenberg could talk fluently on a wide range of topics. Art historian Michelle Cone, who was close to Rosenberg in the late sixties and early seventies, remembers that "*it was extraordinary how he seemed to be attuned to your own way of thinking.*"[111]

As in the fable of the blind men and the elephant, each of Rosenberg's interlocutors was sure that the part he knew indicated the whole; and in the case of Rosenberg, it can be said that each part did contain the essence of the whole:

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the maturing value of the thinking/talking process itself.

*

Most of Rosenberg's conversation was not symetrical and reciprocal Socratic dialogue, but with those few artists he deeply admired and publicly exalted as exemplary, I think he did act as Barthes "perfect interlocutor"; that is, I think he aimed at and sometimes achieved with them a resonant space for mutual self-discovery and self-fabrication. Rosenberg's art criticism, as he said of Baudelaire's, *"put him in the same boat as the artist."* And like Marcel Duchamp, who, according to Rosenberg, *"made no secret of the fact that art attracted him less than artists,"*[112] he was also attracted more to artists than to art. Clearly he admired artists (or those he would call artists) more than other people. Like Wordsworth, Rosenberg undoubtedly believed that artists were just like other people but superior in every way. The high esteem in which Rosenberg held the artist was typical of poets and intellectuals of his modernist tradition. To Valéry *"an artist is worth a thousand centuries."*[113] To Marx and Aldous Huxley, the

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artist was the model for the whole man. While it was not true for Rosenberg as it is for Saul Steinberg that "*the only people an artist can talk to are the other artists,*" I think that Rosenberg's Symposium - the "lover's discourse" in which "*the perfect interlocutor, the friend... constructs around you ... a space with total sonority*"[114] - probably only occurred between Rosenberg and his circle of creative men friends. And it is precisely from this kind of intercourse that conceives spiritual children that I think the inspiration, motive, perspectives, and dialectical style of his art criticism originated.

Rosenberg was clear about his place among the artists. It was part of his "mythological substance." A small undated note to himself reads:

> *I am, if one may coin a term, an art folklorist. What I have to say, what I have seen, heard and thought while growing up with the artists and their creations.*[115]

In the same way, but before an audience at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Rosenberg again explained that the basis of his art criticism was talking to artists:

> *I like to talk to artists. I've spent most of my life talking to artists. My criticism is not really criticism very often, it is simply a*

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continuing dialogue with artists.[116]

In 1962 Rosenberg's close friend, Thomas Hess, editor of Art News in the fifties and sixties, wrote a review of Rosenberg's Arshile Gorky: The Man, The Time, The Idea, in which he explained how Rosenberg's art writing emerged from conversations with artists:

> *The painters insist on a multiplication of possibilities. Harold Rosenberg...has become an influential writer on modern art because of the tact and eloquence with which he put this dilemma and its implications into words. He has carefully listened to the artists' brilliant if unsystematic theories, to their lyric stammers....And he has spun the best of this consensus into a relevant dialectic so refined and so gossamer that there is always room for anybody to escape...*[117]

Hess understood, as very few have, exactly the way Rosenberg's art criticism was an extension of the artists' own talk. It was important to Rosenberg that this be known, and he stated it many times, as, for example, in the following avowal, made in 1975, that his interpretation of de Kooning's approach to style had come directly from de Kooning:

> *...this whole notion - his notion, not mine - of the presence of a style in modern times. What does this mean...to paint within an existing style when the society itself has no style? Now this is*

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> *something de Kooning worked out twenty-some odd years ago without any help from me! I mean, I found out from him what he thought about that!*[118] [Rosenberg's emphasis]

When he was asked about the origins of the idea of Action painting, his unhesitating reply was that *"the painters of that group absolutely suggested that idea to me!"*[119] Once the assertion of sources was made, however, and Rosenberg had, in a sense, vindicated his art criticism according to his own standards, he at once launched into his self-assigned critical task of extending the painters' idea into larger intellectual contexts just as he had done twenty three years earlier in the 1952 essay "The American Action Painters":

> *On the other hand, I will say this, that this idea of art has been implicit in certain types of work for perhaps a hundred years, or even more..."*[120]

With this characteristic "on the other hand," Rosenberg easily set into motion the first of the dialectics that will elevate the artists' ideas and practice to the most ambitious achievements in Modern art, to current social, political, psychological relevance, and to the world historical.

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Rosenberg and Intention

Although Rosenberg's profiles of individual artists relied on the intimate knowledge of friendship, his method cannot be called intentionalist in the sense of a naive determinism: the so-called intentional fallacy whereby meaning is reduced to the artist's conscious purpose and assumed to account sufficiently for the finished work. This is a common misunderstanding of Rosenberg's approach. To Philip Leider, editor of Artforum, for example, Rosenberg's authority as an art critic was based on his *"fidelity to the intentions of the artists."*[121] It is not that this assessment is wrong, but that it misleads because it over-simplifies and reduces. Statements from artists about the meaning of their work were the (necessary but not sufficient) starting point of a larger and more complex whole that I will try to outline.

Rosenberg's focus on the motives of the individual artist was multifaceted, with each facet dialectically interacting (conversing) with its negation (its converse); thus all facets were undergoing perpetual redefinition, and

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contradiction was intrinsic to both the creative and critical processes. As Donald Kuspit has noted, *"the dialectic, with its sense of the contradictoriness ...structures intentionality."*[122]

Since for Rosenberg, the genesis of and motivations for actions are never clear to the actor himself, so much the less can they be clear to others. He inevitably situated the artist as an actor within a vast field of internal and external forces utterly outside the artist's willed control:

> *In the modern consciousness the human act, if it exists at all, is suspended at the intersection of numerous impersonal processes, some still unlabeled. To act is to locate oneself in a middle.*[123]

Rosenberg's view of the willed act as possibly not existing at all, and the "Self" as always "presumed," identifies his position on intention as perhaps closest to the dark irony of Dostoyevsky.

Rosenberg's approach made cause and effect dialectical, and disrupted any monolithic notion of intention:

> *Action and acting are semi-illusory phenomena; they include not only the actors' hallucinations of mistaken identity but the inherent misapprehensions of their audiences.*[124]

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Motives were manifold - both overt and covert, conscious and unconscious. The thinking of the artist was unfailingly considered in connection with the situation and with the work. *"I can talk about the profundity of [de Kooning's] approach,"* he said, *"from a half a dozen points of view."*[125]

Furthermore, according to Dore Ashton, *"no one was more alert to the tartufferie that bedevils the world of the artist."*[126] She might have added the tartufferie of the artist as well, for Rosenberg accepted as a matter of course that *"artists are prone to deceit and self-deceit."* For one thing, he wrote, artists often wish to appear original and so deny their debts to other artists. Such a denial of sources has the deleterious effect of *"disguising the circulation of thought within the community of artists and in the culture of the period,"*[127] and therefore must be exposed by the critic. The art critic keeps the free circulation of thought alive even when artists themselves obstruct it, which is often enough the case.

Rosenberg knew that the artist in conversation is often not telling the "truth" about his work. However, he also appreciated the value of other truths in the "lies" of

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artists. In an exchange with sociologist Melvin Tumin for Partisan Review in 1978, he explained that though artists often do not tell the truth about their work, what they say is *"of utmost importance"* to an understanding of it:

> **Tumin:** *Should anyone pay any attention to what artists themselves say about art?*
> **Rosenberg:** *Oh, absolutely. But you have to know how to pay attention....often they're not telling the truth, they're trying to delude you. Nevertheless they say things that are of utmost importance.*
> **Tumin:** *Can you know without eating dinner with them 200 times how to interpret them?*
> **Rosenberg:** *Yes, you can tell by looking at what they do and comparing it with what they say. Between the two, I'd anytime take a lying artist....to a truth-telling critic.*
> **Tumin:** *At least the artist's lies are of interest in the whole body of art?*
> **Rosenberg:** *Sure.*[128]

Rosenberg's skepticism and irony allowed only a thin margin for individual agency. He observed that *"regardless of what he thinks, anyone who speaks or acts is an agent of someone or something else."*[129] The possibility - or even the fiction - of individual agency was the precious remainder of his humanism; its survival was Rosenberg's moral cause:

> *It seems likely that the poets of anti-drama have gone too far...in surrendering the individual to the void of events. Individual acts have diminished, but they have not totally disappeared. If nothing else, there remains...the act of creation."*[130]

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Were Rosenberg's view of intention essentialist and as free of doubt as some of his critics have thought, were it not so ironic, the artist would not have been his cause. The symbolic agency of the artist located the artist at the heart of Rosenberg's conceptual and moral universe:

> *...the composition of a work of art does contain a point of beginning and an interval of choice - that is to say, it contains the outline of a free act. No wonder that the artist has become the riddle of philosophers, psychiatrists and theologians, and the envy of men of affairs, in this age of process.*[131]

The Art Critic as Intellectual and Word Artist

Rosenberg's method[132] presents obstacles that few art critics have attempted to surmount. If a Rosenbergian criticism would not require *"eating dinner with [artists] 200 times,"* as Melvin Tumin thought it might, his approach does demand some way to gain intimate knowledge of the

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artist. Even if this information is gained, a critic using Rosenberg's method must then be able to advance the insights and observations from the particular artist out to potentially limitless larger meanings, since, as Rosenberg explained, *"anything is relevant to it... psychology, philosophy, history, mythology, hero worship. Anything but art criticism."*[133]

Besides the ambitious demands of the critical method itself, a Rosenbergian art critic would have to be a talented writer, since *"[a] critic who writes badly may have deep insights into painting, but for all his connoisseurship, he is not a critic."*[134] In fact, an art criticism following Rosenberg would require more than what is ordinarily considered "good" writing. The art critic with such aspirations must possess (as "word artist") an artist's keen awareness of the primary importance of form, a grasp of how form equals content. Furthermore, this art critic (as social and political critic) would see that theory and practice must be in accord. This aesthetic (form and content) and political (theory and practice) dialectical unity is crucial. A Rosenberg essay manifests an homologous relation - at once artful and philosophical - between form

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and content; ornamentation - epigramatic sentences, favored tropes, literary allusions, etc. - is consistent with overall composition. Style not only supports meaning, but in itself conveys the same meaning as the critic's overt narrative.

These are daunting demands for the art critic, yet to Rosenberg anything less was worse than nothing at all; a lesser achievement was harmful to the degree it reduced the environment of ideas within which the artist works and develops. Criticism, he believed, has a creative and necessary role in the making of art, and the quality of discourse around art is in a causal relationship with the quality of the art. To him,

> *...the inflection given by art criticism to the general thinking about art affects not only the responses of appreciators of art but the creative attitudes of artists as well. When this thinking is trivial or beside the point, painting and sculpture become the specialty of feature writers, decorators, dealers and speculators in masterpieces.*[135]

Art and the thinking about art should aim for the heights achieved by previous aesthetic models. In this sense Rosenberg argued for an ambitious "high art" to the end of his life, long after it had fallen into disrepute in

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the sixties. *"Those who still speak of "high art,"* he caustically observed in a 1972 defense of Barnett Newman's expressed meanings, *"see no connection between it and high thoughts or high states...*

> *Our age has been taught that elevated sentiments are composites of less elevated ones, or even of desires that are the opposite of elevated. To espouse lofty ideas is something of a scandal.*[136]

Rosenberg was contemptuous of intellectuals who devoted themselves to "kitsch," to conformist culture made for profit. *"As if there weren't already too much talent and intellect in America steadily draining into the dreck of the mass media,"*[137] he wrote in 1958. It was art and society, not kitsch, that desperately needed the services of the public intellectual. Kitsch, after all, had plenty of "bought" support. In fact, writing about kitsch at all, even negatively, was *"to add to kitsch an intellectual dimension"* [Rosenberg's emphasis].[138] Furthermore, the only way to keep the profit culture from spreading - like the plague he thought it was - was *"by being too busy with art."*[139] He followed his own dictate. When he wrote about kitsch it was as aspect, sign, or symptom of the inert thinking and commercialism of a status quo at odds with

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independent creative agency.

Besides striving for the highest intellectual, moral and spiritual level- the level of poetry and art - art criticism must be equal to its historical epoch:

> *Unless critical discussion achieves the intellectual scale of our revolutionary epoch, it cannot be taken seriously.*[140]

Ultimately, it is about an epic sense of scale, of history, of the present as historical. If art criticism does not achieve *"the scale our revolutionary epoch,"* it cannot be taken seriously because it is irrelevant:

> *In order to be relevant, art criticism today must maintain a continuing sensitivity to major characteristics peculiar to the modern epoch which affect the situation of art, including the outlook, rituals, and objectives of those who create it.*[141]

For a public radio broadcast on the situation of contemporary art in 1966, Rosenberg formulated the qualitative interplay he saw between art and art criticism in negative but helpfully concise terms: *"...there has been a radical decline in the intellectual quality of the art being produced and of the discussion surrounding that art."*[142]

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Talking and the Construction of the Mind/Self

The marriage was between "high" art and the "quality" of the discussion that embraced and nurtured it, but this in no way meant that to Rosenberg the discussion must be limited to so-called "high" topics or that there was a single measure for "quality." On the contrary, for his tradition of avant-garde modernism, "high" art had always depended on "low" sources. For Rosenberg art was by definition all about everything, and so was the discussion around it. His talking, as I have tried to show, took a variety of forms. To some he was simply an insatiable intellectual collector - *"very, very promiscuous,"* said Max Kozloff - always on the lookout for ideas that could be picked up in conversation with anyone.

Rose Slivka, editor of Craft Horizon and longtime family friend, thought it deeply significant that *"Harold would listen to anything no matter how dumb, because anything could suggest an idea - even a safety pin!"*[143] Slivka was emphatic on this point; it was not to be passed over. She hinted at the reason, which was that *"anything*

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could suggest an idea." It was if to Slivka Rosenberg were a kind of conceptual alchemist.

But one might also be reminded here of Kierkegaard's observations on the method of Socrates. In The Concept of Irony, With Constant Reference to Socrates, Kierkegaard explained that Socrates's method was to move from the utterly banal to the highest intellectual realms, so as to weave through all phenomena the thread of the Idea. Largely as a strategic opposition to the high-minded Sophists, Kierkegaard's Socrates,

> *dwelt constantly upon the most mundane conditions of life, on food and drink, on cobblers, tanners, herdsmen, and pack animals. By forcing the Sophists down into this sphere, he compelled them to acknowledge their own affectation.*[144]

Given the deep impression the figure of Socrates had made on the young Rosenberg, it seems likely that the example of Socrates contributed to his conversational habit of *"beginning wherever he might find himself"*[145] (as with Rose Slivka's safety pin) and for the same reasons.

But while from another angle, this particular kind of "magpie" conversation, as Kozloff called it, might not have been intended by Rosenberg to approach the level of

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concentric Platonic dialogue, it nevertheless served equally well as an invaluable source for the questing imagination.

Rosenberg's theory of art, as I see it, was equally a theory of mind. For he viewed his own exceptionally self-conscious mind as a work of art, specifically, as a construction, an amalgamation of disparate experiences. Like his imagist poetry and his essays, Rosenberg's mind - an equivalent to his Self - was a sort of non-hierarchical assemblage of fragments brought together from the Western canon and from the everyday poetic stuff of life: the poetry of his New York City streets brought to him in conversation. I think it was the very disarray of lived experience that, in his view, was such a fertile source of ideas. He thus gathered up words and concepts from verbal exchanges with anybody: interlocutors who, according to Michael Denneny, *"didn't have to be bright or even well-informed."*

This attitude toward the making of a mind, a self, or a work of art, is at the crux of Rosenberg's art criticism, specifically his representation of the artist's creative and self-creative process. *"An artist,"* he wrote, *"is an artificial construction... he makes himself up through whatever lies at hand."*[146]

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The painter's mind and canvas is a self-fabrication and so is the critic's mind and text (social or written). Not simply *"a place where the mind records its contents,"* the canvas, Rosenberg wrote, was *"itself the 'mind' through which the painter thinks."*[147]

Rosenberg's description of a de Kooning painting as an unrestricted gathering of experiential fragments also conveys the way he saw the making of the mind and the Self:

> *His compositions devour everyday sights, odd thoughts, moods, theories old and new....He has the hungry multifariousness of the Renaissance humanists, the 'vulgarity' of Rabelais and Cervantes. His abstractions and female figures are no less accumulations than if they had been put together out of newsprint, rags and rubbish...*[148]

Creative works, Rosenberg said elsewhere, *"magnetize out of the formal accretions piled up in [the] mind."*[149]

This gathering process is crucial because it is the only way to become who one can be. Nothing is purely self-generated. The artist depends entirely upon previously existing concepts, words as well as images. As Rosenberg said about the Action painters in 1958, *"No one begins by being very different. Originality is a product - better still, it is a by-product."*[150] That is, one does not set out to be "original," but to discover and create one's Self.

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Originality comes out of the process.

In a 1965 discussion of "Criticism and Its Premises," he asserted that *"the nature of originality is open to debate - in fact, needs desperately to be debated."*[151] Furthermore, for Rosenberg the idea of *sui generis* "originality" was "a *typical middle-class ideal,*" and a rather tiresome one at that. An artist was "original" only in the unique use he made of appropriations and imitations, and to think otherwise was "*completely naive.*" Originality, he insisted, *"has nothing to do with any experience! First of all, because nobody is ever original. There is no such thing!"*[152]

These last comments were made in conversation with Studs Terkel recorded for a Chicago radio broadcast. Rosenberg was expressing impatience with Terkel's implication that Picasso might be overrated since he was such a notorious thief of others' pictorial ideas - a point of view that was absurd to Rosenberg. He countered - with the weariness of one forced to state something obvious - that Picasso's great originality lay in his relocations and transformations of whatever had captured his curiosity and desire.

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The Exemplary Artist: Arshile Gorky

Nowhere is Rosenberg's view of the creative process as self-fabrication more emphatically stated than in his moving portrait of Arshile Gorky, Arshile Gorky: The Man, The Time, The Idea.

> *Those eager to claim early originality for Gorky contradict Gorky's values. At twenty-five he had grasped the basic premise of the art of his time...: the deliberate rejection of originality. How highly original a thing this was to do.*(Rosenberg's emphasis)[153]

Gorky, of whom Rosenberg wrote with the deepest possible admiration and empathy, was his model for the synthetic method of self-creation practiced by the true artist. The first chapter of Arshile Gorky is entitled "The Artist as Intellectual," and the first paragraph includes Rosenberg's thesis statement, a central theme in his art criticism:

> *[Gorky's] own work is almost a visual metaphor of the digestion of European painting on this side of the Atlantic and its conversion into a new substance.*[154]

Gorky transformed European painting into his own

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original painting, which is to say that Gorky transformed his precursors as he used them for self-transformation. He consciously made himself into an artist by imitating, appropriating and converting *"into a new substance"* the art of Uccello, Ingres, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Miró.

Rosenberg underscores the importance of Gorky's lesson on creativity for the New York art community by relating a story Willem de Kooning had told him:

> *Willem de Kooning, who met Gorky around 1934, emphasizes the impact upon him of Gorky's discounting of the idea of originality. After a few encounters in the street, he brought Gorky to his studio and showed him some drawings. Examining them, his new friend put them down and remarked, "Aha, so you have ideas of your own."*
>
> *"Somehow," de Kooning recalls, "that didn't seem so good."*
>
> *In de Kooning's recollection, Gorky's raising this question changed his entire attitude toward painting.*[155]

Here Rosenberg demonstrates through de Kooning, his friend and another of his exemplary masters, Rosenberg's own organic theory of the life of the mind: how ideas, in forms or words, transform into new syntheses as they pass from mind to mind. Thus the artist's need for intimate discursive community.

What Gorky learned in conversation with friends was as

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consequential to his art as was his use of revered precursors. Gorky had been a great talker:

> *Add to this [influence of the European masters] his succession of friendships with painters - the early closeness to Mischa Reznikoff, his years of walking around with Willem de Kooning, his later attachment to Matta, the discourses he delivered on benches in Washington square and in the cafeterias where artists hung out in the pre-war days - his most active hours were divided between hard talking and the labors of the studio.*[156]

It mattered to Rosenberg that Gorky's conversation was on the level of Platonic discourse:

> *Gorky was no chatterer: he argued values, attitudes, possibilities....He demanded of his talk that it have continuity with his deepest thinking centered on art.*[157]

Rosenberg's exemplary artist was an intellectual. More than that, Gorky mastered the arduous conversion of the "verbal consciousness" he had acquired in endless conversation with his artist friends, to the "mind" of his canvas; in his translation of thought to form he demonstrated Rosenberg's thesis that the best art is always an act of the mind:

> *Above all, Gorky stands for the importance of intellect in painting....This lifelong student and, as Meyer Schapiro has recalled him, 'fervent scrutinizer' of paintings, old and new, was an*

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> ***intellectual to the roots; he lived in an aura of words and concepts, almost as much at home in the library as in the museum and gallery."***[158]

Gorky *"lived in an aura of words and concepts."* This aura was, I think, the way Rosenberg envisioned the creative environment of his bohemian circle in downtown Manhattan. If one adds to it sufficient bonhommie, it describes Rosenberg's *"ideal world,"* Plato's Symposium.[159]

The Gorky book, like Rosenberg's encomiums to his living artists, at once honors Gorky and presents him as a lesson to other artists. It should be read as a polemic against the follies of the false or post-avant-garde of 1962, the year the book was published. Primarily, Arshile Gorky counters the detrimental misreading of Action painting (that is, detrimental to the discourse around art) as "gesture painting" - mindless automatism. By presenting evidence of Gorky's intellectualism, and showing how intellect plays the central part in abstract painting, Rosenberg's Gorky was intended as a model for the Tenth Street School of the late fifties whose *"mere stroking and slopping of paint,"* the critic complained in 1966, had *"resulted in tiresome caricatures of Action Painting that*

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marked its phase of mass acceptance."[160]

The book also proposed Gorky's intrinsic motivation against the extrinsic aim of the young postvanguard artists to be on the cutting edge. Rosenberg's model artist did not strive to be on the cutting edge of "the New" as if it were merely the latest fashion. For Gorky, as for de Kooning, Newman, Hofmann and the rest, *"materials become the means of reaching new depths."* The quest was for "new depths" not novelties. With enthusiastic approval Rosenberg quoted de Kooning's remark, *"I'm no lover of the new - it's a personal thing."*[161] And he was indignant when, because of the art fashions of the early seventies, Barnett Newman's profound meanings were *"condescendingly set aside as an irrelevant verbal accompaniment to his formal innovations."*[162]

What Rosenberg admired in Newman and the others was an avant-garde attitude Baudelaire called "naiveté." In the case of Newman, Rosenberg found that the artist's *"behaving as if the sublime had not been dismantled by the modern age was a combination of naiveté and defiance. By naiveté I mean pursuing one's own sense of things regardless of prevailing opinion."*[163] Naiveté, defiance and integrity positioned Newman against the fashionable formalism of the

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time. Newman's naive and intransigent integrity made him a true avant-gardist among the false. As Rosenberg used the ideas of Marx to counter certain dogmatic Marxisms, so he used the ideas of Baudelaire ("a founder of the tradition of the new"[164]) against the establishment avant-garde of the sixties and seventies.

But some modernist tenets were no longer tenable to Rosenberg. Central among them was the belief in teleological progress associated with both the artistic and political avant-gardes. By the nineteen forties, Rosenberg insisted, Gorky knew that the *"bankruptcy of a rationale of progress in regard both to art and to social history had to be acknowledged and an appeal addressed to other powers of the mind."*[165] In Rosenberg's view the mind should return to its first philosophical task: the endless quest commanded by the Delphic Oracle and by Socrates to *Know Thyself*, the goal of Platonic discourse. According to Rosenberg's interpretation, the process of self-discovery and self-creation could only occur within community; it was in no way autonomous or apolitical.

Rosenberg's Gorky did not believe in progress; he was not original; and he was not a "genius" in the conventional

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Romantic sense. The notion of innate, god-like "genius" - generally associated with "originality" and an avant-garde polemic with Positivism[166] - had little if any place in Rosenberg's idea of the creative individual:

> *If the picture is an act, it cannot be justified as an act of genius in a field whose whole measuring apparatus has been sent to the devil.*[167][HR's emphasis]

To Rosenberg one is neither a true artist from birth nor by divine inspiration. Like all determinisms and categorizations of persons, "genius" was an inert and suspect idea. In any case, what is outside human agency is also outside the range of criticism. Since *"in the actual world the fact refuses to be transfigured,"*[168] there is nothing to be done about genius. In fact Rosenberg ridiculed deterministS: *"When a tube of paint is squeezed by the Absolute, the result can only be a Success."*[169] In other words, what kind of culture critique can be made of a painting where the inspired artist-genius acts only as God's instrument? It hardly needs to be said that belief in "the Absolute" was not ridiculous to Rosenberg; on the contrary, the concept of Fate figured crucially in Rosenberg's thought. His negative dialectics, however, acted

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exclusively against the given and within the moral realm of possibility - that which might be transfigured by individual agency.

Rosenberg's most esteemed artists, like Hans Hofmann, Dostoyevsky, Baudelaire and Marx, were called "master,"[170] which for Rosenberg connoted earned versus god-given superiority. His "masters" were self-made; furthermore they were, in the largest sense, teachers.[171] In the end it is true that *"Rosenberg assumes that one can become an artist if one intends to be."*[172] Certainly, predetermined qualities, so central to most art criticism, like "talent" or good "taste" were pointedly rejected:

> *Limited to the esthetic, the taste bureaucracies of Modern Art cannot grasp the human experience...*[173]

In an effort to defend and expand the possibilities for human agency, Rosenberg focused on the existential remainder of that which was predetermined. His watch was the moral and poetic process of self-transformation through art and dialogue (nearly synonymous terms). And here Arshile Gorky was the exemplary master.

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Plato's Symposium and Rosenberg's Tenth Street

> *Aldous Huxley felt that an artist had the possibility of being a whole man. This is the idea that Marx had too, that the model of the whole man was the artist, and therefore we could always see him as a kind of ideal. This, however, if you look at it historically, went along with bohemianism in which the artist actually stayed apart from the rest of society.*[174]
>
> Rosenberg (1969)

> *What is portentous for the future of art is...the ending of that separation between the advanced artist and society which had been the rule for more than a hundred years.*[175]
>
> Rosenberg (1966)

Although Rosenberg redefined, or rejected as no longer relevant, modernist cultural ideologies of "progress," "originality," and "genius," he saw himself and his companions as traditionally vangardist in their alienated individualism. Self-exile - if historicized and understood in dynamic and contradictory relation to other values - still identified the vanguard artist and intellectual.

In a 1965 essay on the post-bohemian intellectual, Rosenberg mused:

> *One suspects that today there are at least as many intellectuals among cab drivers and jazz musicians as there are among holders of doctorates.*[176]

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Just as in nineteenth-century Parisian bohemia, for Rosenberg, an artist or intellectual could come from any place, class or occupation. What brings the statement forward a century is partly terminology. "Holders of doctorates" was a new name for what was to Rosenberg an updated version of the original nineteenth-century avant-garde adversary: the bourgeois academician.

A decade earlier, in an essay for the 1954 Art News Annual entitled "Tenth Street, A Geography of Modern Art," Rosenberg had written that "The Block of the Artists"[177] - the block west of his apartment on Tenth Street - was itself a metaphor for modern art because of its oppositional stance against the university (the academy) as a place to be creative:

> *For what could be plainer than that Tenth Street is tradition?...unmistakably the tradition of more than a century of art creation. Like modern art itself, Tenth Street stands against the university and its passivity...*[178]

Rosenberg's artists' community was, he declared in this essay, *"not a community"* at all, but rather more like *"a tribe."* The distinction he drew was the defining paradox of

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bohemia: *"the individual prevails against the band."* Tenth Street,

> *... mostly suggests a tribe....Yet its chiefs have no authority, and no tribesmen ever evinced comparable degrees of disloyalty. One might conclude that Tenth Street is a tribe based on the rugged individualism of American pioneering - an impossible contradiction and therefore most likely to fit.*[179]

The one "*indispensable condition*" for the right relation of the intellectual to the collective is "*that he be out of place in it.*"[180] Out-of-placeness - a conscious self-alienation from society - remained the sign of the bohemian intellectual and artist of Tenth Street as it had been for Montmartre in the decade before the First World War. To Rosenberg, Tenth Street was a place where individuals went to reinvent themselves; their independence brought them together. Such paradox characterized Rosenberg's thought; his signature trope was the oxymoron, as in his well-known formulations: "The Tradition of the New," or "The Herd of Independent Minds." And an ideal of a community in which *"what they think in common is represented only by what they do separately,"*[181] was in fact the motor of his theory and social practice.

The community is necessary because it is only within

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such a radically democratic community that individual growth can occur. Only there can the normal tensions between individual and society translate into the fruitful interpersonal tension - the conflict and cooperation - that characterizes Platonic friendship based on love. This is decisive. One cannot come to self-knowledge without a community of competitive and cooperative friends.

Rosenberg once neatly formulated the social dynamic in political terms:

> *My conservatism: everything for the individual.*
> *My radicalism: nothing for fictitious persons (corporations, the state).*[182]

He did not dream of a utopia of communal wholeness. *"For my own part, I regard communal 'wholeness,'...as an unattractive and bad idea."* Nor was his vision of ideal community a post-marxist rejection of communism and reactionary swing to individualism. Rosenberg's bohemia was essentially the communist classless society. Notes for a seminar at the Committee on Social Thought sometime after 1966 read: *"Bohemia = the end of classes.... Classless art defeats the Academics - a form of bourgeois transcendence."*[183] Rosenberg's values remained bohemian and

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marxian all his life; his notion of "the individual" and the possibilities of individual agency had always been complex and dialectically determined by his concept of societal interaction.

In 1958, attempting to correct a common misreading of American Action painting as a kind of solipsistic bourgeois individualism, he observed that,

> *In this age so often felt to be one of de-individualization, there is a great tendency to make an ideal of 'the individual.' Such an ideal is no less abstract and unreal than any other ideal and the living individual can only be reduced by it.*[184]

And in 1974 in notes for a letter to Lionel Trilling, he wrote,

> *I have never wanted to argue for individualism as a value. But I see art criticism as a showing of the individual in action.*[185]

From the beginning "individualism" and its coordinate, "freedom," had been community values for Rosenberg.[186] In 1935, at the height of his enthusiasm for communism, he condemned *"bourgeois individualism"* as *"self-fascination of personality."* To the bourgeois individualist "freedom" meant only *"the liberty to inherit, travel, and 'live dangerously' a career of sensation...without*

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responsibility."[187]

Against this bad kind of bourgeois individualism the young Rosenberg proposed the exemplary alternative individualism of the Greeks:

> *In antiquity, the individuality of a man seems to have consisted largely of Name and Reputation, an eidolon resulting from the social quality of his deeds.*[188]

This is a standard interpretation of Plato's Socratic dialogues as directed towards individual self-development that is essentially political. To Max Weber, for example, Plato's teaching was about *"how to act rightly in life and, above all, how to act as a citizen of the state; for this question was everything to the Hellenic man, whose thinking was political throughout."*[189]

At the height of his enthusiasm for communism in 1933-1937 Rosenberg promoted the same kind of individualist brotherhood he would always promote. His thirties communism was from the beginning a version of the ideal community he had come to as a young man by way of Plato and other poets, and through his personal experience of a "true collectivization" in art - his Brooklyn "cabal." The dream of a lived Symposium was already in place when he discovered

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the same in Marx. Rosenberg's Marx was a radical democrat like himself for whom,

> *A genuinely human society would not be a supra-individual entity to which all individual members conformed, but one in which, as the young Marx put it, nothing could exist independently of individuals.*[190](1958)

When he wrote the above, however, Rosenberg was employing bohemia as the model of a "genuinely human society" against totalitarian states, every one of which *"have sold themselves to the masses as antidotes to alienation,"* and *"taken an oath to eliminate the gap between the individual and society and between the public self and the private self."*[191] There can be no state solution to alienation.

But by 1958 "alienation" was fast becoming a popular media concept in the United States, transformed to the "howl" of the Beat and Hippie countercultures of the fifties and sixties. New York Intellectual William Barrett, in his 1982 memoir, The Truants, described the 1945-1950 Village bar culture as a moveable feast of *"conversation and friends."* Barrett observed:

> *The Village and its bars were very different from what they were to become....The Beats of the 1950s*

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> *and the Hippies of the 1960s had yet to decimate the region and turn its bars into galleries of human grotesques and infantile* poseurs.[192]

"The New York of the Golden Age (1945-1950)" is Gore Vidal's epic glorification of the years that he felt marked the pinnacle of American cultural achievement, including Abstract Expressionism. But *"all that,"* Vidal declares, *"changed in the Fifties."* [193]

To Rosenberg the avant-garde's "alienation"[194] succumbed in the fifties to what was really a "new alienation" that he thought trivial in its self-pity, rancor and peevishness:

> *Nothing could be more vulgar, in the literal meaning of the term, than whining about separation from the mass. That being oneself and not others should be deplored as a condition of misery is the most unambiguous sign of the triumph in the individual of the ideology of mass culture over spiritual independence.*[195]

Rosenberg repeatedly tried to counter the conflation of his view of a creative community with that of the fifties Beat counterculture. *"Tenth Street,"* he explained in 1954, *"draws on deeper sources than the negative sociability of West Coast hang-out literature (Kerouac, 'Beat," etc.) with its generation-propaganda."*[196] It had become *"difficult to distinguish alienation from dyspepsia,"* Rosenberg joked

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derisively in 1964.

That year, in a review of Georg Lukács's The Meaning of Contemporary Realism for Dissent magazine, although fundamentally disagreeing with Lukács's view of modernism, Rosenberg was in accord with Lukács's contempt for the popular postwar literature of despair:

> *In the postwar novel and theater, despair, the 'void,' 'loss of self,' have become clichés...One can hardly help sharing Lukács's impatience with glib intimations of an underlying 'human condition' that turns real events into mere illustrations of an irresistible sickness.*[197]

In the same way a mocking one-liner exposes the self-deception of sixties' alienated conformism: *"Do we really need a university course in Alienation?"*[198]

For Rosenberg it was not the alienated condition of artists and intellectuals *per se* that created a fraternal bond, but rather the manner of individual response to that universal fate. Rosenberg thought it obvious that in his time both the bohemian and the man-on-the-street were equally and inescapably alienated from consumer society.

In this Rosenberg adhered to his marxian concept of alienation:

> *The theory of the 'alienated individual' is, in*

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> *American critical literature, largely derived from Marx. Marx, however, sees alienation as the condition not of the artist but of the common man of industrial society;... The artist is the only figure in this society who is able not to be alienated, because he works directly with the materials of his own experience and transforms them.*[199](1948)[Rosenberg's emphasis]

The crucial difference, then, between the vanguardist and the man-on-the-street was the decision each had made in the face of their common condition. The independent artist chooses his (fated) alienation, whereas the man-on-the-street tries desperately to evade his fate but experiences it nonetheless. To choose is to exercise one's moral privilege:

> *Alienation is neither a reflex to modern crowds and computers nor is it a disease for which the future will supply a vaccine. Every act of creation involves a degree of otherness, and the right of the person to alienate himself from himself and from society...is the most exalted and indispensable of privileges."*[200]

Conscious alienation is the beginning of self-discovery: "*The individual...removes himself from his neighbors and their beliefs in order to gain access to his own sensibility."*[201]

What is most remarkable in this existential dialectic, however, is the high degree to which Rosenberg felt that

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self-estrangement from conventional society was *"compensated... by closer ties among themselves, as in Genet's love colonies of jailbirds.*[202]

> *The estrangement of the Bohemian is balanced by the identity he establishes through his group...There is nothing that makes up for the estrangement of the....contemporary citizen.*[203]

The bohemian establishes an identity through the group that compensates him with much stronger bonds of friendship than the self-deceived "good citizen" can ever enjoy. But is a Genet brotherhood - a love colony of "jailbirds" - morally comparable to Tenth Street and the elite fraternity of the Symposium? It is. The dramatic persona of Socrates, who redeemed Plato's anti-tragic philosophy of adjustment for Rosenberg, is redolent of the pariah: physically ugly, destroyed by the State for the corruption of youth, and a model for Rosenberg's ironic view of the individual's relation to his intimate circle and to the larger society which he served by opposing.

Rosenberg found it richly comical that his own elite symposium had sprung from *"a caste of social delinquents."* And *"who,"* he asked with the provocative flippancy of a jester, *"but one with a taste for priests would desire this*

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peculiar caste to flourish?"

> *...revolutionists in everything from paint to politics, those who never stop talking save when someone puts to them a pertinent question, these people have proved themselves as a group more trouble then they are worth. With too few exceptions, they are false, fanatical, arrogant, greedy, emotionally unstable, morally sophistical, politically and socially untrustworthy...*[204]

They were, "*with too few exceptions*" (his own inner circle), a truly scurvy bunch; yet to him every one them was happily closer to Genet's criminal than they were to the useful, socially well-adjusted intellectual: the "*'clerk,' 'expert,' 'man-of-letters.'*"[205] Rosenberg's bohemians were Marx's *lumpenproletarians*, made up of all classes, all political positions, and because of this heterodoxy bohemia had great political significance to Rosenberg:

> *Marx's analysis of the* lumpenproletarian, *or bohemian, composition of the Society of December 10* [in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte] *is one of his most valuable contributions to modern political dynamics. Bohemians are a phenomenon of middle-class societies and can therefore be understood only by reference to the particular layers - aristocratic, capitalist, worker, peasant - from which they have separated themselves....Among the declassed the myths of all classes, from utopian socialism to anarchy and cultural elitism, mingle and converge. Intellectual unreality is the vertical line that unites all levels of bohemia in a common impulse toward extreme behavior.*[206]

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Among Rosenberg's community of outcasts were the artists and the intellectuals whose antagonism to conventional society was crucial to both the artists and the society. Just by living independently they opposed the *status quo*. The omnipresence of conformism made the existence of bohemia necessary to freedom; it was the only fence - though a jerry-built affair - that secured a space for independent thought within a collective.

Furthermore, the artist group was the only audience for the artist:

> *The best art of our times restricts its appeal to other artists, a group that has neither money nor glamor to bestow and whose members are for the most part miserly in handclapping.*[207]

However unangelic the ranks, it is *"his group"* that compensates the bohemian artist and intellectual with loving camaraderie. Importantly, it is through the group that he establishes his identity. But since the war, with the *"disintegration of bohemians and the reconciliation between artist and society on the basis of foundations grants, jobs in universities, public programs,...and so forth,"* such artists' communities had vanished. *"There's no sanctuary,*

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at least no social sanctuary, for the artist.[208]" For Rosenberg, bohemia disappeared with the reconciliation of the artist and society, and with it went the historic avant-garde.

For a 1968 review of Renato Poggioli's The Theory of the Avant Garde, Rosenberg wrote that Poggioli was dealing with out-of-date conditions. Poggioli's 'culture of negation' was applicable, he wrote, only up through *"pre-affluent stages of Abstract Expressionism (1952-1953)."*[209] Since Pop Art *"no influential American art movement has been either overtly or tacitly hostile to the 'majority culture.'" "Today, both the alienation of the artist and the antagonism of public opinion to art have been successfully liquidated."*[210] Without the condition of alienation there was no true avant-garde and no bohemia. There was only *"a demilitarized zone, flanked by avant-garde ghosts on one side and a changing mass culture on the other."*[211]

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Conclusion: The "Mythological Substance"

> ***You talk about your life and you talk about a mythological substance that actually carries you from one moment to the next.***
>
> Rosenberg[212]

Rosenberg's art criticism was a part and a product of his community. As a *"self-exiled vanguardist,"* his own estrangement from society was, like that of his bohemian friends, *"balanced by the identity he established through his group."* His thought emerged from this community and served it through the crisis of institutional, market, and media appropriation of bohemia and the avant-garde.

What Rosenberg contributed to his creative community was *"an aura of words and concepts":* transformations of its own substance elevated by the classical ideal of Plato's Symposium. Greek and avant-garde culture - the Symposium and Rosenberg's bohemian community in downtown Manhattan - intersect in other ways in Rosenberg's thought, but what has concerned me here is the relationship between Platonic discourse and Rosenberg's art criticism. Words were the material from which he self-consciously fabricated his life and his work. I think that Plato's Socratic dialogues were

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a basic cognitive and social model, and a substantial part of his "mythological substance."

As in Plato's Symposium, behind Rosenberg's art criticism was an active principle: the supreme value of dialogue motivated by love of the friend and love of the process of self-discovery and self-transformation. Rosenberg brought this powerful myth of affectionate friendship that "begets spiritual children" to his "community of the happy few" and to his analysis of post war American art.

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Endnotes

1.Rosenberg, Dorothy Sackler interview, New York, 28 June 1967, The Archives of American Art and The Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

2.Rosenberg, public question and answer session New York University Art Critics in Residence, 1975. Tape and transcription, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. Edited version published in Craft Horizons (August 1975) and The Case of the Baffled Radical. This immediate response to a question from the audience conveys the sense of daily intimacy that I'm after.

3.Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse: Fragments, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: The Noonday Press, 1978):167.

4.Whitman, Democratic Vistas, 1871.

5.Denis de Rougemont, Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963):222.

6.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 June 1967: *"One lump of mythological substance which is what we mean when we talk about our lives, huh? You talk about your life and you talk about a mythological substance which actually carries you from one moment to the next."*

7.Ibid.

8.Ibid.

9.Rosenberg's dedication of Barnett Newman includes this epitaph "For Barney":

> *"Above the vertical of painting, there floats*
> *The circle, the halo, of poetry."*

10.Herbert Read, "The Apollinaire of Action Painting," The Shavian: Journal of the Shaw Society, London (1959).

11.Dore Ashton, "On Harold Rosenberg," Critical Inquiry 6, no.4 (Summer 1980):615.

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12.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 June 1967.

13.Ibid.

14.Harold Baumbach interview, 12 October 1992.

15.Harry Roskolenko, "Harold Rosenberg: 1906-1978," Quadrant (April 1979):62-63.

16.Ibid.

17.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 June 1967.

18.Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol.2 The Use of Pleasure (New York: Random House, 1990):238.

19.Plato, Symposium, in Dialogues of Plato, the Jowett translation, J.D, Kaplan, ed. (New York: Washington Square Books, 1951):214-215.

20.Eve Sedgwick "Introduction," Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia U P, 1985).

21.Parker Tyler, Letter to Charles Henry Ford (ca. November 1931). Parker Tyler Literary Estate, Houston, Texas. Tyler and Ford were openly gay editors of Blues, The Magazine of New Rhythm, a little magazine that published Rosenberg in 1930, and the editors of View magazine, central to the New York avant-garde milieu during the war years. See Part 2, "Making Harold Rosenberg."

22.Wallace Stevens, seventh section of "Sunday Morning," published in Harmonium in 1923. On the importance of Stevens to the painters of Abstract Expressionism, see Glen Macleod and Sandra Kraskin, Painting and Poetry: Poetry and Painting: Wallace Stevens and Modern Art (New York: Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, 1995).

23.Michael Denneny interview, New York, 4 April 1987.

24.Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982):352. Arendt's The Human Condition, promotes the active public life of the Greek male as her own philosophical ideal, and demeans the passive

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domestic life accorded to the Greek female and male slave.

25.Patia Yasin, conversation, New York, 29 November 1995.

26.Susan Sontag, letter to Rosenberg, 17 July 1963, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

27.There are relatively few essays in this "encomium" genre - about thirty out of Rosenberg's roughly 500 publications, about 300 of which are on art. Chronologically, the first to fit the category would be "Arshile Gorky: The Last Move," Hudson Review 13 (March 1960):102-110, the date suggests that Rosenberg's motivation was polemical. The last was Barnett Newman (New York: Abrams, 1978).

28.Xenophon quoted by Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990):204.

29.Robert Hughes, Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990):5.

30.Newman, "The Artists' Sessions at Studio 35," (April 21-23, 1950) in Modern Artists in America, Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, eds. (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951):21.

31.Donald Kuspit, "Preface," The Critic is Artist: The Intentionality of Art (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1984):xiv.

32.Ibid.

33.Rosenberg, "Notes on Identity: With Special Reference to the Mixed Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard." View (May 1946):7. Reprinted in Act and the Actor (1970) with stylistic changes.

34.Rosenberg, "Notes on Identity," Act and the Actor, p.66.

35.Ibid.

36.Ibid.

37.Ibid, p.67.

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38.Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship (New York: Schocken Books, 1981):30. Scholem is remembering the early years of his friendship with Benjamin, 1916-17, when he was nineteen to twenty years old and Benjamin, twenty four to twenty five. My allusion to this famous friendship is meant as a reminder of how broad an influence the Platonic myth of love has had in Western intellectual culture.

39.Parker Tyler letter to Charles Henry Ford, April 9, 1939. Parker Tyler Estate. Catrina Neiman, currently researching a biography of Parker Tyler, brought Tyler's letters to my attention.

40.Saul Steinberg interview, New York, 24 March 1993.

41.Ibid.

42.Rosenberg, "Notes on Identity," p.66.

43.Saul Steinberg interview, 3 March 1993.

44.Ibid.

45.Rosenberg interviewed by John Gruen, 28 March 1969.

46.Steinberg interview.

47.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 June 1967.

48.Annalee Newman telephone interview, 28 November 1995.

49.Ibid.

50.This story is always offered by those who knew Rosenberg to show how much he loved to talk. A published version as told by Hedda Sterne to April Kingsley for The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) varies in detail and emphasis from Annalee Newman's. Kingsley focuses on the drinking, while I think the friendship and the love of talking is the lesson of the story, and the drinking is consistent with the classic "brothers in drink" bonding. Since Mrs. Newman was a witness I decided to use her version.

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51.Annalee Newman telephone interview, 13 September 1995.

52.Rosenberg, Vogue 141 (February 1963):134-135.

53.Baudelaire quoted by Rosenberg, Artworks and Packages, p.173.

54.Newman's letter to Rosenberg, dated 21 January 1963, is published in O'Neill, ed., Barnett Newman, p.222.

55.James Atlas telephone interview, 3 November 1992.

56.J. Hoberman, "Harold Rosenberg's Radical Cheek," Voice Literary Supplement 45 (May 1986):11.

57.Saul Bellow, Him With His Foot in His Mouth and Other Stories (New York: Harper & Row, 1984):65.

58.Ibid, p.96.

59.Rosenberg, "The American Woman's Dilemma: Love, Self-Love, No Love" Vogue 149 (May 1967): 263. Reprinted in Discovering the Present as "The Erect Odalisque: Transcendence Plus Liberation"; this citation, p. 38.

60.Steinberg interview.

61.Letter to Dwight Macdonald from Ralph Manheim (Summer 1948), (Dwight Macdonald Papers, Yale, #33/812). On the withdrawal of the story, Macdonald wrote back that "*I think the story is altogether excellent and grieve at not being able to print it.*" (17 August 1948, Yale #33/812). This material was brought to my attention by Michael Wreszin, author of A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and *Politics* of Dwight Macdonald.

62.Kenneth Burke interview, Andover, New Jersey, 12 October 1989. Telephone conversation with William H. Rueckert, author of Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations, 5 December 1995. Rueckert and other Burke scholars, many of whom specialize in communications, have emphasized the importance of talk for Burke.

63.Rosenberg had used this metaphor of "prospecting" for "perspectives" himself in the 1940 essay "On The Fall of

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Paris," in which he called Paris the "cultural Klondike" of the world. Partisan Review 7 (November-December 1940). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New, p.210.

64.Ralph Manheim "The Perspectors," Typescript p.14. Dwight Macdonald Papers, Yale, #10/11.

65.Ibid, pp.14-15.

66.Parker Tyler, "The Essay," ca. May 1940, typed draft of Acrobat in the Dark: A Metaphysical Autobiography. Estate of Parker Tyler.

67.On the woman's crucial role in "male homosocial desire" both as wives and as part of erotic triangles in which the woman is actually the vehicle for male bonding, see Eve Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

68. June Wayne interview, Los Angeles, 19 March 1992.

69.Plato, Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII, trans. Walter Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1973):98-99.

70.Ibid.

71.Ibid. "The Seventh Letter," p.138.

72.Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," The New Yorker (25 May 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p. 222.

73.Rosenberg, "Art and Words," The New Yorker (29 March 1969):110. Reprinted in The De-definition of Art; this citation, p. 68.

74.Ibid.

75.Rosenberg, Public symposium, Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago, 1969. Tape recording, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

76.Bellow, Him With His Foot in His Mouth, p.77.

77.Plato, "The Seventh Letter," Phaedrus and Letters, p.140.

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78.René Char quoted by Rosenberg for the epigraph to "Twilight of the Intellectuals": *"It will be a bad night when, lacking truth itself, man suppresses the superstition of truth."* Dissent 5 (Summer 1958), a review of Raymond Aron, The Opium of the Intellectuals. Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.166.

79. This disregard for "truth" as the goal of art making and intellectual dialogue will be discussed in relation to Rosenberg's attacks on museum curators for "falsification" of the past. The value under discussion here did not apply to scholars and museum officials who had a moral duty not to falsify the past. See chapter "Making it Official."

80.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

81.Rosenberg, "All About Everything," an interview with Howard Conant at New York University critics-in-residence public lecture, 1975. Rosenberg continues *"On the other hand, a good idea can be absolutely worthless. What is wrong with the Conceptualists is they have left the doing out of art. Yes, there has to be an idea in it, but the idea is nothing without the doing."* Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.230.

82.Rosenberg, "Sum of Many Colors," Saturday Review 36 (6 June 1953). Revised version in The Tradition of the New as "Revolution and the Concept of Beauty"; this citation, p.77.

83.Valéry was one of those whom Rosenberg "absorbed" as he did Marx, Baudelaire, and Dostoyevsky. Rosenberg's theory of influence and its relevance to his own life is presented in the chapter "Making Harold Rosenberg." For typical acknowledgments of Valéry, see "Criticism and Its Premises," Penn State Co-Seminar on Curriculum & Research Development (30 August 1965); Reprinted in Art on The Edge, pp.135-152.

84.Paul Valéry, "A Fond Note on Myth"(1929), The Outlook For Intelligence, Bollingen Series XLV (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1989):43-44.

85.Rosenberg, Letter to the editor of Partisan Review (28 January 1964), published as a footnote to the transcribed BBC broadcast (5 September 1963), "Tradition and Creation -

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The Breach With the Past," published in Partisan Review 31(Spring 1964).

86.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 June 1967.

87.Ibid.

88.Harold Bloom, "The primal scene of instruction," a chapter in A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford U P, 1975). Similarly considering the possible relevance of the Hebrew language to philosophical thinking, Walter Kaufmann has claimed a relationship between Martin Buber's compulsion to get to the root (etymology of "radicalism"), and Buber's translation of the Hebrew Bible to German. *"For in Hebrew,"* writes Kaufmann, *"it could be argued that one did not really understand a word until one had grasped its root and considered its relation to other words with the same root."* [Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970):32-33.]

89.Bloom, A Map of Misreading, pp.42-43.

90.Pentateuch and Haftorahs, second edition, ed. J.H. Hertz, (London: Soncino Press, 1973):2.

91.Patia Yasin, telephone conversation, 23 December 1995.

92.William Shawn, "Harold Rosenberg," The New Yorker, 24 July 1978. The obituary is unsigned, but May Tabak wrote to William Shawn to thank him for it. The New Yorker papers, New York Public Library, Harold Rosenberg file.

93.Parker Tyler, c.1940, Estate of Parker Tyler.

94.Ibid.

95.Lionel Abel, "Harold Rosenberg, 1906-1978," Art News (September 1978):76.

96.Ibid.

97.Steinberg interview.

98.William Phillips, "Four Portraits," Partisan Review 50 (Winter 1983):536.

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99.Irving Howe, A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982):134-135.

100.Eleanor Handley interview, New York, 2 July 1992.

101.Simone de Beauvoir, Letters to Sartre (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1992):455-456.

102.Clement Greenberg interview, 22 June 1990.

103.Martin Greenberg telephone interview, 8 August 1995. Martin Greenberg and Tabak were both working as camp counselors and HR had come up to visit his wife. MG remembers HR reciting Wallace Steven's Harmonium while MG and Tabak rowed him in a boat on the lake. *"I was dazzled by him...He had a heavy Assyrian presence like Ashurbanipal."* MG came to visit HR on 10th street after the war. The two went to a cafeteria in the neighborhood where all the artists hung out. *"He was talking away and as I left I saw that he had moved to another table and was talking to someone else."*

104.Max Kozloff interview, New York, 12 August 1993.

105.Michael Denneny, unpublished eulogy for Harold Rosenberg, read at memorial service for Rosenberg, 25 April 1979, The New York Public Library.

106.Ibid.

107.Esteban Vicente interview, New York, 13 May 1993.

108.Paul Brach, telephone interview, 20 September 1994. In a letter to the author (28 September 1994), Brach added, *"Once a year he had a panel at the club on 'Has the Situation Changed?'"*

109.Bellow, Him With His Foot in His Mouth, p.93.

110.See taped seminars and symposia in Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

111.Michelle Cone interview, New York, 10 October 1995.

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112.Rosenberg, "Duchamp: Private and Public," Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations (1975) (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983): 8. Original version appeared in The New Yorker 49 (18 February 1974): 86.

113.Paul Valéry quoted by Wallace Stevens in "Two Prefaces," Paul Valéry, Dialogues, Bollingen Series XLV (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1989):xiii.

114.Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978):167.

115.Rosenberg, Undated handwritten note, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

116."Harold Rosenberg on Criticism," Artforum 11 (February 1964). Transcription of HR responding to questions from members of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, probably commissioned by editor John Coplans who was disturbed about Clement Greenberg's Post Painterly Abstraction exh. at the LACMA. Max Kozloff telephone interview 9/21/94, and letter from John Coplans 3/23/64 to HR, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York

117.Thomas Hess, "History discarded, regained," a review of Arshile Gorky: The Man, The Time, The Idea by Harold Rosenberg, Art News 61(December 1962).

118.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

119.Ibid.

120.Ibid.

121.Philip Leider, "The New York School in Los Angeles," Artforum 4 no.1 (September 1965):3-11.

122.Kuspit, The Critic is Artist, "Preface," p.xvi.

123.Rosenberg, "The Diminished Act," Act and the Actor, p.6. This essay was intended for a Lincoln Center theater magazine that never appeared.

124.Rosenberg, Act and the Actor, "Preface," p. xxi.

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125.Rosenberg, Walker interview.

126.Ashton, "On Harold Rosenberg," p.616.

127.Rosenberg, "Criticism and its Premises," p.147.

128.Rosenberg, "What is Art?" Partisan Review 45 (Fall 1978). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this exchange is on p. 279.

129.Rosenberg, "Themes," Discovering the Present, p.208.

130.Rosenberg, "The Diminished Act," p.12.

131.Ibid, p.13.

132.Rosenberg objected to the academic terms "method" and "methodology" as antithetical to his anti-structural (and anti-academic) process. However, I think that today the paradox of anti-structural methodology will confuse no one.

133.Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 1952, p.28.

134.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Art on the Edge p.142, version of paper for Penn State seminar on Curriculum and Research Development, 30 August 1965.

135.Rosenberg,"Criticism and Its Premises," Pennsylvania State Seminar on Research and Curriculum Development, 30 August - 7 September, 1965. This quotation is from the revised version reprinted in Art on the Edge (1975):135.

136.Rosenberg, "Meaning in Abstract Art (Continued)," The New Yorker (1 January 1972):43. Also published in Art International 16 (March 1972):64. Reprinted in Art on the Edge as "Newman: Meaning in Abstract Art II"; this citation, p.51.

137.Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," Dissent, (1958). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.260.

138.Ibid. This phrase is italicized in Rosenberg's text.

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139.Ibid, p.263.

140.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," p.140.

141.Ibid.

142.Transcription sent to Rosenberg for his approval by producer Susan Allen, WNDT Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 29 September 1966. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

143.Rose Slivka interview, New York, 10 November 1992.

144.Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, With Constant Reference to Socrates (New York: Harper and Row, 1965): note p.55.

145.Ibid., p.54.

146.Rosenberg, "Themes," Discovering the Present, p.218.

147."The American Action Painters," Art News (December 1952). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New. This citation, p. 26.

148."De Kooning on the Borders of the Act," Vogue 144 (September 1964):146. Reprinted in The Anxious Object; this citation, p.126.

149."The Concept of Action in Painting," The New Yorker (25 May 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.216.

150.Rosenberg, "Some Points About Action Painting: A Conversation Between Thomas B.Hess and Harold Rosenberg." Action Painting...1958 exh.cat.(Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts, 1958):6.

151.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Pennsylvania State Seminar on Research and Curriculum Development, 30 August to 7 September, 1965. Reprinted in Art on the Edge; this citation, p. 138.

152.Rosenberg, Studs Terkel radio interview of Rosenberg, n/d, Chicago. Tape and transcription Rosenberg/Tabak Papers,

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New York.

153.Rosenberg, Arshile Gorky: The Man, The Time, The Idea (New York: The Sheepmeadow Press, 1962):62-63.

154.Ibid, p.13.

155.Ibid, p.66.

156.Ibid, p.15.

157.Ibid, p.16.

158.Ibid, p.14.

159.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 January 1967.

160.Rosenberg, "Image as Counterforce," Art News 66 (February 1966):48.

161.Rosenberg, Willem de Kooning (New York, Abrams, 1973). Reprinted in Art and Other Serious Matters; this citation, p.167.

162.Rosenberg, "Meaning in Abstract Art (Continued)" The New Yorker 47 (1 January 1972):43. Reprinted in Art on the Edge as "Newman: Meaning in Abstract Art II," this citation, p.51.

163.Ibid, p.52.

164.Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," The New Yorker 43 (10 February 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.173. "The tradition of the new" is the title of Rosenberg's first collection of essays (1959). Loosely synonymous with the aesthetic and political avant-garde, the oxymoronic formulation tradition of the new meant both the authentic avant-garde "culture of negation" and the false or affirmative avant garde of the post-Abstract Expressionist art world.

165.Rosenberg, Arshile Gorky, p.95.

166.On the debate around these concepts in American art criticism between 1973 and 1983, see Rosalind Krauss,

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"Introduction," Originality of the Avant-garde and other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985):1-6.

167.Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p.28

168.Rosenberg, Act and the Actor, p.72.

169.Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p.34.

170."Master" is a stigmatized term in the lexicon of contemporary feminist and post-colonial criticism. Mastery was, however, an irreplaceable value for Rosenberg, one which countered artists' expectations of "making it" quick in the art-world (by luck, the right gimic, etc.). Rosenberg opposed "making it" with "mastery," achieved only after many years of dedicated practice, and regular exercise of imagination, critical thinking, and courage. For a brief discussion of how this axiological position served as a basis for Rosenberg's judgments on art and artists, see "The Making of Frank Stella" in the section, "Aesthetic Assault."

171.With important exceptions, Rosenberg's personal canon was composed of white European and American men, but his criticism championed universal individual liberation. Frantz Fanon, for example, cited Rosenberg for Fanon's own anti-racist purposes. See Peau noire, masques blancs (1952. Rosenberg's "Du Jeu au Je: esquises d'une geographie de l'action," Les Temps Modernes, April 1948, cited on page 71).

172.Donald Kuspit, "A Phenomenological Approach to Artistic Intention," Artforum (January 1974). Reprinted in The Critic is Artist; this citation, p.8.

173.Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p.38.

174.Rosenberg, question and answer session, Committee on Social Thought Public Seminar, 12 March 1969. Tape and transcript, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

175.Rosenberg, "From Pollock To Pop: Twenty Years of Painting and Sculpture," Holiday, 20th Anniversary Issue: A Critical View of America's Flourishing Arts (March 1966):140.

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176.Rosenberg, "The Vanishing Intellectual?" The New Yorker (26 June 1965). A review of Lewis Coser, Men of Ideas, A Sociologist's View. Reprinted in Discovering the Present as "The Intellectual and His Future"; this citation, p.194.

177.Rosenberg, "Tenth Street, A Geography of Modern Art," p.103.

178.Ibid, p.108.

179.Ibid, pp.106-107.

180.Ibid.

181.Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p.25.

182.Rosenberg, Miscellaneous note, undated, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

183.Rosenberg, "Miscellaneous Notes 1966," Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

184.Rosenberg, "Some Points about Action Painting: A Conversation Between Thomas B. Hess and Harold Rosenberg," exh.cat. Action Painting...1958 (Dallas Museum for Contemporary Art, 1958):n/p.

185.Rosenberg, notes for a letter to Lionel Trilling, 28 May 1974. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

186.On Rosenberg's communism, see section "Making Harold Rosenberg: Community, Self, Conflict," this dissertation.

187.Rosenberg, "A Specter Haunts Mr. Krutch," a review of Was Europe a Success? by Joseph Wood Krutch, Partisan Review 2 (April-May 1935):83-84.

188.Ibid, p.83.

189.Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford U P, 1958):141.

190.Rosenberg,"Professors of Man Estranged," Midstream 4(Winter 1958). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.185.

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191.Rosenberg, "It Can Happen to Anyone," New York Times Book Review (20 December 1964). Reprinted in Act and the Actor: Making the Self, as "Missing Persons"; this citation, pp.203-204.

192.William Barrett, The Truants: Life Among the Intellectuals (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982):30.

193.Gore Vidal, "Queen of the Golden Age" a review of The Diaries of Dawn Powell, 1931-1965, The New York Review of Books (21 March 1996):6.

194.Renato Poggioli offers a standard definition of avant-garde alienation - the psychological, ethical, economic, cultural, social, aesthetic and stylistic dissociation resulting from the antinomy between the two cultures of modern democratic capitalism - bourgeois and avant-garde. Poggioli's definition is informed by Marx's concept of alienation under capitalism, but also by the many modern philosophers and poets he synthesizes. See The Theory of the Avant-Garde, p.103-128.

195.Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," Commentary (September 1948). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, pp.16-17.

There is no doubt that without the popularization of Existentialism and "alienation" in the fifties "Action painting" would not have had the wide appeal it did. While it is a truism that the appeal and survival of an idea typically owes more than a little to its vices, the popular reception of Action painting as an expression of Existential angst has unfortunately led to some of the most entrenched and reductive misreadings of Rosenberg and the Abstract Expressionists.

196.Rosenberg, "Tenth Street, A Geography of Modern Art," Art News Annual (New York: Macmillan, 1954). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.105.

197.Rosenberg, "The Third Dimension of Georg Lukács," Dissent, vol 11(Autumn 1964). Republished in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.46.

198.Ibid.

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199.Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," p.16.

200.Ibid.

201.Ibid.

202.Rosenberg, "Missing Persons," Act and the Actor: Making the Self, p.199.

203.Ibid, pp.199-200.

204.Rosenberg, "Twilight of the Intellectuals," Dissent 5(Summer 1958). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.173.

205.Ibid, p.172.

206.Rosenberg, in Ihab Hassan, ed. Liberations: New Essays on the Humanities in Revolution (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan U P, 1971) Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.323.

207.Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," Dissent (Winter 1958). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.267.

208.Rosenberg responding to question from audience, Committee on Social Thought Public Seminar on 12 March 1969. Tape and transcription, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

209. Rosenberg, "D.M.Z. Vanguardism," The New Yorker (28 December 1968):155. Reprinted in The Dedefinition of art; this citation, p.218.

210.Ibid, pp.218-219.

211.Ibid.

212.Rosenberg, Sackler interview, 28 June 1967.

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MAKING HAROLD ROSENBERG: SELF, COMMUNITY, CONFLICT

The hope and the light did not come from museums, collectors, or dealers.... It came out of that milieu. It came out of that mysterious throw of energy back and forth among all of the people in the milieu...that communal nucleus which was a source of everyone's stimulation...a mystery exactly like the mystery of a revolution.[1](1971)

Harold Rosenberg on his milieu

"The reality which communism creates," The German Ideology explains...[is that] *the community has become the individuals themselves in their real interrelationship ....A spontaneous passionate communion, as in invasions, floods, celebrations, becomes the normal state.*[2] (1949)

Harold Rosenberg on Marx's idea of community

The background to many features of present-day American painting, by which I mean that painting of the whole postwar period, is the decade of the thirties.[3]

Rosenberg fragment after 1969

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1930: Between "Bohemianism in Literature" and "The Crisis in Criticism"

> *The ambition was to appear in the same little magazine, here or abroad, that published Cummings, Joyce, Stein, and all the other stars of International Bohemia.*[4]
>
> May Tabak, A Collage

> *I was too young to be firmly anchored 'in the twenties' and when the new tide rose I was swamped like the rest (woe to him who is not swamped).*[5]
>
> Rosenberg (1957)

Harold Rosenberg's identity as an avant-garde writer was established in the milieu of the "little magazine"[6] with his first publications in 1930 when he was 24 years old. These were two surrealist-inspired stories for the Paris-based transition, a dramatic dialogue for Charles Henri Ford's and Parker Tyler's Blues, "The Magazine of a New Rhythm," out of Columbus, Mississippi, and a poem for Pagany.[7] Rosenberg's poems, reviews and essays appeared regularly from 1931 to 1943 in the Chicago-based Poetry: A Magazine of Verse - *"modernism's inaugurating little*

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magazine."[8] James Burnham's and Phillip Wheelwright's The Symposium, from the heart of Greenwich Village, published Rosenberg's early literary criticism, including "Character Change and the Drama," the 1932 essay that Rosenberg always pointed to as the "basic piece" that identified his lifelong critical position.[9]

But starting out one year after the Crash of 1929, Rosenberg had indeed, as he said, come too late *"to be firmly anchored in 'the twenties'"* and the culture of the "little magazine" that independent, experimental magazines like Blues, Poetry, and The Symposium represented. Rosenberg would always hold the spirit of twenties international bohemianism in literature as an ideal, but he was, however reluctantly, *"a man of the thirties."* With the failure of capitalism in the early years of the Depression, suddenly pre-thirties avant-garde bohemian attitudes appeared (at best) too frivolous to meet the demands of the revolutionary era.

Starting a writer's life at the outset of the thirties made all the difference. The international financial and social crisis of the Depression was paralleled by what Alfred Kazin describes in his social history of modern

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American prose literature, On Native Grounds, as a "crisis in criticism":

> *The "crisis in criticism" of which critics were speaking so confidently at the turn of the decade was for them really a crisis in the whole moral order of civilization, a crisis in which critics...would play a leading role.*[10]

"Making Harold Rosenberg: Self, Community, Conflict," is about Rosenberg's participation in the political, social and cultural crisis of the thirties that brought criticism to the forefront. For Rosenberg the crisis would never end; during his four decades of criticism it would only change shape. For him, criticism would never step down from its public office out of a sense of having failed in the thirties to rescue the social order. Nor would Rosenberg ever stop believing that the cultural intellectual had a public obligation to remain political - unaffiliated and critical of the powers that be.[11]

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The New Act

From a room on East Houston Street in early 1933 Rosenberg and his friend, the writer H.R. Hays, produced a little experimental magazine entitled The New Act: A Literary Review. Rosenberg wrote the editorial statement for the first of the three issues. Entitled "Note on Class Conflict in Literature,"[12] the editorial presented Rosenberg's view of the situation for little magazines at a time when young bohemian writers like himself were under great moral pressure to relinquish "aesthetic" values and the modernist literary canon to develop a new proletarian literary culture.

Rosenberg's editorial response to the demand for an engaged literature was to argue that a truly revolutionary literature must be free of any external agendas. Only an independent literature, he insisted, can possibly represent the contradictions, particularity and multiplicity of lived human experience:

> *My belief is that both the protagonists and the opponents of the economic-social view of literature treat it as involving a problem too easily settled, the quick circular certainties of an emotional Q.E.D. working, naturally, a*

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simplification.[13]

Writing as a dialectician, Rosenberg objected that the polarization, either art or politics, was false. For him they were inseparable.

And what if, Rosenberg rhetorically proposed, the social utopias were to be achieved? (Here in 1933 he lists "Fascist" utopias with "Communist" utopias.) What if they were somehow able to overcome all the negations of reality with *"the most open trustfulness in the ideal of such a general progress in all fields and such a general conformity of human minds and desires."*[14] Could they, even then, *"remove the human irony that waits at the top of the tower?"*[15] Rosenberg thought the "marxian theorists" were naively idealistic, optimistic, and simplistic in their view of human nature. These were the insights of tragic literature[16]:

> *Ajax, Macbeth, Stavrogin - they possessed everything one needs from the Social-Economic standpoint to live well and freely. And yet they were tragic and pathetic, these figures who matched, at least at the time they appeared, the earthly aspirations of the mass-man.*[17]

The young Rosenberg speaks here as a tragic ironist, a

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Dostoyevskian "pessimist" deeply critical of utopian psychology. At the beginning of 1933 Rosenberg was skeptical and clearly repelled by conformism and the anonymous abstraction: *"the mass-man."*[18]

As he always would, against the class-identified mass-man, Rosenberg proposed the socially responsible individual who discovers and creates his true collectivity:

> *The man who is identified by some fact known only to himself or meaningful to himself in some singular way, belongs to no active class and is an individual in the strictest sense of the term....It is when the Fact that moves him is also the one that moves you that brotherhood begins, solidarity, class sympathy. You are now both class-men of the same class.*[19]

In other words, friendship freely chosen is the only basis for fraternity. The editorial posture of The New Act, Rosenberg concluded his "Notes on Class Conflict in Literature," was therefore against all collectivist pressures on writers from either the protagonists or the opponents of proletarianism in literature. The New Act was to be the work of independent artists in the tradition of the experimental avant-garde magazines of the pre-thirties era. In the terms of the times, The New Act promoted *"Bohemianism in literature,"* an attitude so emphatically

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opposed by the Communist Party that in February of 1934 it established the Partisan Review specifically to counter it.[20] The first issue of Partisan Review appeared just two months before the last issue of The New Act in April, 1934.

The last issue of The New Act published both Ezra Pound and Georgi Plekhanov, a fact that seems to suggest Hays's and Rosenberg's radically democratic cultural politics.[21] However, according to their mutual friend, the painter Harold Baumbach, Rosenberg and Hays quarreled over the inclusion of the political pieces. Hays wanted them excluded. It was Rosenberg who insisted they appear.[22] So it was evidently Rosenberg's doing that The New Act consciously positioned itself with regard to the pressing social, political and economic questions facing the American writer in 1933-1934.

Rosenberg's critical focus on the dialectical tension between art and politics, and his defense of artistic independence in The New Act remained unwavering lifelong postulates. In 1933 his stance was unquestionably in opposition to the anti-modernist and anti-bohemian cultural politics of the Communist Party. But Hitler's rise to power in 1933 changed things dramatically for New York writers.

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The call for a "United Front Against Fascism," first announced in The Daily Worker in March of 1933, inspired many American writers to ally themselves with the Communist movement.[23] As Alfred Kazin explains in On Native Grounds,

> *It was precisely because Hitler, almost as his first move in power, had ordered the burning of the books, precisely because an easy-going materialism had proved so disastrous and the disruption of the social order threatened the foundations of thought, that criticism now came to think of itself as a central office.*[24]

Rosenberg's New York intellectual milieu responded to the rise of fascism and the alarming threat to free intellectual culture emblematized by Hitler's burning of the books to inaugurate the Third Reich. Criticism became the writer's social duty. It was at this point that Rosenberg began his serious reading of Marx and revolutionary marxists. By early 1934 he could be called a communist.

Four decades after the last issue of The New Act, in 1974, Rosenberg replied to a query about the magazine from a graduate student. Rosenberg recalled that *"The New Act was pro-leftist. We were kids and literary ones. We learned about politics later."*[25] This self-assessment is significant; it shows that looking back Rosenberg saw that

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his real political education was yet to come.

The Formation of the Bands: 1934-1937

> *The troubled nineteen-thirties - the decade, to use the phrase of Jules Romains, of 'the formation of the bands'...that extremist period....*
>
> *Rosenberg (1964)* [26]

> *Each writer felt himself joined to the group of writers gathered about him, and the group as a whole felt itself to be a center of the masses...yet the note dominant in the speeches and the entire atmosphere was one of individual responsibility, individual creative freedom, and individual method and artistic perspective.*[27]
>
> Rosenberg (1935) (on The American Writers' Congress)

In 1944, reviewing a new novel by Arthur Koestler, the ex-communist author of Darkness at Noon, Rosenberg looked back on the nineteen-thirties. Koestler's latest book, Arrival and Departure, Rosenberg wrote, was another in the expanding god-that -failed genre that he mock-biblically dubbed *"the moral Flight From Moscow."*[28] Rosenberg admired the *"political sophistication"* of Koestler's

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antitotalitarian novels for their awareness *"of viciousness and weakness not only, as the older writers knew it, as something inherent...[but] also as something made, even made 'according to plan.'*[Rosenberg's emphasis]"[29] In the end, however, Rosenberg concluded that Koestler had failed to capture *"the tragedy of the left intellectual of the past decade."*[30]

Koestler's historical drama of the individual and the collective was distorted, Rosenberg felt, by Koestler's dualistic morality and deterministic view of fate. For Rosenberg, the tragedy of the thirties intellectual was not rightly represented by Koestler's drama of the good heroic intellectual against the bad totalitarian state. Rosenberg thought it was more accurately an individual versus the collective struggle in which the thirties intellectual had been, at every turn, totally responsible for his own actions. Rosenberg's tragic vision, his insistence on individual responsibility no matter what, is the fundamental difference between Rosenberg and Koestler, and more generally distinguishes Rosenberg's independent marxian critique from that of writers who made *"the moral Flight From Moscow."*[31]

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For Rosenberg, one's fate can only be ennobled by the exercise of personal choice. Collective identities like "the proletarian," or "the Communist," were to him morally evasive abstractions.[32] Thus Leon Trotsky was admired by him as *"the tragic figure of the revolutionary epoch"*[33] precisely because Trotsky *"had chosen [my emphasis] his ordeal in obedience to his conscience."*[34] *"[Trotsky] was trapped as in Greek drama in an irony on a cosmic scale."*[35] The literary paradigm of tragedy structures Rosenberg's existential eschatology and plays equally in his criticism - political, social and cultural - and his life.

The years 1934 - 1937 (when he was 28 to 31 years old) of what he called *"the extremist period"*[36] bracket a transformative episode in Rosenberg's intellectual odyssey in which he and other thirties intellectuals were, like Trotsky, *"trapped as in Greek drama in an irony on a cosmic scale."*[37] Throughout these years Rosenberg maintained the values and critical purpose he had worked out by the time he wrote "Note on Class Conflict in Literature" for The New Act in 1933: the conviction that self-knowledge and self-creation requires a free, creative collectivity of

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individuals; that the individual is by definition always already social and political; and that the right, critically conscious, interactive tension must be eternally sustained between the individual and the society for the good of both.

Although some sense of Rosenberg's marxian theory will emerge, what follows is not a discussion of Rosenberg's theoretical marxism *per se*. (His most important marxian criticism will be published after World War II as a retrieval of Marx for the reactionary period and the battle with totalitarianisms of both East and West.) Rather, the subject of "Making Harold Rosenberg: Self, Community, Conflict" is how the experiences of these few intense years shaped Rosenberg's mature thought. By situating Rosenberg in his formative circumstances some understanding of how he came to hold the opinions he held, how his world view and critical strategies developed under the pressure of events, and how marxism added scale, focus, and a principled but flexible structure to his bohemian avant-garde modernism will surface.

Rosenberg would always acknowledge his large intellectual debt to Marx. When many important thirties intellectuals later made *"the moral Flight From Moscow,"*[38]

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Rosenberg made lifelong enemies of them by publicly ridiculing their *en masse* apostasy. For himself, Rosenberg never ceased *"to see in Marx's writings a grand scaffold on which current political, social and cultural phenomena appear to interact in a significant way."*[39]

*

In the mid-thirties, however, the appeal of Marx to Rosenberg was not merely about serious culture critique; it was about the possibility of transforming the real conditions of life. In what follows, it will be clear that between 1934-1937 he held almost magical hopes for a revolution. In these years Rosenberg will link his radicalism and the radicalism of his artist and writer friends to the avant-garde rebellion stemming from the intellectual milieu of Henri de Saint-Simon a century earlier. Bohemians, he told an interviewer in 1972, were traditionally revolutionary; they were natural communists, proto-Communists.

> *There was a prestige and a tradition of leftism in art, being against the bourgeoisie. This is an old thing, a hundred years old....Everybody -*

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> *novelist, painter - worth anything was anti-bourgeois. This whole tradition extended to the... communists who were the heirs of leftism, you see.*[40]

Although the Communist Party held bohemianism in contempt, to Rosenberg, bohemianism and the communist movements had the same historical source. Bohemianism was, like communism, collective, anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, and opposed to the class system:

> *All bohemias and underworlds transmute the ranks established by social class into a hierarchy based on talent or daring.*[41]

It was as if Rosenberg had hoped Plato's Symposium and his own downtown Manhattan bohemian milieu would become the universal human condition.

> *In the thirties...having gratefully accepted from politics an assignment in changing the world....Painting and sculpture were to overcome at last their bohemian isolation and gain an audience of ordinary folk in the classical manner.*[42] (1962)

Rosenberg's marxism was consistent with, and clearly inspired by, his preexisting platonic ideal of friendship and community. The prototype was the "*true collectivity in art*" he had experienced from his late adolescence in

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Brooklyn, when at the same time he discovered the "ideal world," as he called it, of Plato's Symposium.[43] In the mid-thirties he would find the collective ideal magnified as a societal possibility.

The lessons of the thirties, however, will have a long reaching impact on Rosenberg's criticism. His ideal of a democratic communism will be loathed by the members of the Communist Party, his stubborn independence resented by both the Stalinists and the Trotskyist anti-Stalinists, whose Bolshevik organizational forms he will equally oppose. He will not fit - will refuse to fit - any political group, and he will be proud of that. By 1938 Rosenberg will have dialectically linked his ideal of individualist comraderie to its concrete self-negation: the sectarianism, puritanism and fratricide he will accept as inherent to all intellectual groups. In fact, several years before the decade is over, he will have come to see conflict as the necessary corrective to the intellectuals' much more dangerous - and equally powerful - herd instincts: their penchant for authoritarian dogmatism.

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May Day 1936

> *We write <u>in behalf of</u> the working class, wouldn't you agree?*
>
> Kenneth Burke to Harold Rosenberg
> 1 May 1936

According to Jean Pucelle, a leftist New York writer, Rosenberg had been one of a group of Village "aesthetes" when she left for Europe in 1932. But by the time Pucelle returned in 1936 much had changed. Watching the May Day parade that year, she was astonished to see that

> *...there was Harold Rosenberg marching along...because these were all esthetes...who had turned their back on social problems.*[44]

The implicit conclusion Pucelle drew from Rosenberg's participation in the May Day parade was that he had turned away from aestheticism to political engagement. But a more accurate image is that Rosenberg's bohemian modernism had undergone a marxist restructuring in the years Pucelle had spent in Paris. These changes in Rosenberg's thinking are the subject at hand, but for now, the perspectives on Rosenberg's view of art and social responsibility can be

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multiplied, at least on May 1, 1936, by a glimpse at his attitude as he marched in this May Day parade.

May Tabak remembered marching in the parade between her husband and Kenneth Burke (while Pucelle was evidently observing them with some surprise from the street):

> *...it was May Day and everyone was marching....we were all bellowing WE WRITE FOR THE WORKING CLASS! We'd probably gone eight or so blocks with this message when Harold leaned past me and asked Kenneth Burke, "Do we really write for the working class?"*
> *"I've been wondering about that myself," replied Kenneth. "Of course it could be said that we write in behalf of the working class, wouldn't you agree?" Harold pondered that a second and agreed. Happily we went on shouting that we wrote for the working class for another block or two.*[45]

Burke and Rosenberg decided they worked not *for* but "*in behalf of* the working class." This apparently pedantic question of prepositions is amusing, but imbedded in it is actually the deeper question of the right relationship between the writer and society; it amounts to the basic question of individual creative freedom under socialism. Both Rosenberg and Burke assumed that the communist writer was to have more freedom, not less, and both writers required erudite readers at ease with dialectics and their difficult essay styles.[46] Their point, therefore, was that

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one works freely (that is, independently, critically) in behalf of society.

Like Burke and Rosenberg, artists and writers participating in the workers' parade had not necessarily renounced the individualistic or the aesthetic. Tabak recalls that one of their writer friends had been jubilantly chanting *"Bon Vivant Art!"* as he marched along in front of them. Similarly, according to Dore Ashton, *"De Kooning...remembers [John] Graham with great affection for donning his chamois gloves and, in his straightest calvary officer's guise, marching on May Day shouting 'We want bread!"*[47]

But by the time of the 1936 May Day parade, the situation of American literature, art, and criticism was thoroughly politicized. Rosenberg held equally to the aesthetic values and bohemian leftist politics of the American literary renaissance of the twenties. He did not like to think of himself as a man entirely of the thirties, but rather *"chronologically, as well as temperamentally, on the edge between the two generations and actually stangers to both."*[48] Rosenberg was highly allergic to interpretive packaging that disregards the specificity of individual

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responses. *"Generations"* (to him a chronological package), he said more than once, *"belong to comedy."*

> *I was too young to be firmly anchored 'in the twenties' and when the new tide rose I was swamped like the rest (woe to him who is not swamped). Like everyone else, I became involved in Marxism, but from the start my Marxism was out of date. I was interested in Marx for the sake of something else - in the cliches of 'my generation,' I found in his writings an image of the drama of the individual and of the mass, as I saw in Lenin a new kind of hero, a sort of political M. Teste. Every word of Marx I read made the master seem more interested in the deities I had brought with me than in by contemporaries' Marxism....Yet we were using the same vocabulary.*[49]

These recollections from 1957 - near the end of the McCarthy confession era - explain that Rosenberg had been *"swamped like the rest,"* but add parenthetically that it had been morally right to be swamped. Rosenberg never disavowed his radicalism,[50] and Marx would always be "the master."

Rosenberg's loyalty doubtless had much to do with the singular way in which he assimilated Marx. Following his own theory of influence, he "mimicked" Marx in the sense of Aristotle's performative mimesis; that is, Rosenberg consciously enacted in his thinking what he called *"naive imitation"*[51] of Marx, the self-transformative process he admired in Baudelaire's absorption of Edgar Allen Poe:

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> ***Baudelaire establishes himself inside Poe as a base of operations; he apes him but does not use him. Through Poe he achieves a heightened sense of himself, whereas the "users" favor "objectivity," a belief in the "self-abnegation of the artist"....Baudelaire is simple in his mimicry, which absorbs Poe into an act of knowing.***[52]

The important distinction for Rosenberg was between achieving a much desired *"heightened sense of himself"* by imitating Marx's "acts of mind," versus achieving "self-abnegation" thought an "objective" use of Marx. As in Plato's Socratic dialogues, the dynamic interaction between interlocutors creates no followers, but aims at reciprocal self-recognition and self-creation. *"Imitation"* of *"certain selected models,"* Rosenberg wrote, *"is more naive than such using, has a closer resemblance to life itself."*[53]

When he read Marx seriously for the first time, probably in 1933 and 1934,[54] Rosenberg discovered that *"every word of Marx I read made the master seem more interested in the deities I had brought with me."* These "deities" were worshiped by all his chosen precursors, the dead poets he had already assimilated (and also called "master"): Baudelaire, Valéry, Melville, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Plato, Sophocles, and others.[55] Rosenberg had

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shaped his own mind through reading and conversation, training it in dialectical thinking with Plato's Socratic dialogues; it was receptive to the cognitive possibilities of Marx's dialectic.

Certainly Marx's totalizing vision reinforced and enlarged Rosenberg's own philosophical structure and appealed to his Old Testament view of the contemporary actor playing his part on a vast mythic-historical stage. From Marx, Rosenberg derived larger perspectives on, and ways of thinking about, his own critical preoccupations: "*the drama of the individual and of the mass,*" the demystification of the life world, and the relationship between art work and individuation.

This important theoretical affinity does not need to be developed in this context, but it is worth at least quickly noting the relevance of Marx's theory of alienated labor for Rosenberg's view of art as "action," that is, as a model of agency and process of self-fabrication. Marx proposed in Capital that the laborer (in a good society) makes himself concurrently with the act of making a "*form adapted to his own wants.*"[56] This ideal kind of work - free work - is ontologically central, according to Marx, because in "*acting*

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on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway."[57]

Rosenberg recognized in Marx's theory of alienated labor his own philosophy of art and life as dialogical self-enactment:

> *Marx speaks of the liberation of work, and defines free work as work for the sake of the worker, as distinguished from work for the sake of the product. In this idea, which puts creation above the object, whether artifact or commodity, Marx anticipates the thought...of the Action Painters - a thought that [David] Jones beautifully formulates in his concept that in art "one is trying to make a shape out of the very things of which one is oneself made."*[58]

As Rosenberg said, he *"was interested in Marx for the sake of something else,"* something other than what he thought were the interests of his "generation." The 1933 editorial, "Notes on Class Conflict in Literature," shows that from the beginning Rosenberg was repelled by collective abstract identities of "class" and "mass-man," exclusive focus on economic motives, and teleological determinism: conceptual categories fundamental to Marxist doctrine.[59] Marx's ideas were never a faith for Rosenberg; on the contrary, Marx provided an iconoclastic method Rosenberg

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would employ against doctrinaire systems of thought, including dogmatic Marxisms.

Rosenberg's marxian[60] criticism was shaped as much by his concrete lived experiences in the New York political-cultural milieu of the thirties as it was by his reading of Marx and the revolutionary Marxists. His twenties-style bohemian nonconformism was politicized and reconceived as the social duty of the public intellectual. After the thirties the paradoxical value - the collective individualism of the adversarial avant-garde - altered only in becoming more morally and politically urgent.

"Bohemian Depression Euphoria" and The Project

> *The Art Project did have one very definite effect and that was to bring artists together in one place where they would see each other.*[61]
>
> Rosenberg

According to May Tabak, the pre-Project years of the Depression were energetic years of comradeship and creative

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growth for the Rosenbergs and their circle of friends - young people in their twenties.

Tabak described *"living in Bohemia"* then as endless conversation:

> *I had become accustomed to falling asleep almost every night to the halloo of exuberant discussion... about logical positivism, phenomenology, Husserl or Plato, the definitive analysis of a brand new poem, novel, or article just published by an avant-garde foreign idol or by someone in the room.*[62]

Everyday, she recalled, *"We talked and laughed and friends dropped in. Men. All men."*[63] Tabak thus calls attention both to the bonhomie that characterized their bohemian culture and to the fact that it was basically a fraternity. She refers to this period fondly in her memoirs as *"Bohemian Depression Euphoria,"*[64] made possible because none of the men had jobs to take them away from their work: writing, art making, reading, and non-stop discussion. The fact was, however, that in this New York bohemia *"all the women had jobs."*[65]

Tabak wrote that the women were all working during the week and would appear at the weekend parties. These women all had low-paying jobs as waitresses or teachers, etc. In

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fact, the bohemian men, Tabak noted, much preferred poor working women to wealthy women, and told each other horror stories about writers and artists "emasculated" by marrying rich women and unable to continue their bohemian life and their art:

> *With zest the boys exchanged anecdotes about one budding talent after another who had been smothered by the deceptive, cushy softness of life with an over-rich wife. Complacently the girls they lived with reflected that no one could accuse them of having too much money.*[66]

Tabak thought her own professional job as a social worker somewhat embarrassingly unbohemian, but under the pressure of money worries, an ingrained work ethic, and deep concern about her clients' welfare, Tabak felt morally compelled to go to work.

In this light, the following explanation of how joblessness freed "them" to become *"anything that excited us"* actually applied only to Rosenberg and his male friends:

> *Deprived of our expectations, many permitted ourselves the privilege of becoming artists, writers, musicians, scientists; anything that excited us, that we wished to practice.*[67]

When the Public Works of Art Project started in December of 1933, Rosenberg and his artist friends all

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joined it together. At the time, Rosenberg was taking an informal life-drawing class in the afternoons at Greenwich House.

> *So I was there drawing one afternoon and a guy came rushing in like a messenger in an old fashioned play who announced they were hiring artists up at the College Art Association. So he said grab your paintings and go up there and get a job. So several of us did that, we took the paintings and went up there....one of them was Gorky, whom I knew....So we assembled a few guys like Max Spivak, and Mike Lowe might have been there. I'm not sure. Anyway, a bunch of boys were hired to paint murals.*[68]

Harold Baumbach remembered that on this first day of sign-ups Rosenberg called to tell him to "*'Run down to 57th street and bring a picture with you because an art project is beginning!' So, of course,*" Baumbach said, "*I went down there and stood in line and got a job.*"[69]

May Tabak's version of the story goes this way:

> *Shortly after Harold had wakened, the door of our cold-water flat began to shake with a banging of fists. Loud voices bellowed, 'Harold, come on. Come on, come on. They're hiring artists.' I opened the door and Harold Baumbach and two or three other friends pushed in past me. They were all artists pro tem, each carrying two or three framed paintings....so...[Harold] grabbed a couple of his paintings and went along to see what was up.*[70]

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What all three versions of this story make emphatically clear is the madcap drama of the event, and the decisive importance of camaraderie in Rosenberg's circle. At the sign-up, Tabak was surprised to see that *"Every artist we knew...seemed to be present."* When Rosenberg got to the front of the line he was asked by the government interviewer what branch of the Project he wanted to be on. Tabak writes that,

> *...Harold blandly replied that he preferred to be on the mural project. 'Have you painted any murals?' he was asked. 'Nonsense,' our boy replied, 'No one in this country has yet painted a mural. No one questioned his reply; he was accepted as were all the others.*[71]

From August of 1935 Rosenberg started working on the W.P.A. Federal Art Project Mural Division as an assistant, with Lee Krasner, to Max Spivak. Every day Rosenberg and Krasner would meet in Spivak's studio and talk while they waited to sign in with the Project's timekeeper.[72] Spivak had been assigned a wall in a high-school auditorium, and Rosenberg submitted a design for it:

> *Harold produced a glossy finished product that was deemed worthy of being exhibited in a show sponsored by the Mural Society of New York.*[73]

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At some point in this first year of the Project Rosenberg and another artist *"slapped out"* a forty-foot mural in two days at Washington Square Market.[74]

Rosenberg obviously loved remembering the camaraderie of these days. Here is his happy description of the drunken party "the boys" had to celebrate the opening of the Project:

> *We had a huge party at the College Art Association. While prohibition had been repealed, they decided they didn't want to spend the money on regular booze, so they got a five gallon can of alcohol and several cans of grapefruit juice. David Smith...mixed the first batch, which was pretty rough and the boys began to get drunk at once....The boys began falling like flies, you never saw anything like it, it was like a battlefield ....You know, in two hours the whole place was devastated. Nobody was left on their feet. It was a great opening party of the WPA.*[75]

Rosenberg took several different assignments on the Artists Project before supervisor Harry Holtzman assigned him to assist Willem de Kooning on a mural. De Kooning had told Holtzman he didn't want an assistant hanging around his studio:

> *So Harry, who was always looking around to do something for the boys, said, well, why don't you make Harold your assistant because he's a writer anyway and he probably would rather sit home and write than paint. So he can be your assistant and*

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> *then you can meet him in the Jumble Shop. So we made that arrangement ....We'd meet at the Jumble Shop or at my house.*[76]

Rosenberg was now in daily contact with the artists on the Project who would later be called Abstract Expressionists. The Project was a culture; it more or less dictated the formation of a lasting fraternal bond between the artists and their future critic. According to Tabak, being on the Artists Project was, especially at first, *"an interesting experience for Harold."*[77]

> *Close contact with the artists initiated him (as it did all the other artists as well) into a variety of technicalities and perspectives practiced by the painters and sculptors of New York whose training, coming as they did from everywhere, differed surprisingly. Ferocious disputes about the subject of art, and ungrudging exchanges of professional tricks, produced a stimulating atmosphere.*[78]

The artists Rosenberg met on the Project evidently appreciated him from the start as a man of words, a poet and intellectual who clearly preferred the company of artists. Ibram Lassaw first met Rosenberg around 1935 at the studio of Max Spivak, which was adjacent to Lassaw's own loft on 8th Street. He remembers that Rosenberg was reading a text by Stalin to Spivak and Spivak's other assistant.[79] Sixty

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years later Lassaw still found the memory of his first impression amusing. As Spivak and the other artist worked on the W.P.A. mural, Rosenberg sat in an easy chair by the stove and read to them. He ridiculed Stalin's ideas at every point, laughing and exclaiming: *"Did you ever hear anything so stupid?!"*[80] According to Lassaw, he, and other independent artists on the Project, admired Rosenberg's irreverent attitude toward Stalin and his outspoken criticism of the Communist Party at a time it was so dominant in New York, and when most people were refusing to believe the stories coming out of Russia.[81]

Dore Ashton's cultural history, The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning, stresses the definitive importance of the social side of the Project for the development of the Abstract Expressionist milieu. *"The most compelling force that emerges,"* Ashton wrote of the W.P.A. artists, *"is their sense of having found each other."*

> *From the days of the Project onward, there would be the median between artist and society that had long sustained the European artist: an artistic milieu. How important this was can be judged by the defensive statements of the few artists who either didn't qualify because of income, or who preferred to remain independent. The sculptor Isamu Noguchi felt bitterly isolated when he was excluded, and Barnett Newman claimed: 'I paid a*

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> *severe price for not being on the project with the other guys; in their eyes I wasn't a painter; I didn't have the label.'"*[82]

At the time of the Artists' Project, the Rosenbergs shared an eight-room apartment on West 14th Street with Lee Krasner and the Russian emigre artist Igor Pantuhoff.[83] Willem de Kooning and Arshile Gorky, who, according to Rosenberg, met each other around 1934,[84] were friends of Pantuhoff and all three were on the Project. Moreover, Pantuhoff was one of the first to attend Hans Hofmann's school,[85] which opened in 1933 at its first location uptown.[86] Tabak remembered that while the couples were living together,

> *Igor began to attend the newly opened Hans Hofmann art school. Other artists we all knew had gone to Europe to study with Hofmann; and, although familiar with much of his vocabulary...,the school in New York was an exciting curiosity. We were all fascinated by Igor's reports of what went on there.*[87]

But it was Krasner whom Rosenberg called "a central figure" in bringing artists together:

> *She'd been on the WPA and she was active in the Union, and she went to the Hofmann School, which put her right in the middle of everything. And she had been a waitress in that joint on Third street...the hang out, where she was very popular*

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and everybody liked her.[88]

Rosenberg's knowledge of Hans Hofmann stemmed from this time, around 1936, when Hofmann opened his school at 52 West 9th Street, and Krasner had started attending.[89] Krasner, Rosenberg once remarked, *"went to Hofmann's school for years and kept talking about Hofmann's concepts to anybody she ran into."*[90]

Rosenberg's unsurpassed admiration for Hofmann was in large part based on the artist's independent posture in the thirties. Later, when Rosenberg was waging his battles with the art establishment in the sixties and seventies, Hofmann served as his model of modernist intellectual-aesthetic passion and integrity.

As Rosenberg explained in 1970, Hofmann, in exile from Europe, brought to New York in the mid-thirties the ideas of the School of Paris in *"the great decade before the first World War...those ten overwhelming years in which...the alphabet of twentieth century art had been promulgated."*[91] Hofmann's school, opening in *"the depths of the Depression,"*

> *...provided a link between the great masterpieces of modern art, the work let's say of Matisse, Cézanne, of Picasso, of Braque, of Kandinsky ....Hofmann held up this banner of the most*

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> ***advanced modern art in America at a time when it wasn't, that banner wasn't raised in Europe anymore. Let's be clear about that. Nobody was saluting it.***[92]

In the thirties, Rosenberg asserted, *"Nobody was in favor of those artists whom [Hofmann] had taken as a model of modern art."*[93] Rosenberg was convinced that had it not been for Hofmann, many more years might have passed before American artists learned about the principles of modern painting. *"In fact,"* he wrote, *"they might never have become aware of them."*[94]

By the middle thirties Rosenberg had met the artists who would most influence his understanding of painting: Hofmann, de Kooning and Gorky.[95] All three men were perfect guests for Rosenberg's Symposium: notably companionable, independent thinkers and generous talkers for whom painting was their life and supreme passion.[96] They were the least political of artists, yet it was their stance vis à vis society that Rosenberg would celebrate as politically exemplary after the Second World War. In addition, it was their art-making process that he would recognize and take as the metaphor for his own radicalism.

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The "Well-Nigh Irresistible" Idea

> *The vision of the artist as collaborator in the creation of living history....the idea was well-nigh irresistible.*[97]
>
> Rosenberg recalling 1935-1936

The influence of communism on Rosenberg's bohemian community was such that no one was left unaffected: a fact which needs to be underlined before beginning the following discussion of Rosenberg's communism[98] in the mid-thirties. The intellectuals, writers and artists of his circle lived and worked in intimate physical proximity to each other at the center of Communist politics in New York City around Union Square.

"*Politically,*" wrote Lionel Abel, Rosenberg's close friend in the thirties, "*New York city ...became the most interesting part of the Soviet Union.*"[99] To Rosenberg, "*You had to be involved with politics if you were around in New York bohemia; there was no way of avoiding it.*"[100] May Tabak recalled that by around 1935-1936,

> *...politics had become an incredible force in the lives of everyone we met. The intellectual world*

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> *was divided between Stalinists and Anti-Stalinists. Nobody we knew seemed capable of neutrality or indifference. Everyone acquired the new vocabulary and unsuspected passion.*[101]

And according to Rosenberg,

> *Even people like de Kooning, who was theoretically opposed to being involved in politics, saw no way of avoiding making a float, for example, for a May Day parade....You'd have had to be a real recluse to stay out of it.*[102]

Mary McCarthy's description of the location of the Partisan Review offices at the time gives a good sense of the hothouse political/cultural environment:

> *This whole region [Union Square] was Communist territory; 'they' were everywhere - in the streets, in the cafeterias; nearly every derelict building contained at least one of their front-groups or schools or publications.*[103]

Communist Party headquarters and Arshile Gorky's studio were on Union Square; David Siquieros had his workshop there and New Masses its offices. *"Union Square"* writes Dore Ashton of the origins of the New York School, *"was surrounded by convenient, low-priced eating places which the artists frequented, comrades or not, and indulged in what had become a New York obsession: talk....At most levels, the discourse was punctuated with Marxist allusions."*[104]

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In January of 1935 Rosenberg contributed for the first time to the Partisan Review - a poem entitled "The Front." Partisan Review, which has been described as *"possibly the most influential little magazine ever,"*[105] was then the organ of the Communist Party's John Reed Club of New York. Its editors noted that Rosenberg's piece was the author's *"first in a proletarian magazine."*[106] Rosenberg was twenty nine. Seven years later, in 1942, "The Front" would not be included in his collection of poems, Trance Above the Streets, possibly because he had become uncomfortable by then with its distinctly agitprop tone.

who thrust his fist into cities
arriving by many ways
watching the pavements, the factory yards,
the cops on beat

walked out on the platform
raised his right arm, showing the fist clenched
"comrades, I bring news"

came back then skies and silhouettes,
facing the bay, of sailors
who no longer take the sea
because of strikes, pay-cuts and class unity

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"comrades I bring news"
of the resistance of farmers
in Oneida county on a road
near a small white cottage
looking like a Xmas card,
4 shot, the road was blocked
glass to blow their tires

there was one guy we grabbed
some bastard of a business man
learning to play State Trooper
one of the boys tackled him neat as he ran

Behold my American images get it straight
a montage of old residences bridges shops freights
Xmas, the millions walking up and down
the tables where applications are received
the arguments that will yet get down to something

in the center of this a union-hall
and on the platform he
with right arm crooked, fist clenched
"comrades, I bring news"[107]

Rosenberg's writings of 1935 to 1937 represent the high point of his enthusiasm for communism. Malcolm Cowley called 1935 *"the year of congresses,"* to convey the general atmosphere of collective enthusiasm, discussion and planning that year. In the early thirties Russia appeared to writers like Upton Sinclair, Joshua Kunitz, Arthur Koestler and many others to be an overwhelming success in contrast to the dreary conditions of The United States at the height of the Great Depression. Matthew Josephson reported from Moscow in

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The New Republic in 1934 that Moscow was "*'the* ville lumiére *which was Paris, a center of activity, creation, and joy.*" Josephson wrote that foreigners were accepted as part of the people, and that the writers were all involved in Russia's important projects.[108] All this would surely have had a direct appeal to Rosenberg whose politics consistently had the goal of creating and defending "*a center of activity, creation, and joy.*"[109]

In April 1935 The American Writers' Congress held a general meeting at Mecca Temple in New York followed by two days of sessions at the New School for Social Research. Rosenberg published a report on the Congress in the July, 1935 issue of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.

Poetry was an established and highly-regarded little magazine coming out of Chicago, at that time still under its founding editor, Harriet Monroe. Since 1912 Monroe had published new American poets alongside the most famous poets of the post- World War One era. Her magazine was a product of the renaissance in American literature that Rosenberg venerated. Living in Chicago briefly in 1931, he had been part of Monroe's circle of emerging poets,[110] and continued to regularly publish poems and reviews with Poetry until

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1943. The rapid politicization of his thought in the mid-thirties is most evident in the context of this tolerant but non-political monthly. By juxtaposing Rosenberg's contributions to Poetry with those he contributed to Communist Party magazines, like the early Partisan Review and New Masses, one gets a picture of the dilemma that shaped his dialectics of art and politics, artist and society.

By the time of the April 1935 Writers' Congress, Poetry magazine had for some time been censured by Communist writers for its relatively autonomous modernist posture. One year before Rosenberg's article on the Congress appeared, Harriet Monroe published an editorial called "Art and Propaganda"; it was a response to the attacks on Poetry by *"an ardent revolutionary group."* [111] *"Stanley Burnshaw,"* Monroe wrote, for example, *"now poetry editor of The New Masses, has been giving a series of fiery talks before middle-western John Reed clubs in which Poetry is berated as decadent in language almost unprintable."*[112] Monroe's argument was that all art is essentially propaganda in that each artist represents his or her own interests. But it did not matter to Monroe what those interests were; all were

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equivalent in her eyes as inspiration for art. Sometimes the artist's interest is to *"instruct his age,"* she wrote; sometimes it is *"the spots on the butterfly's wing."*[113] Clearly what mattered to the editor of Poetry was the poet and poetry, not politics and society. *"We cannot believe that it is our duty to accept and spread before our readers such half-baked efforts at class-conscious poetry as The New Masses, The Anvil, Partisan Review, Dynamo, Blast, and other enthusiastic organs of the Left...may perhaps legitimately use."*[114]

Alfred Kazin's On Native Grounds represents the thirties entirely in terms of the constant attacks by critics Kazin calls "Marxists" on those he calls "Formalists," the latter being literary figures like Harriet Monroe and the contributors to Poetry magazine, but also older bohemian radicals like Floyd Dell, communist editor of The Masses (1911-1918) and libertarian author of Love in Greenwich Village (1926), who was too frivolous for the puritanical Communist Party writers of the thirties. For his interest in sexual liberation, Dell was moralistically denounced by orthodox party writer and former comrade Mike Gold as a *"Greenwich Village playboy."*[115] According to

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Kazin, the Stalinists' doctrinaire assumption that they alone occupied the high moral ground of human interest and sympathy was the fundamental premise of their literary criticism[116]:

> *The formula was to become all too familiar: Our experience is a proper subject became* Only *our experience is a proper subject. Thus the invidious distinction drawn between a dynamic social consciousness, and 'nightingales, the stream of middle-class unconscious, or love in Greenwich Village.'*[117]

During these culture wars between Kazin's Marxists and Formalists, to place a report on the First American Writers' Congress in Poetry was an act of independent critical intervention. The fact of location adds an important dimension to Rosenberg's views. Aggravating the Communist writers by publishing in Poetry, at the same time Rosenberg annoyed Harriet Moore with the content of his article and by using Poetry as a forum to praise the Party-dominated Writers' Congress. Clearly Rosenberg's strategy was to have both sensual joy (*"love in Greenwich Village"*) and serious moral purpose ("*dynamic social conscience*") in the poet's world. By maneuvering between the "Marxists" and the "Formalists" Rosenberg performed an independent act of

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criticism, typical of his strategies of dislocation and paradox.

To Rosenberg the so-called aesthetic sensibility was as essential to political theory as the political was to the aesthetic. This never changed. It was precisely the poet's literary imagination, his "Formalist" pleasure in the art and artifice of life lived in a present moment, and his deep appreciation of the tragicomic force of relations between real individuals - immediate, particular, irrational - that would keep Rosenberg from the most egregious error of Party orthodoxy: putting the ends before the means, the abstract collectivity before the actual friend, and morally justifying an austere authoritarianism in the name of the future utopia.

It was the Congress organizers' openness - precisely their lack of dogma, in fact - that Rosenberg claimed to admire. No *"dogmatic system of beliefs,"* he wrote, was at work at the Congress.[118] *"Though the Congress turned its face towards the left, it donned no red uniform."*[119] One might ask if Rosenberg were hoping, in his flattery, that the Congress might conform to his ideal, but his report makes it very clear that the Writers' Congress, with its

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huge audience of 4,000 people at the public session, inspired him with the sensation that his own ideal collectivity had at least for that moment been realized - enough of it to move him deeply. "*Each writer*, he explained,

> *felt himself joined to the group of writers gathered about him, and the group as a whole felt itself to be at center of the masses assembled in the hall and concentrated from afar in its delegates; yet the note dominant in the speeches and in the entire atmosphere was one of individual responsibility, individual creative freedom, and individual method and artistic perspective.* [120]

He felt "*joined to the group of writers,*" in an atmosphere of "*individual responsibility.*" "*Individual creative freedom*" was from the beginning Rosenberg's first principle[121]; it was his Platonic Symposium and his New York bohemia writ large. As he recollected in 1962, "*the vision of the artist as collaborator in the creation of living history....the idea was well-nigh irresistible.*"[122] On this basis the immense appeal of the Writers' Congress is far from surprising.

> *It became possible to see how poetry might step forth from the little magazines...and walk once more upon the stage and the street.*[123]

The degree of Rosenberg's commitment to marxian social

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practice and theory is evident in an exchange of letters with his editor, Harriet Monroe. Monroe, whom Rosenberg would praise as a great editor, was not in sympathy with his marxism. She had requested that the article on the Writers' Congress be non-political, in keeping with the policy of Poetry magazine; on publishing it she omitted the sentence that identified Earl Browder as Secretary of the Communist Party. Furthermore, to counter Rosenberg's anti-fascist communism, Monroe added an editorial endnote stating her opinion that Soviet Communism was just as repressive as fascism.

Rosenberg wrote a long letter to Monroe, which he asked to have published in Poetry, claiming that her editing amounted to censorship and propaganda. He pressed on his editor the importance of theoretical marxism for the critical thinking of all writers:

> *No, of course, Miss Monroe, you don't accept the marxian analysis, and one may say you have the right not to accept it. On the other hand, I could name a long list of writers who have acquired through marxism an understanding of social forces, whereas before they became aware of marxism they were completely innocent of what caused movement in society.*[124]

The exchange with Monroe, which was not published,

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shows the 29-year old Rosenberg positioned himself between Monroe's view that marxian analysis and the politics of the Writers' Congress were irrelevant to modern poetry, and the opposing view of the Party writers that modernism had no good relation to the Communist "*vanguard of the proletariat.*"[125] Rosenberg's mature dialectic, which engaged polarities (of art and politics, individual and society, etc.) without priority or teleological subsumption, evolved in these years as a response to his lived intellectual situation. In the central dialectic of his art criticism, he would always stress the vital necessity of maintaining an unresolved tension between established middle-class society and the avant-garde artist, who was "*joined to the bourgeoisie by bonds of antagonism always on the verge of being transformed into love.*"[126] For the same reason - the absolute need for the tensions of dissent - he would always insist on the value of marxist analysis for the critical thinker.

It was also clearly a tension with which he was willing to live. The marxian principle of criticism as active, lived participation in the community, would always be a Rosenberg axiom. This explains some of the contempt he

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would have for the academic sociological studies of community that appeared after the fifties. *"The first condition,"* he wrote for Commentary in 1960,

> *is that the professional "participant observer" shall be a participant in life before he participates in the community.* [Rosenberg's emphasis] *....Through his own life alone could he recognize the common situation of man as victim-critic of his actions, his environment, and his destiny, and thus achieve an objectivity that is not a ruse.*[127]

This demand that the critic must be an insider participant will have enormous impact on Rosenberg's art criticism and his scornful attitude toward academic art critics and curators in the sixties and seventies.

Another incident associated with the 1935 Writers' Congress exposes the real dilemmas of Rosenberg's independent posture "*as victim-critic of his actions, his environment, and his destiny.*" Rosenberg's friend Kenneth Burke had read a paper at the Congress entitled "Revolutionary Symbolism in America" arguing that terms such as "masses," "workers," and "proletarians" excluded people like himself from the class of the "petite bourgeoisie" who were needed as allies. *"The symbol I should plead for,"* Burke mildly suggested to the Congress, *"is that of 'the*

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people.'"[128] Although within weeks the Congress of the Comintern would announce the Popular Front policy of class alliance, Burke was severely attacked by Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman, and German emigre Friedrich Wolf as a "snob" because they felt Burke's usage of "the people," was the same as Hitler's "*das Volk.*"[129] Half a century later Burke would vividly remember it as *"a terrible experience."*[130] He felt horrible, ostracized. *"It was ghastly,"* he remembered, and he went home:

> *I lay down and I'd hear "Burke! Burke!" My own name had become a curse word. I'd wake up and finally, my god, just this side of an absolute hallucination: my tongue...shit dripping from my tongue. Horrible.*[131]

At this point Rosenberg came by to see him:

> *My whole devotion to Harold Rosenberg stems from that time on. He turned up when I was lost. He thought it was funny! He took me down to a bunch of super, of sub sub-splinters of a splinter group. To take me into reality.*[132]

Rosenberg thought it was funny, but the report he was about to write on the conference would reveal none of this. Apparently Rosenberg was familiar with the many anti-Party *"sub sub-splinters of a splinter group,"* and had already witnessed the *'the formation of the bands'* of what he later

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characterized as *"tension and totalitarian tenor of that extremist period."* Indeed, the situation was so bad that May Tabak had been *"afraid to be...identified as my husband's wife"* when she became active briefly in the CPUSA-dominated Writers' Union in 1936.

> *The rank and file Stalinists had long loathed him and his Marxist writings. They considered him a maverick Trotskyite although he declared himself, on the contrary, an admirer of Rosa Luxemburg, whose picture he had over his desk.*[133]

Rosenberg was sustaining an independent marxist position. His familiarity with anti-Party sub-splinter groups might be explained by the following observation by Tabak:

> *Who would become a Stalinist and who an Anti-Stalinist was predictable. The antis were always the Bohemian types. Not only were they against Stalin, but many soon broke away from allegiance to Trotsky and formed other splinter groups - even a Trotskyite one.*[134]

Nor is Rosenberg's amusement at Burke's plight surprising. First, it is theoretically consistent with his tragicomic world view. He claimed that *"the oldest form of social study is comedy,"*[135] and liked to remind his readers that Marx himself was deeply indebted to the comic irony of

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Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, Moliere, Diderot.[136] The last scene in Plato's Symposium, a fundamental life model for Rosenberg, has the inexhaustible Socrates still drinking and philosophizing at dawn with Aristophanes and Agathon. The great teacher's last word was on the importance of comedy. Socrates, writes Plato, was

> *compelling the other two to acknowledge that the genius of comedy was the same with that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy was an artist in comedy also.*[137]

A few lines from a poem published in Poetry magazine the year previous to the Burke incident show that for Rosenberg laughter was in itself criticism:

> *and no stiff thing*
> *but wilts beneath*
> *the great undammed*
>
> *savage rinse of laughter*
> *roaring....*[138]

Neil Jumonville, historian of the New York Intellectuals, explains the role of Rosenberg's humor as a strategy for maintaining his intellectual independence:

> *Those who knew this side of him saw a humorous and skeptical iconoclast, one whose humor was a shield against the dogmatism around him. In this sense, his humor not only sprang from his intellectual independence, it protected and defended it.*[139]

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There can be no doubt that Rosenberg's humor was an intentional critical strategy. Furthermore, as Jumonville hints, its source was deeper: an ontological posture, and therefore spontaneous, as if a matter of personality. Tabak shows us something of this in her description of an encounter between Rosenberg and his brother David, a member of the Communist Party, over Harold's choices as editor of the Writers' Project publication, American Stuff, editorial decisions that had infuriated the CPUSA-dominated Writers' Union.

> *Harold's brother, an officer of the Writers' Union, came to our place and told Harold that unless he changed his political point of view he would no longer be able to publish anywhere and he, his brother, would be unable to protect him. I was horrified; Harold was laughing himself silly. Dave bellowed that if not for him Harold would by now have been beaten to a pulp! "Don't be a horses's ass," said Harold, still laughing at my patriotic indignation and at his brother's genuine concern.*[140]

"[He] was, in part, a humorist," Mary McCarthy remembered. *"...the ferocity of his look and voice had a hint of playfulness, as though he were casting himself jovially as King Herod in a pantomime ordering a massacre of*

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innocents."[141] For the reader of his essays, this is crucial. It hardly needs to be said that if Rosenberg is read without the humor - ironic, absurd, waggish - his meaning will be missed or even invert.

The following description of how Rosenberg saw the critical usefulness of comic irony might help further unravel the apparent contradiction between his idealistic enthusiasm for the Writers' Congress and his jocular reaction to the dogmatic factionalism that had caused Burke such anguish:

> *The comedian, from Aristophanes to Joyce...does demonstrate his objectivity by capturing behaviour in it most intimate aspects yet in its widest typicality. Comic irony sets whole cultures side by side in a multiple exposure (e.g. Don Quixote, Ulysses), causing valuation to spring out of the recital of facts alone....*[142]

Art Front

> *It was like being part of a milieu, and there's something good about that, you know, that kind of thick intellectual environment and you're part of it even when you're against it.*[143]
>
> Rosenberg

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In December 1935 Rosenberg joined the editorial board of Art Front, the Artists' Union magazine.[144] With that December issue, according to art historian Gerald Monroe, *"Art Front began to look like an art journal."* The changes included a smaller, magazine-size format, and an increase in the number of reproductions of paintings, graphics and sculptures beside the political cartoons that had monopolized the previous issues. A full-page Fernand Léger drawing was reproduced with a translation by Rosenberg of the lecture the artist had given at The Museum of Modern Art on "The New Realism." In the eleven months Rosenberg worked as editor for Art Front he also contributed articles on Salvador Dali, William Gropper, and Vincent Van Gogh, and a review of Alfred Barr's Cubism and Abstract Art.

Although Gerald Monroe characterized Art Front as *"in effect, an aesthetic dialogue on the left,"*[145] and Dore Ashton described it as having *"managed to maintain a lively, open position,"*[146] Rosenberg would remember the political debates as somewhat closer to scenes from Dostoyevsky's The Possessed. According to Tabak,

> *Some of the many members of the magazine's board were rabid semi-literates, voted in by the membership that overlooked the fact that the Judas*

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> *goats knew more about local CP politics than they did about art - a slight oversight.*[147]

Of the efforts of Rosenberg and his friends Max Spivak and Clarence Weinstock to make Art Front an advanced art magazine *"which reflected their points of view rather than the Party line,"*[148] Tabak remarked,

> *More and more time was spent in the struggle to outmaneuver the Stalinists, an effort that smacked more of neighborhood pool-room victories than any true intellectual challenge.*[149]

Rosenberg remembered that the magazine had a large board of around thirteen people, and that only he and Max Spivak were not Communist Party members, but that for a while the two of them managed to run the magazine as they liked:

> *For quite a while we really ran the magazine because when it came to putting the magazine out these editors all vanished.*[150]

But the other editorial board members of Art Front thought that Rosenberg placed aesthetic issues before political and economic concerns. According to Monroe, writing in 1973, Rosenberg's attitude annoyed some and infuriated many.

> *Rosenberg made no effort to disguise his disdain for his critics on the board and in the*

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> *leadership; he considered most of them intellectually shallow and boring.*[151]

Rosenberg never doubted that vanguardism in art and politics went together, that avant-garde modernism was inherently liberating and revolutionary. And he never hid the fact that to him the kind of artists he most admired were an elite minority. But Art Front was the organ of a workers' union, and though these workers were artists, it was conceived by the membership as proletarian magazine, which meant to them anti-intellectual and anti-modernist. They resented Rosenberg's intransigent "bohemianism" and intellectualism. As Monroe explained:

> *The Artists' Union, however, was a mass organization and the majority was relatively unsophisticated; many resented the scholarly tone of the magazine and considered it an indulgence of a clique of intellectuals. In his review of Salvador Dali's book, Conquest of the Irrational, in the April 1936 Art Front, Rosenberg warned that the book is '...not recommended to those readers of Art Front who have complained of the obscurity of some of the articles in these volumes.'"*[152]

According to Rosenberg, who greatly enjoyed the story and laughed a lot while he told it, he and Max Spivak were brought up on charges of "Robespierreism" by the other board members. A meeting was held at the Artists' Union, which

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was a loft on Sixth Avenue:

> *We, you see, had seized power somehow. We were putting out our kind of magazine in spite of the fact that we were a minority. So they got up one after another and denounced us....The place was packed because it was a big occasion: they had the editors brought up on charges, you know! The militants were in favor, not only of bouncing us off the board, but kicking us out of the union for this political crime, seizing power. Anyway it was a great meeting, must have been five hundred people!*[153]

"Anyway it was a great meeting...!" Apparently the fact that five hundred people rallied because of his actions suited Rosenberg's partly jarryesque sensibility. According to Monroe, Rosenberg's demeaning remarks about the union leaders brought down on him angry *"cries of 'elitism'"* that *"filled the hall."* A motion was made to expel him and the *"clique of intellectuals"* with which he was associated from the editorial board. Rosenberg's friend Clarence Weinstock was so alarmed by the shouted accusations against them that he fell off the window sill where he had been sitting. They were not expelled,[154] but Rosenberg was not listed as editor on the November 1936 issue, nor did he contribute again to Art Front.

Remembering Art Front in 1968, Rosenberg pointed to the

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attitude and decisions of its editor Stuart Davis as emblematic of what he thought was wrong with it.

> *[Davis] was the editor of the Art Front, organ of the Communist-dominated Artists Union, and he allowed his friendship with Arshile Gorky to lapse because Gorky, despite the political situation, "still wanted to play," as Davis put it; that is to devote himself to the problems of painting.*[155]

Against Stuart Davis, Rosenberg positioned his beloved thirties exemplar, Hans Hofmann, who Rosenberg eulogized precisely for having always *"put the creative individual above all principle."*[156] Furthermore, Rosenberg claimed the contrary values were evident in the artists' work. Davis's painting style was read as a manifestation of dogmatic thinking, whereas Hofmann's *"'dialectical' approach to painting"*[157] joined the painter to Rosenberg's own anti-ideological philosophical tradition:

> *...in seeing the object as enmeshed in laws which reduced its importance yet preserved its integrity, Hofmann was...offering a 'dialectical' approach to painting which no American artist on the Left had been able to conceive.*[158]

The problem with Art Front in Rosenberg's mind was that the magazine, like its editor, Davis, had put the end before the means: the ideology of art-as-a-weapon before the messy

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lived experience of comradeship and individual freedom. As a result, Art Front manifested degrees of the sectarianism and fratricide that came to characterize American Communism generally.[159] As Alfred Kazin explained it,

> *The polemics in which opposing radical critics engaged untiringly...were so fratricidal that they dismembered each other far more effectively than they did the enemy.*[160]

Long after the thirties, Rosenberg would relate his Art Front story, and others like it, as cautionary tales, particularly in the late nineteen-sixties when the debates of the New Left restored the immediacy of their relevance, and Rosenberg was in regular dialogue with politicized students as a professor at the University of Chicago Committee on Social Thought.[161]

Sometime in the mid-sixties art historian Peter Selz heard Rosenberg entertain a dinner party audience with a long amusing story of how he had been the only non-Stalinist with the Artists' Union and Art Front.[162] The truth of the story clearly mattered less than the point he wanted to make; and the fact that Rosenberg told it that way - that he had been alone - thirty years later, indicates, for one thing, how deeply impressed he had been by the hostilities

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directed at him and his so-called elitist editorial ambitions for the magazine.

Significantly, Rosenberg was silent on the American Artists' Congress held in New York on February 14-16, 1936 at Town Hall and the New School for Social Research. Though he began working as editor of Art Front in December, 1935, he did not sign the "Call for an American Artists' Congress" that was published the month before.[163]

In the ten months between the first Writers' Congress and the first Artists' Congress, the factionalism among the communist cultural groups might have made it so that there was no place for Rosenberg's participation. Among his papers there is a 1975 article on the American Artists' Congress by Gerald Monroe annotated by Rosenberg in a way that suggests this was probably the case. Rosenberg's marginal commentary is an ongoing dialogue with Monroe on the question of whether the Artists' Congress had at any point been nonpolitical, which was, according to Monroe, what Stuart Davis and other organizers claimed they had intended. From the beginning of the article to the end - from Monroe's depiction of the planning stages commencing immediately after the 1935 Writers' Congress to the

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absorption of the Artists' Congress into the Artists League of America in April of 1942 - Rosenberg underlined any characterization of the situation as nonpolitical. Alongside he jotted marginalia, such as a sarcastic *"more nonpolitics";* or - towards an interpretation - there is the Orwellian comment: *"'non-pol,' 'non-political' politicization = a refuge from criticism."*[164] Beneath a paragraph in which Monroe discusses the failure of dissident members to back Meyer Schapiro's effort to liberate the Congress from Communist Party control after the invasion of Finland in December 1939, Rosenberg's one-word explanation was . . . *"terror."*[165] In 1972 Rosenberg told the following story about Schapiro and a meeting of the Artists' Union, surely just before or after this one:

> *Somebody got up and denounced Meyer Schapiro for being a Trotskyite and some hot-head began to shout, let's go to his house and kill him....This was going on all the time. They used to waylay anti-communist leftists, and on the Artists' Project they beat up a couple of guys....It's very hard to grasp this without having a feeling of the tension of that period, and particularly against left-wingers who were anti-communist, you know. This is fear.*[166]

On this mood of terror, a longer summary comment noted on the Monroe article was more explicit: the history of the

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Artists' Congress *"can be seen correctly only vs the background of the crime and conspiracies of the Stalin era."*[167]

In 1983 Meyer Schapiro recalled that the beginning of his own disillusionment with Party Communism began with the first Moscow trials in 1936, nearly four years before he led a group secession from the American Artists Congress in 1940:

> *When I read accounts of the trials and of the slaughter of party members, comrades, old revolutionists; when I read books by people who had escaped from the Stalinist prisons and work camps, it was a real shock to me. Many party members and sympathizers here in the United States refused to believe these reports. They accepted party doctrine as though it were gospel. They did not read.*[168]

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Fraternity and Fratricide

in these nights
our illusions, outfitted in gay
duncecaps and gilded pleats. . .

. . . spell out
in spark-showers a tyrant's name
they explode
leaving the air hollow black
and feverish with
echoes

Rosenberg (1937)[169]

For Rosenberg, as for American left intellectuals generally, 1935 was the high point of communist idealism.[170] Radical artists and writers hoped that United Front and Popular Front communism would overcome capitalism and fascism in Spain and the world. The hope was short-lived, however. In August of 1936, one year after the announcement of the Popular Front by the Fourth Communist International, news came of the first Moscow Trials. That same month Partisan Review intellectuals began complaining anxiously among themselves that Popular Front governments were not responding with adequate speed to the urgent situation in Spain; they privately acknowledged that the Soviet Union

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under Stalin had *"ditched the proletariat of one country after the other."*[171]

In September 1936, naturalist novelist James T. Farrell, creator of Studs Lonigan, recorded in his diary a conversation with Rosenberg in which Rosenberg *"referred to the Communist Party as having become a job hunting and a job finding agency. He said that the C.P. had more influence in the W.P.A. here than Tammany Hall."*[172] That year, 1936, Farrell - whom Alfred Kazin has described as *"the archetypal novelist of the* [thirties] *crisis and its inflictions"*[173] - published the influential A Note on Literary Criticism, a strong polemic against what Farrell considered the Procrustean and mechanical cultural politics of intellectuals associated with the Communist Party and the New Masses, especially Michael Gold and Granville Hicks. "Proletarian" writers, Farrell argued, must think independently of the Party's proletarianism and look to modernist writers like Joyce to properly learn their trade.[174]

Events of the year 1936-7 turned the scale for

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Rosenberg as it did for so many other writers on the American Left. Years later he recapped the well-worn story of the general disillusionment:

> *There was enormous disillusionment that took place in the succession of shocks. First the Moscow trials, then the Stalin-Hitler pact, then the invasion of Finland by the Soviet Union, and it simply smashed the whole political sensation.*[175](1973)

In June of 1937, Partisan Review severed its affiliation with the Communist Party and the Popular Front. But in the penultimate issue of the old Partisan Review, June 1936, Rosenberg published an enthusiastic review of Granville Hicks's biography of John Reed.

John Reed (1887-1920), radical American journalist and author of the influential Ten Days That Shook the World, is still an emblem of the idealistic moment in American Communism. According to intellectual historian Daniel Aaron,

> *By 1930 [Reed] had already become, in Joseph Freeman's words, "a fruitful and activizing symbol for American radical literature," the patron saint of a group of young revolutionary writers.*[176]

At the time of Rosenberg's review Granville Hicks was literary editor of the New Masses. According to Alfred

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Kazin, Hicks was widely respected by writers in and outside the Party, *"the central figure in Marxist criticism,"* and *"the battleground on which Marxists and anti-Marxists fought."*[177] Furthermore, Hick's book, the biography of John Reed, was itself a site of contention. The Russians were outraged by it, because, for one thing, Hicks had mentioned Trotsky's name twenty-seven times,[178] which was treasonous historiography by 1936.

On the other side, according to historian of the New York Intellectuals, Terry Cooney, Hicks, as editor of the New Masses, was a long-declared adversary of the Partisan Review. Partisan Review editors Phillips and Rahv charged (in a letter to the New Masses dated October 1937, before the new anti-Stalinist PR appeared) that it had been the relentless warfare with the New Masses that had defined the early Partisan Review, not the latter's affiliation with the Communist Party:

> *every informed writer and reader knows that the New Masses and the Partisan Review were constantly at loggerheads on the problems of revolutionary literature....The New Masses ...has always been part and parcel of the very tendency which the Partisan Review was fighting.*[179]

In the midst of this cultural political fray,

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Rosenberg's decision to review Hicks's book for the Partisan Review gains significance. In terms of his attitude toward criticism, it suggests that for Rosenberg literary criticism was a kind of intellectual - social and moral - crisis intervention of the kind that could only be accomplished by an unaffiliated critic. In terms of his attitude toward communism, Rosenberg's review tells much about his personal position in June of 1936. His enthusiasm for Reed made effective propaganda for his own communist values, for his efforts to keep the joyful bonhomie of the twenties (the unorthodox *"bohemianism in literature"*) at the heart of revolutionary communism instead of the dreary instrumental determinism of the Party.

Rosenberg's essay, "The Education of John Reed," unfolds an existential drama of intellectual discovery, recognition, and self-transformation. It's a mythic tale of a young bohemian nonconformist remade by the October Revolution. Rosenberg's Reed was as a self-produced character - a creative, heroic individual, not a proletarian - one whom Rosenberg not surprisingly admired, and with whom he doubtless identified. A tall, robust young man of action and intellect, Reed, like Rosenberg, had begun his

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intellectual journey as a Greenwich Village writer and bohemian; moreover, Reed's famous transformation from anti-bourgeois bohemianism to committed communism was probably close to how Rosenberg viewed his own political education. To him Reed's anti-middle-class bohemianism was the foundation of Reed's communism.

"John Reed," Rosenberg's first line declared, *"emerged from the avant-guard movement in art and literature which began in America around 1912."*[180] This bohemian *"insurgent movement,"* a community of *"bourgeois revoltés,"* was certainly *"lacking in historical self-consciousness,"* but it had a *"definite ideology"* and was *"by no means...merely a literary school."*

> *The insurgents took a destructive position with respect to the arid value-systems of American life, and set up against these systems the image of the free, "creative" individual.*[181]

Rosenberg selected quotations from Reed himself that emphasized Reed's pre-1917 avant-garde radicalism:

> *As John Reed put it in the program he wrote for the Masses in 1913: "We refuse to commit ourselves to any course of action except this: to do with the Masses exactly what we please....The broad purpose of the Masses is a social one: to everlastingly attack old systems, old morals, old prejudices....*[182]

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Rosenberg's narrative reaches its climax. Reed then *"had the exceptional good fortune to have a great education thrust upon him,"*[183] not from a theory, system, or classroom, but by participating in life, in the epic events of his historical era. *"The vastest event of the modern world, the Bolshevik seizure of power in October,"*[184] transformed Reed from the bohemian cosmopolitan into the Revolutionary hero and author of Ten Days That Shook the World.

> *And when the world of personalities was transformed into a world of historical forces, then it was no longer a question of sympathy for the working class but of identification with it in its historic role.*[185]

With this June 1936 issue, Partisan Review ceased publication for the summer. The editors began their agonized move away from Communist Party affiliation, producing only one more issue under the Party's wing. For Rosenberg, at age thirty in 1936, his education in real Communist cultural politics was not over, and what his writings of 1937 reveal are some of the turnings of his mind as he responded to the real politics of Russian and American Communism.[186]

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The poetry and criticism he published in 1937 show both hope and despair for the cause of communism. He produced very little - indeed almost nothing towards the end of the year - and later remembered those Fall months as a time of confusion. At the end of 1937 he started working for the Writers' Project in New York City, thinking that "*the best antidote to confusion is to make oneself useful and to be paid a salary.*"[187]

But before those silent months, in March of 1937, in the Party-controlled New Masses, Rosenberg published a spirited review of Jules Romains' The Boys in the Back Room, significantly titled *"Aesthetic Assault."* At this moment, when Partisan Review was reorganizing along modernist and roughly pro-Trotsky lines,[188] and up against the Party and its fiercely anti-Trotskyite writers and artists in the New Masses, the location of Rosenberg's piece can be seen as act of independent bohemian radicalism that made a point of taking neither side. Or rather, as a statement of unchanging principle, it took the side of his own collective ideal - the intimate community of creative individuals.

Thirty-eight years later, in 1975, Rosenberg would tell two young English critics that this independent stance was

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precisely what all of the New York artists learned from the thirties:

> *Every art movement, practically every individual, including all those artists who became Action painters later on, were all involved in the social utility of art, and the idea that art is an action, which is an old communist idea, you see - that art is, whether you liked it or not, fighting either on the side of the proletariat or on the side of the bourgeoisie. The one thing that never occurred to anybody was that he might be fighting on his own side!*[189]

To Rosenberg, *"fighting on his own side"* was the same as fighting on the side of one's intimate community. But one enemy Rosenberg was fighting across the board in all Communist factions was leftist puritanism. His "Aesthetic Assault" proposes what might be called a politics of pleasure, of lusty bonhomie. Romains' "boys" (as both Rosenberg and Romains called them) enjoyed what was for Rosenberg an ideal world: *"a little social eddy of peace and good humor within the clashing currents of modern society."*[190] Clearly he saw their back room society as a kind of updated Symposium with *"clouds of Olympian drinking parties."*[191] It was exactly his model for international democratic communism:

> *Their "back room" society, with its realistic and*

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> ***magnanimous impulses, seems to be the foreshadowing of a similar society that will cover the whole earth with a fraternity of productive men of good will.***[192]

Crucially, axiomatically, in this collectivity of loving men so admired by Rosenberg, the individual flourishes:

> ***...the individuality of each is heightened and completed by his participation in the group... The supreme virtue of Romains' outlook is that it finds this purely human and natural world as inspiring and profound as any gilded with ideals and otherworldly promises.***[193]

The context of Rosenberg's *"Aesthetic Assault"* - the New Masses, March of 1937 - changed its meaning. The article was well-named. Like a vanguard wedge of intervention, it assaulted what he thought was the error of the whole movement, regardless of the faction. The lush (aesthetic) picture of jubilant camaraderie in The Boys in The Back Room, was clearly intended as a counter to the dour, undemocratic dogmatism - and mean fratricidal terror - he had come to associate with the Communist groups. One has an intuition that Rosenberg's well-known lifelong love of *"Olympian drinking parties"* with the boys was a need to quench a perpetual thirst he developed in the thirties,

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somehow a reaction to the aridity, and loveless puritanical sobriety he so disliked in much of the intellectual life of his times.

With his New Masses Party readers in mind, Rosenberg justified Romains' "aesthetic" perspective by the authority of Marx. For Marx, he reminded them, *"the last phase of a historic form is its comedy. History prepares matters thus, he asserts, in order that humanity may separate itself joyfully* [Rosenberg's emphasis] *from its past."*[194]

Against the subjective torment and boredom of bourgeois individualism, with its empty pleasures and friendships, Rosenberg concludes, Romains proposes the *"poetry of actual living...the robust optimism of the social group with its new conception of joy."*[195] These last lines are from Rosenberg's typescript; they did not appear in the New Masses, nor did the following closing sentences in which he speaks through Romains in an act of ventriloquism for his own deepest *"conception of joy"*:

> *They were happy because they were seven good friends....They were happy because they had acted together, and because they were together in one place upon earth where they might recall their action.*[196]

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In Rosenberg's hands The Boys in the Backroom became an allegory of the communist movement as something to be richly desired - a model of what it should be. It is precisely as allegory that pleasure becomes political.[197]

*

Two poems Rosenberg published simultaneously in July 1937 in separate journals - one "Communist," one "aesthetic" - exhibit (at least to me) a poignant ambivalence. The first poem, his last publication in a Communist Party magazine, was entitled *"The Melancholy Railings"*; it appeared in the New Masses in July, 1937.[198] Its first stanzas spurn the *"old music"* and chilly "*twilights*" of disillusionment, fatalism, and cowardly mass retreat from revolutionary idealism. Since Rosenberg's writings were never simply private reflections but always responses to current intellectual debates, it can be assumed that this poem was a position statement: a sort of personal manifesto and a response to the human failure of Stalinism and the Popular Front. He must also have been positioning himself against other Western marxists, particularly the Trotskyites

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among the New York Intellectuals.

Rosenberg sustained from this period of the Great Disillusionment, the *"tragedy of the left intellectual,"* a lifelong contempt for the fatalism of intellectuals, variously castigating it as "wailing" or "owlish clucking"; or, in this case, "melancholy railings." Melancholy was considered a kind of moral failure by communists. The last stanza of "The Melancholy Railings" shows the poet defiantly rejecting fatalism. Save that, he sneers, for the mystical individualists who have no interest in the world; he was still "seduced" by the builders of the future, still convinced that *"the adult anger of the crowd"* justified, as much as ever, the continued *"trampling [of] the broad lawns"* of the status quo (a more loathsome kind of "railings"):

> *Here you come with your old music,*
> *A clear case of arrested development!*
> *And with your twilights, chilly ones,*
> *Whispering of newspapers scraping in the winds.*
>
> *Take your alphabet to the drawing-rooms,*
> *To the phthisic old ladies who hobble on 5th Avenue*
> *With black poodles bobbing on their bosoms,*
> *Wheeze it to the harps of the mystical individualists.*
>
> *I have been seduced by the bricklayer of daylight*
> *Flicking his trowel over the fresh walls.*
> *The adult anger of the crowd has got me*
> *Trampling the broad lawns without a bound.*[199]

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Rosenberg's refusal to yield to despair was based on principle, but the poem's tone of defiant tough-mindedness very likely was a response to his own melancholia.[200] That it was Rosenberg bracing up Rosenberg seems a reasonable interpretation because of a second poem.

The month before "Melancholy Railings" appeared in the New Masses, June of 1937, he published what can be read as a companion poem in Poetry magazine called "The Man In Medals Blows a Horn." Clearly in dialogue with himself, this poem for Poetry expresses the disillusioned "no" to which "Melancholy Railings" responds with its scornful and spirited "yes." Here are some lines from "The Man In Medals Blows a Horn":

In these nights
our illusions, outfitted in gay
duncecaps and gilded pleats,
toddle across the starry air
above the Olympic ice-festival
making for the lake

where
against the red and yellow wheels
that whizz, grow smaller,
elaborate, whizz again, spell out
in spark-showers a tyrant's name
they explode

leaving the air hollow black
and feverish with echoes

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Speaking collectively of "our illusions" - hopes of an international communist revolution - as toddling, foolish fictions and satanic fireworks display, Rosenberg's closing image of hollow blackness, feverish and echoing, makes his poem a lament for the nearly intolerable human cost of those utopian dreams he had shared.

American Stuff

Rosenberg's last encounter with the New Masses Party writers became another favorite and often-told anecdote in his repertoire.[201] His older brother, David, called him up one evening to warn him: *"You'd better not go home the usual way. Some of the guys from New Masses are laying for you at 34th Street."* [202] According to Patia Yasin, at some point her father received a number of hostile and threatening letters about him that had been exchanged between New Masses writers. Rosenberg kept this correspondence all his life; unfortunately, however, it has disappeared since his death in 1978, so it's unclear exactly when or why the Stalinist

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New Masses writers wanted to beat him up.

But the best bet is that they were members of the Writers' Union seeking retribution for Rosenberg's policies as editor of American Stuff, the Federal Writers' Project issue of Direction magazine published in February of 1938. Of course they might also have thought terror would make Rosenberg betray those policies. The leaders of the Union were Stalinists, CPUSA members. According to anti-Party leftist writer Harry Roskolenko, a contributor to American Stuff and lifelong friend, Rosenberg was *"hardly loved by the many-headed, talentless Stalinist writers who crowded the project....A strike was pulled and the Stalinists demanded that Rosenberg be replaced but he was backed by the national head Henry C. Alsberg."*[203]

In 1972 Rosenberg retrospectively interpreted the Stalinists' fury over American Stuff in a way that seems incredibly trivial unless the political tensions of the Left - Stalinist vs. anti-Stalinist ("Trotskyite") - at this time are remembered: *"See,"* he explained to an art world interviewer, *"for example, I published people like Lionel Abel and Harry Roskolenko, who, according to them, were Trotskyites."* Rosenberg did also publish Party writers in

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American Stuff, but evidently not enough; so one problem, he said, was simply that *"all the guys who didn't get published had one target, Rosenberg, see?"*[204] But what made the dilemma impossible was that the Writers' Union did not want their endorsed writers to publish alongside anti-Stalinist writers like Abel and Roskolenko. Communist Party member George Petry, a friend of Rosenberg and an advisor on the board of American Stuff, was brought up on charges of *"collaborating with an enemy of the working class,"* meaning Rosenberg.[205]

Rosenberg was caught in a double-bind of thirties cultural politics much like the situation he had come up against at Art Front. He was traveling a narrow road with a ditch on either side. His boss, Project Director Henry Alsberg, argued that one of the poems Rosenberg wanted to include in American Stuff was too Communist for the government magazine. Rosenberg recalled:

> *Alsberg said, "You can't publish that poem."... I said, "Look, I think its a good poem so it goes in."...So I published the poem. That same lousy kid whose poem I had gotten in by bucking the boss went around and denounced me in the Union because he said Rosenberg has complete power. He was the one that put the finger on me.*[206]

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Alsberg was worried about the growing right-wing anti-Communist climate in Washington; the Dies Committee warned the Federal Writers' Project in September 1938 that it was to be investigated.[207] Furthermore, on the other side, Rosenberg knew that the CPUSA was trying to get control of American Stuff in order to impress Moscow:

> *Even Earl Browder, who was then head of the Party, was very concerned about this magazine - that they would be able to show that they had gotten control of a piece of so-called government property and were able to run a magazine which had to keep out enemies and commend the Party. I always insisted I was running a literary magazine.*[208]

Rosenberg's editorial statement for American Stuff, "Literature Without Money," was consistent with his principled devaluation of any economic determinism for art. To the traditional avant-garde dilemma of how to make art *"independent of economic standards,"*[209] he did not propose Communist solutions; instead he told the history of the "little magazines":

> *The new and vital literary movements which commenced in this country shortly after the opening of the century found their first expression in a persistent accretion of "little magazines" and small publishing ventures. Hundreds of advance guard publications bore witness that an enormous distance lay between commercial magazines and the new literary energies*

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> *which were in the process of coming to birth. Scores of editors, writers, and patrons contributed labor and money towards the sponsorship of a literature independent of economic standards.*[210]

The publishing tradition Rosenberg established for American Stuff - The Little Review, Poetry, The Dial, Hound and Horn and Symposium - was still, he wrote in 1938, the best solution to the obstacles the profit society presented the individual writer, and the only model for American Stuff. Though sponsored by the Federal Project, the selections, Rosenberg emphasized, were not institutional products, but "*off-time writings,*" "*spare time works.*"[211] This was an important point to Rosenberg because it made a case for the writers' institutional as well as economic independence.

Rosenberg's politically heretical list of exemplary little magazine contributors included Carl Sandberg, James Joyce, Hart Crane, T.S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens. Doubtless it was Rosenberg's editorial "bohemianism in literature" - his unconcealed admiration for the modernist tradition and his emphasis on creative autonomy - that infuriated the Party

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writers. According to Jerre Mangione, historian of the Writers' Project,

> *"Literature Without Money"...antagonized the Writers' Union and caused its leaders to declare that Rosenberg's literary standards were "inconsistent" with their own. It was evident from the editorial that Rosenberg, unlike the union, had no intention of breaking with the traditional role of little magazines.*[212]

Mangione explains that all attempts to appease the Stalinist leaders of the union failed. The Writers Union pushed harder to remove Rosenberg as editor and tried to keep his first edition of the magazine from appearing at all. When it did, the Union severely crippled its distribution.[213]

A few months later, in May of 1938, Rosenberg was in Washington with the Writers' Project. He joked that the threats of the Stalinists got him his job on the Federal Writers' Project as national art editor of the State Guides:

> *They were really responsible for getting me a job as national editor because they made so much noise and the only way out for Alsberg was to kick me upstairs and take me to Washington.*[214]

No further issues of American Stuff appeared. Alsberg had hoped to get Kenneth Burke as editor to replace Rosenberg, since Burke was liked by both the anti-Stalinists

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and the Stalinists. But Burke was overwhelmed by the pressures and evidently wrote to Rosenberg in Washington to tell him he had already resigned. Rosenberg's careful and very serious response to Burke, dated May 23, 1938, immediately after Rosenberg had moved to the Capital, reiterated his lifelong position on politics and art, but the tone, perhaps, has become more resolute:

> *Dear Kenneth,...You impartially accept the idea that this is a political controversy - the C.P. on one side, myself acting politically on the other. Nothing could be further from the truth. You know to what extent my political notions, not tied to any discipline or organization, being purely a function of contemporary thinking, of contemporary intellect, could influence my literary selections. Intellect forbids acceptance of the C.P. domination over itself, but this same intellect forbids also political bias in literature....The fight is not my politics vs. their politics, but my refusal to yield to political pressure.*[215]

Rosenberg had identified his enduring enemy - not one political position or another, but any mass-minded ideological domination of the individual intellect. The demands that forced Rosenberg out and caused Burke to resign, he told Burke, must not be met:

> *These demands mean the systematic exclusion of all writers who might gain the hostility of this non-literary organization. It means making this magazine, which is intended to give writers a free*

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> ***opportunity, another instrument for whacking them into line and threatening their productive abilities.***[216]

Like others on the radical left, Rosenberg had expected revolutionary communism to gain more freedom for the intellectual - writer and artist - not less. What he wanted for himself - the *"free opportunity"* to publish and make a minimal living without being whacked into line - he wanted for others. Rosenberg's politics turned on the obstacles a given situation put in the way of the creative individual; thus it might be said, as he did say, that he was political for cultural reasons, but only if one forgets that for him the realms of thought and action were indivisible.

Conclusion: Preserving Separate Nihilisms

> *Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.*
>
> William Blake

Rosenberg had more battles with American Communist

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factions, adding up to a large repertoire of cautionary tales. Like the story of his fight with the Artists' Union and Art Front magazine, Rosenberg used his New Masses and American Stuff stories to dramatize the authoritarian impact of the CPUSA on intellectual and artistic life in New York in the thirties.

Looking back on the late thirties from 1973, Rosenberg feared that Stalinism had destroyed the motivational force behind avant-garde modernism: the hope that art can transform the world. Without this faith, he still insisted, *"avant-garde art simply sinks into a professional little thing."*

> *Marxism was the end-all of hope for a society that would go beyond societies that were known in the last hundred years. It didn't matter whether they were this kind of a Marxist or that kind of a Marxist, or even an anti-Marxist, an anarchist. There was that idea that art was somehow sensitive and humane or something - anti-bourgeois, let's say. Whatever it is it was on the side of a transformation of the world. This was destroyed by Stalin. The art world has not recovered from it to this day....*[217]

From another perspective, another reflection on the lessons of these years, Rosenberg determined that the internecine battles and sectarianism of American Communist

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groups had been fortunate, since it had in fact kept any one group from achieving total dominance. The *"malice, rancor and envy"* of such groups, Rosenberg explained, serve a positive function; they destroy the collective, but in doing so secure intellectual freedom. Thus he observed that *"to preserve the separate nihilisms...becomes, ironically, a condition for maintaining liberty."*[218] A contradiction that suited his Dostoyevskian appreciation of intellectual group psychology, Rosenberg's idea of community would always presuppose the necessity of interactive antagonisms, the perpetuation of what he called "free conflict." Community was thus for him a *"theater of conflicts,"*[219] a *"focus of shifting needs and struggles...an ideal testing ground for individuals...."*[220] In this political insight one recognizes the pragmatic motions of Rosenberg's dialectics no matter what the occasion for his critical focus - art, literature, politics, society.

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Endnotes

1.Rosenberg, Paul Cummings interview, New York, 7 February 1971. The Archives of American Art, New York, and The Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

2.Rosenberg, "The Pathos of the Proletariat," Kenyon Review 11 (Autumn 1949). Reprinted in Act and The Actor: Making the Self; this citation, pp.34-35.

3.Rosenberg, in "Thirties, Miscellaneous Notes," Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

4.Tabak, A Collage, MSS., Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. p.193. Tabak's emphasis on "little magazine."

5.Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer, 1957). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation pp. 250-251.

6. The little magazine - like Little Review, Dial, Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, Egoist, Masses - was modeled after the kind of institutionally and financially unaffiliated cultural and political review that characterized the European avant-garde from the second quarter of the last century. See Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie, eds., The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History (Yonkers, New York: Pushcart Press, 1978); and Steven Watson, Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991). Art historian Ann Gibson examines the artist-run magazines associated with Rosenberg's New York milieu in Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990).

7."A Fairy Tale," transition 19/20 (June 1930):264-269; "I Had Myself to Blame," transition 21 (1930):98-99; "A Relative Case of Absolute Collaboration," Blues, The Magazine of New Rhythm, no.9 (Fall 1930): 11-17; "Prayer for a Prayer," a poem, Pagany 11 (April/June 1930). Blues is important to the history of art in New York in the 1940s, because beginning in September, 1940, its editors Ford and

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Tyler produced View magazine, an important surrealist-inspired little magazine for the visual arts, literature and criticism. View was central to the development of Rosenberg's Abstract Expressionist milieu. It circulated internationally and published New York Intellectuals Rosenberg, Meyer Schapiro, Lionel Abel, Paul Goodman, French intellectuals Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, André Breton, along with artists and poets like Joseph Cornell, Jorge Luis Borges, William Carlos Williams, Marc Chagall and René Magritte.

Gertrude Stein's epitaph for Blues in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas conveys the essential value of the little magazine - creative freedom: *"Of all the little magazines which, as Gertrude Stein loves to quote, have died to make verse free, the youngest and freshest was the Blues."* See Catrina Neiman, "Introduction: View Magazine: Transatlantic Pact," *View, Parade of the Avant-Garde: An Anthology of View Magazine (1940-1947)*, Charles Henri Ford, ed. (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991):xi-xii.

8.Frank Lentricchia, Modernist Quartet (New York: Cambridge U P, 1994):1.

9. Rosenberg told Dorothy Sackler on 8 July 1968, that *"'Character Change and the Drama'... was a basic piece...which in a way I keep elaborating on."* Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York, and The Archives of American Art. Lionel Abel singled out this article in his obituary essay on Rosenberg. Abel interpreted "Character Change..." as profoundly theological. Rosenberg, wrote Able, had joked that the article was full of metaphysics: *"I give more reasons for religion in it than T.S. Eliot ever thought of."* Rosenberg referred to Eliot and Valéry as religious thinkers, and Abel believed that in the early thirties at least Rosenberg thought of himself as belonging to a "religious" tradition of literary thought. See Abel, "Harold Rosenberg," Art News (September 1978):78.

10.Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (1942, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995):405.

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11.Rosenberg had much to say about the role of the intellectual in the post-war, post-marxist era. See "Tartuffes, Pedants and Con Men" in Part III of this dissertation, "Aesthetic Assault." In 1958 Rosenberg reviewed Raymond Aron's much-discussed Opium of the Intellectuals, in which Aron attacked public intellectualism generally, and proposed that because intellectuals had proved themselves to be dangerously ideological, they should keep out of real politics. Rosenberg countered that Aron's myth of action without ideology was equally ideological. Rosenberg concludes ironically that all theories are myths and must be eternally countered. Both ideology and intellectuals are necessary evils:

> *Since history has not achieved a steady sanity, the time for the extinction of the intellectual has not yet arrived. Unpleasant as it is to have us around, and anxious as we are to get rid of ourselves, society has no choice but to put up with us - if for no other reason than that we can at present be abolished only by other myth-makers.*

See Rosenberg,"Twilight of the Intellectuals," Dissent (Summer 1958); Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.174.

12.Rosenberg, "Note on Class Conflict in Literature," The New Act no.1 (January 1933):3-10.

13.Ibid., p.3.

14.Ibid.

15.Ibid., p.10.

16.Ibid., pp.9-10.

17.Ibid., p.8. Rosenberg's political theory never focused on issues of "class" and "economic exploitation." The word "exploitation" very rarely appears in his criticism. "Middle-class" or "bourgeois" are used throughout his writings to signify a set of conventional values: "success" and happiness, adventure seeking, careerism, professionalism, positivism, property ownership, complacency, and so on. Other collective identities (like institution, gender, and race) were treated with the same

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pointed disregard - an attitude that is consistent with Rosenberg's tragicomic perspective and his moral focus on individual choice and responsibility.

18.Rosenberg was familiar with the violent and fratricidal history of American radicalism up to the thirties. While he was writing "Notes on Literature and Class Conflict," he was listening to the stories of old "Wobblies" at the Fifth Avenue New York Public Library. The Wobblies were the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World, a radical, anti-CPUSA, unskilled labor union, formed in Chicago in 1905, which aimed to put the working class "in possession of the world." Wobblies were forced underground with the Red Scare of 1919. Their politicized renegade independence impressed the young Rosenberg. He presented them as models of integrity and political action to his students at the University of Chicago in the sixties and seventies. See Rosenberg's seminar on The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, cassettes and transcription, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

Paul Buhle, historian of American marxism, writes of the Wobblies that their *"romantic spirit" - "inclusive and generous" - "came the closest to 'pure' Marxism of any American movement. Through personal example and grand vision they summoned up the kind of enthusiasm among non-political Americans rarely seen again until the CIO and later the Civil Rights movement."* See Paul Buhle, Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left (New York: Verso, 1991):101-102.

19.Ibid., p.4.

20.In 1957 Rosenberg recalled that the CPUSA had established the Partisan Review specifically to combat "Bohemianism in literature." See Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer 1957); reprinted in The Tradition of the New, p.250. The first issue of Partisan Review was February-March, 1934.

21.See The New Act, no.3(April 1934). The issue includes "Plechanov on Art and Social Life," a very influential text written in 1912 by Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918), Russian Social Democrat, scholar, and Menshevik leader; and a note

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that Ezra Pound *"confirms Mr. Rosenberg's article"* in The New Act no.2 (June 1933). Rosenberg's friend Parker Tyler corresponded regularly with Ezra Pound at this time. Pound's radio broadcasts for Mussolini were still in the future.

22.Harold Baumbach interview, Brooklyn, New York, 12 October 1992).

23.See Daniel Aaron, "The Appeal of Communism," a chapter in Writers on the Left (1961; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969).

24.Kazin, On Native Grounds, p.405.

25.Rosenberg, notes for a response to Richard Sieburth, summer 1974. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

26.Rosenberg, "The Third Dimension of George Lukács," Dissent (Autumn, 1964):404-414. Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation p.33.

27.Ibid., p.224.

28.Rosenberg, "The Case of the Baffled Radical," Partisan Review 11, no.1 (Winter 1944). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.4.

29.Ibid.

30.Ibid., p.8.

31.Ibid., p.4.

32.Rosenberg did not write about the exploited, but in the sixties and seventies he will have something to say about certain exploiters of artists, who were always specific named individuals. The report on the Rothko Trial, entitled "Death and the Artist," is an example. [The New Yorker (24 February 1975):69+; not reprinted]. The nature of the article was such that The New Yorker was threatened with a lawsuit by the Marlborough gallery if it were published. Editor William Shawn had Rosenberg double check his facts before the magazine printed it. See The New Yorker Papers, the Harold Rosenberg file, the New York Public Library.

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33.Rosenberg, Letter to Alan Wald (24 August 1974). Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. Wald had requested information about Trotsky's influence on Rosenberg for an English literature dissertation, U.C. Berkeley. Rosenberg responded that he had admired Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, his attacks on Stalin and the bureaucratic transformation of the USSR, and his analysis of the events leading to war. But Rosenberg wrote that he was *"never drawn to Trotskyism... because to me the Bolshevik idea of the Party, the revival of which was the central feature of Trotskyism, represented a distortion of Marxism and a program for dictatorship over the proletariat."*

34.Rosenberg, "Books: Defeat," review of Trotsky's Dead, by Bernard Wolfe, and The Life, by Victor Serge. The New Yorker 51(28 November 1975):64-71.

35.Rosenberg, Letter to Alan Wald, 24 August 1974.

36.Rosenberg, "The Third Dimension of George Lukács," Dissent (Autumn, 1964):404-414. Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation p.33.

37.Rosenberg, Letter to Alan Wald.

38.Rosenberg, "The Case of the Baffled Radical," Partisan Review 11 (Winter 1944). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1985); this citation, p.4.

39.Rosenberg, "Notes and Acknowledgments," Act and the Actor: Making the Self, p.206.

40.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 2 February 1972.

41.Rosenberg, "Tenth Street, A Geography of Modern Art," Art News Annual (New York: Macmillan, 1954). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.105.

42.Ibid.

43.This "ideal world" is the subject of the chapter "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium."

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44.Jean Pucelle quoted by Francine Tyler, "Artists Respond to the Great Depression and the Threat of Fascism: The New York Artists' Union and Its Magazine 'Art Front'(1934-1937)" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1991):352.

45.Tabak, A Collage, p.212.

46.William Phillips has also commented on this May Day parade: *"I remember an incident, Kenneth Burke, when you and I, and a lot of other people, were marching in a May Day parade....I remember your joining in the shout, "We write for the working class." And I remember wondering whether Kenneth Burke really thought he wrote for the working class. How many workers read Kenneth Burke?...Some of my graduate students have a little difficulty..."* See Daniel Aaron, ed.,"Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress," The American Scholar 35 (Summer 1966):501.

47.Ashton, The New York School, A Cultural Reckoning (1972, New York: Penguin Books, 1985):68.

48.Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer 1957). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.251.

49.Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer, 1957). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, pp.250-251. Rosenberg's sense of being too "late" characterizes the New York Intellectuals in general. Paul Buhle, historian of American marxism, for example, writes that, *"Irving Howe's lament that the New York Intellectuals arrived 'late' applies to the overwhelming majority of radical thinkers who came of age in the mid-1930s or early 1940s, scarcely setting out their personal agendas before the imagined streamliner of history had turned into a freight car on a spur line leading nowhere."* See Buhle, Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left (New York: Verso, 1991):158.

50.Alfred Kazin, though on some points quite critical of Rosenberg, keeps a photograph of Rosenberg on his bulletin board because, he explained, Rosenberg was the only one of the Old Left who had stayed radical all his life. So the

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photograph served Kazin as a reminder and encouragement. Kazin telephone interview, 1 September 1993.

51.Rosenberg, "The Situation in American Writing: Seven Questions." Partisan Review 6, no.4 (Summer 1939):47. Reprinted in section entitled "Themes" in Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics; this citation, p.200.

52.Ibid.

53.Ibid.

54. This may seem late for Rosenberg to begin reading Marxist texts, but according to historian Terry Cooney other New York Intellectuals read them even later. Cooney notes that in April of 1937

> *"[Frederick] Dupee remarked to [Dwight} Macdonald in a letter on the trials: 'I don't know anything about Trotsky. I must read him!' Macdonald had himself begun to read the basic radical texts only recently. [Mary] McCarthy, trying to make of herself an expert on the trials, read for the first time 'a little in the Marxist canon.' Even [William] Phillips, though he had clearly studied at least some works of Marx before, reported...in the summer of 1937 that he was then busy reading Trotsky, Marx, and other radical texts."* See Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle (Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1986):104.

55.According to Marshall Berman, Rosenberg's marriage of modernists like Baudelaire and Marx in this way was exceptional - an integration of political and cultural modernism that "goes against the grain of contemporary thought." See Berman, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air, p.88 and n.2, p.354.

56.Karl Marx, Capital (1867), in Marx & Engels on Literature and Art, Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973):53.

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57.Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol.1 (1867, New York: International Publishers, 1972):177.

58.Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," The New Yorker (25 May 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.220.

59.This one-sentence sketch cannot suggest the complexity of Rosenberg's marxian critique of Marx, which is not the subject here. There is of course a vast critical discourse in which Rosenberg's concerns and attitudes can be located, but for a recent discussion of these same problematic categories as they relate to contemporary marxist art history, see Andrew Hemingway, "Marxism and Art History after the Fall of Communism," Art Journal 55, no.2 (Summer 1996):20-27.

60.For a definition of the term "marxian," see Dick Howard, The Marxian Legacy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1988). My intention is to distinguish the critique of Marx and Marxism that Rosenberg practiced from the criticism of reformed marxists or right-wing anti-marxists. See Howard's Part III, "Criticizing Marxism" on the political criticism of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis. Howard was working with Rosenberg on a collection of the latter's marxian essays at the time of Rosenberg's death.

61.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 18 December 1970, p.54.

62.Tabak, A Collage, p.184.

63.Ibid., p.187.

64.Ibid., p.550.

65.Ibid., p.188.

66.Ibid., p.190

67.Ibid., p.183.

68.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 17 December 1972, pp.192-193.

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69.Harold Baumbach interview, Brooklyn, New York, 12 October 1992.

70.Tabak, A Collage, p.199.

71.Ibid. It is unclear whether Tabak is referring here to the first government relief Project, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), December, 1933 - June, 1934; or the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), August 1935 - January 1943. Rosenberg signed up for both.

72.Tabak, A Collage, p.346.

73.Ibid., p.360.

74.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.202.

75.Ibid., pp.193-194.

76.Ibid., p.195.

77.Tabak, A Collage, p.360. This understated description, "interesting experience," is not characteristic of Tabak's zestful style. Her memory of the Project may have been darkened by Rosenberg's encounters with the Artist's Union, Art Front, coercive Party politics, etc., that came later, and which will be discussed further on.

78.Tabak, A Collage, p.360.

79.According to Ibram Lassaw, the name of Spivak's other assistant was Eric Stry. Lassaw interview, 26 July 1992

80.Ibid.

81.Ibid.

82.Ashton, The New York School, p.44.

83.There was a fifth friend, Bobby Dolan, named by Tabak without further identification. Ellen Landau's Lee Krasner: A Catalog Raisonée [New York: Abrams, 1995], identifies a fifth roommate as a pharmacist, but does not name him. By all accounts the dates are uncertain and conflict. The return address on Rosenberg's correspondence in March 1937

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was 333 West 14th Street. According to May Tabak's memoir, A Collage, they all lived together for three years. But she gives no dates other than the fact that she met them *"about the time the Project began,"* which would be the end of 1934, and *"After a while they, we...rented an eight-room top-floor apartment on Fourteenth Street, opposite a church."* See A Collage, p.177. Gregory White Smith and Steven Naifeh, authors of Jackson Pollock: An American Saga (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989) write that Krasner and Pantuhoff had moved to another apartment around 1937. Tabak is their source. See Smith and Naifeh, p.388. According to Jeffrey Grove, however, Krasner and Pantuhoff shared the 14th Street apartment with the Rosenbergs between 1932 and 1935. See Grove, "Chronology: Lee Krasner 1908-1989" in Ellen Landau, Lee Krasner: A Catalog Raisonée. Rosenberg's correspondence from July 1935, however, is from 64 Poplar Street in Brooklyn.

When Krasner married Jackson Pollock, May Tabak was their only witness. According to Smith and Naifeh,

> *Lee wanted Harold Rosenberg and Peggy Guggenheim, but Jackson wouldn't have Harold, only May....So on Thursday afternoon, October 25, 1945, only Jackson, Lee, and May Rosenberg met under the Gothic arches at the Marble Collegiate church at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-ninth Street.*(p.503)

Their source was Tabak, and B.H. Friedman's Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible (1972; New York: Da Capo, 1995), in which Friedman wrote that Tabak had been the only witness because Guggenheim opted out, but Friedman did not mention Pollock's refusal to have Harold Rosenberg there.

84.Rosenberg, Arshile Gorky, p.66. Rosenberg seems to have picked up this information from de Kooning. According to Rosenberg, *"after a few encounters in the street,* [de Kooning] *brought Gorky to his studio and showed him some drawings."*

85.Naifeh and Smith, Jackson Pollock, pp.380-381.

86. This date too is uncertain because Hofmann moved his school a number of times. After teaching at the Art Students League, in 1933, Hofmann's first school opened at 444 Madison Avenue; 1934, 137 East 57th St.; 1936, 52 West

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9th Street; 1939, 52 West 8th St. Krasner began studying with Hofmann in 1937.

87.Tabak, A Collage, pp. 177-178.

88.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, pp.157-158.

89.Barbara Rose, Lee Krasner: A Retrospective (exh. cat. Museum of Modern Art, 1983):18-19. Rose gives another date for Rosenberg's friendship with Krasner. According to Rose, around the time Krasner started attending Hofmann's school, she was working as a waitress at a Greenwich Village restaurant called Sam Johnson's.

> *There she met a young poet named Harold Rosenberg, with whom she struck up a life-long friendship, which had its tense moments, since both had volatile personalities....at one point she rented a room in the coldwater flat where he and his wife lived in the thirties.*(pp.18-19)

Much more could be written about the significance of Rosenberg's great admiration for Hofmann that only increased with the years; by the sixties it seemed boundless. In 1964 Rosenberg dedicated The Anxious Object to *"Hans Hofmann, to whom art is never in question."* (Subsequent editions use the past tense). At the artist's death in 1966 the two were collaborating on a book tentatively titled "The Method of Hans Hofmann." Rosenberg owned five Hofmann paintings in 1970 (transcript of KQED television, San Francisco, broadcast to be viewed on December 8 1970. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, N.Y.). Hofmann was the spirit of European modernism itself for Rosenberg, I think, and his grief at Hofmann's death was later vehemently expressed in Art News ("Homage to Hans Hofmann," January 1967) perhaps the most unrestrained of his attacks on establishment art intellectuals. Clearly Hofmann was the antithesis of all that Rosenberg loathed in the art world of the sixties.

90.KQED transcript (1970), p.7.

91.Rosenberg, "Hans Hofmann: The 'Life' Class" Art News Annual 6 (Fall 1962). Reprinted in The Anxious Object; this citation, p. 132

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92.Ibid. On Hofmann's influence on the New York artists and on Clement Greenberg, see Ashton The New York School, pp.71-84.

93.Ibid., p.6.

94.Ibid, KQED transcript, p.6. In Rosenberg's eyes the importance of Hofmann in the thirties was so great that Rosenberg *"often felt that if we had had Hofmann teaching young poets and novelists the principles of modern literature...the whole literary situation in this country would be different."*(6)

Finally, Rosenberg's eulogy to Hofmann delivered at the artist's funeral, February 20, 1966, represents Hofmann's gift to the community of artists as his faith in the creative individual above all principle. Without him, *"Who now is going to uphold it, if necessary against all reason?"* (published in Art News, April 1966)

95. According to May Tabak *"Harold and I met Gorky in the early Thirties....We had never been out of touch since."* (A Collage, p. 543) Rosenberg and Barnett Newman met around 1934 through their wives. May Tabak and Annalee Newman met each other in 1930 when they were both students at Hunter College and played tennis together. Annalee Newman interview, 28 November 1995.

96. It should also be noted that all three painters were immigrants; and, although it is widely believed that Rosenberg preferred Jewish artists, not one of them was Jewish.

97.Rosenberg, Arshile Gorky, p.88.

98.The lower-case "c" is to distinguish Rosenberg's unaffiliated communism. Communist Party Communism is capitalized and sometimes referred to as "Stalinist" or "Party" policy. Trotskyism is identified only as Trotskyism or the Trotskyist movement. For the same reason the lower case "m" indicates Rosenberg's independent marxism, and marxist or marxian culture critique.

99.Lionel Abel, "New York City: A Remembrance," Dissent 8(Summer 1961):255.

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100.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 20 January 1973, p.51.

101.Tabak, A Collage, p.361

102.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 20 January 1973, p.51.

103.Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, p.117.

104.Ashton, The New York School, pp.53-54.

105.Melvin Maddocks (1982) cited by Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, p.3. Cooney comments that this is a widely held opinion.

106.Editor's comment, Partisan Review 2(January-February, 1935):2. Rosenberg's poem "The Front" appeared on page 74 of this issue.

107. I am interested in "The Front" as an exhibition of how Rosenberg was thinking in 1935, the peak of his communist enthusiasm. Art historian Annette Cox has presented "The Front" as evidence of Rosenberg's Party Communism. See Cox, Art as Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-garde and Society (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1982):131. Fred Orton inferred from the poem Rosenberg's enthusiasm for the United Front, and that Rosenberg was a fellow-traveler. See Orton, "Action, Revolution and Painting," The Oxford Art Journal 14, no.2 (1991).

108.Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left, p.171, quoting Matthew Josephson's report in The New Republic, 6 June 1934.

109.Ibid.

110.Tabak comments in A Collage that *"It was not the lack of intellectual excitement that caused us to return to New York.* [There were] *the poets who gathered around Harriet Monroe and Poetry Magazine...*[Harold] *enjoyed arguing with the old lady and listening to her stories about all the great contemporary American poets, most of whom she'd been the first to publish."* A Collage, p.151. For more on Harriet Monroe and Poetry, see Steven Watson, "Poetry 1: The Imagist Wars," a chapter in Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991); and Ellen

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Williams, Harriet Monroe and the Poetry Renaissance: The First Ten Years of 'Poetry' 1912-1922 (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1977).

111.Harriet Monroe, "Art and Propaganda," Poetry: A Magazine of Verse 44 (July 1934): 210.

112.Ibid., p.212.

113.Ibid., p.215.

114.Ibid.

115.Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left (New York: Avon Books, 1965):233. Aaron and subsequent historians of the Writers' Congress and American Communism try to sort out what is a dauntingly entangled web of arguments and conflicting memories - complicated, to say the least, by the deceptions and self-deceptions of the participants. Rosenberg and the writers with whom he was associated must also be read through the fog of thirties' collective memory.

116.Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, p.418.

117.Kazin, On Native Grounds, pp.417-418. Kazin cites Joseph Freeman's introduction to Proletarian Literature in the United States.

118. Rosenberg, "The American Writers' Congress," Poetry 46 (July 1935):224. According to Malcolm Cowley, Rosenberg was on the lecture committee for the League of American Writers, which had been founded at the Congress. The lecture committee sustained the League financially. Besides Cowley and Rosenberg, there were Isidor Schneider, and Marjorie Fischer. See Aaron, ed.,"Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress, The American Scholar 35, no.3 (Summer 1966):513.

119. Ibid, p.223. Rosenberg's reference to "red uniform" might be a comment on Max Eastman's bitter denunciation of the Party in Artists in Uniform (1934). On the hostilities between Eastman and the Party over this book, see Aaron, Writers on the Left, pp.332-333.

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120. Ibid., p.224.

121.Serge Guilbaut has been critical of the idea of collective individualism and independent radicalism because it is externally indistinguishable from "quietism" and capitalist individualism: *"[The Abstract Expressionists] did not see that individualism as a combative stance could easily combine with individualism as a form of quietism or withdrawal, old-fashioned bourgeois individualism that did not trouble itself with avant-garde subtleties."* See Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, p.200.

On this crucial point, Guilbaut has identified the dilemma. The misunderstanding of Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting is itself evidence that the "avant-garde subtleties" have been ignored and this decisive distinction between socially engaged radical individualism and naive, or "bourgeois," individualism, seldom made. Vaclav Havel, Claude Lefort, Dick Howard, Stanley Aronowitz, Cornell West, and other "radical democrats" continue to struggle with this central political question pragmatically. See Havel's "The Power of the Powerless," and other essays in The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against The State in Central-Eastern Europe (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1983).

122.Rosenberg, Arshile Gorky, p.88.

123.Ibid., p.226-227.

124.Rosenberg, Letter to Harriet Monroe, editor of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse (10 July 1936). Monroe's response to Rosenberg, 12 July 1935; and Rosenberg to Monroe, 19 July 1935. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

125.Rosenberg uses this phrase within quotation marks in a comment on Georg Lukàcs' antimodernist Communism, which led Lukàcs to dismiss writers like Proust and Dostoyevsky as inferior to Balzac and Tolstoy. See "The Avant-Garde," in Louis Kronenberger, ed., Quality: Its Image in the Arts (New York: Atheneum, 1969). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.77.

126.Rosenberg, "The Avant-Garde," Discovering the Present, p.80.

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127.Rosenberg, "Community, Values, Comedy," Commentary (August 1960). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.151.

128.Burke's paper quoted by Malcolm Cowley in Aaron, "Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress," p.507.

129.Burke, "Thirty Years Later," p.506. Malcolm Cowley commented that by the time the Writers' Congress anthology came out *"They'd already decided to change 'the workers' to 'the people.'"* (p.507). Cowley read aloud James T. Farrell's version of this incident in Yet Other Waters, p.123.

130.Kenneth Burke, "Counter-Gridlock: An Interview With Kenneth Burke," All Area (Spring 1983):16.

131.Ibid.

132.Ibid.

133.Tabak, A Collage, p.334. According to Theresa Konsal, who was married to David Rosenberg, Harold's brother, Tabak was acting as a spy for her husband at Party meetings. Konsal, who never renounced her Stalinism, still resented Rosenberg for his "theoretical communism" and his refusal to commit to the Communist Party. (Konsal interview, New York, 9 September 1990).

134.Ibid., pp.361-362.

135.Rosenberg, "Community, Values, Comedy," Commentary (August 1960). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.149.

136.Ibid.

137.Plato, "The Symposium," Dialogues of Plato (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1950):234. Roger Shattuck used this last scene in The Symposium as the epigraph to The Banquet Years: Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I, which suggests the essential relevance of the scene to Shattuck's representation of the bohemian avant-garde.

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138.Rosenberg, "Rural Movie Comedy" (For Wyndham Lewis), Poetry 44 no.1 (April 1934):5-7. Reprinted in Trance Above the Streets as "Movie Comedy (town)," pp.38-39.

139.Jumonville, Critical Crossings, p.142

140.Tabak, A Collage, p.367.

141.McCarthy, "Ideas Were the Generative Force of His Life," The New York Times Book Review (6 May 1979):1. Jumonville discusses Rosenberg's humor and cites McCarthy. See Critical Crossings, p.142.

142.Rosenberg, "Community, Values, Comedy," Discovering the Present, p.150.

143.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.51.

144.Gerald M. Monroe, "Art Front," Studio International: Journal of Modern Art v.188 (September 1973):66-70.

145.Monroe, "Art Front," p.69.

146.Ashton, The New York School, p.62.

147.Tabak, A Collage, p.361.

148.Ibid., p.360.

149.Ibid.

150.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 7 February 1972, p.129.

151.Monroe, "Art Front," p.68.

152.Ibid., p.69.

153.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 7 February 1972, pp.129-130.

154.Monroe, "Art Front," pp.68-69.

155.Rosenberg, "The Thirties," The New Yorker (30 November 1968). Reprinted in The De-definition of Art; this citation, p.185.

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156.Rosenberg, "Eulogy, February 20, 1966," Art News 65 (April 1966):21.

157.Rosenberg, "Hans Hofmann: The 'Life' Class," The Anxious Object, footnote, p.133.

158.Ibid.

159.In 1964 Rosenberg would blame *"the tension and totalitarian tenor"* of the 1930's for the authoritarianism of another, more famous cultural journal - the influential British literary quarterly, Scrutiny. Rosenberg's interpretation of what happened to Scrutiny reflects his view of what happened to Art Front. Scrutiny, according to Rosenberg, was begun by F.R. Leavis in 1932 with the best of avant-garde intentions: to create a forum for anti-ideological, individualist criticism. Unfortunately, however, Leavis's *"no-doctrine ideal," "realized itself in practice in a set of formulas and verdicts."* Scrutiny's transformation of ideals into orthodoxy was to Rosenberg the typical, apparently inevitable, pattern of thirties cultural and political enterprises. It was the one Art Front had followed.

160.Kazin, On Native Grounds, p.409.

161.Rosenberg's attitude toward these "thirties" questions when raised by his students in the late sixties is evident on the recordings made of his seminar on Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire at the Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. Rosenberg was pleased by the May 1968 student uprising in Paris, but the article it occasioned firmly warned about the need to keep the individual foremost in collective actions. See "Surrealism in the Streets," The New Yorker (28 December 1968). Reprinted in The De-definition of Art.

162.Peter Selz interview, Berkeley, California, 23 May 1995. Selz remembered this was around 1964.

163.See Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, eds., "Signers of the Call," Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers U P, 1986):49-52. It is noteworthy that of the

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future Abstract Expressionists only Adolph Gottlieb and David Smith signed the call. The original "Call" was published in November 1935 with 114 names, including David Smith. See Gerald Monroe, "The American Artists Congress and the Invasion of Finland," Archives of American Art Journal 15, no.1 (1975):16. The list of 401 names published in Baigell and Williams adds those who then signed the November Call, including Adolph Gottlieb and Meyer Schapiro.

164.Rosenberg annotations on an article by Gerald Monroe, "The American Artists Congress and The Invasion of Finland," Archives of American Art Journal 15 no.1 (1975):14-20. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

165.Ibid., p.17.

166.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 7 February 1972, pp.130-131.

167.Rosenberg annotations on Gerald Monroe article, "The American Artists Congress and the Invasion of Finland," p.16.

168.Schapiro quoted by Helen Epstein, "A Passion to Know and Make Known, Part 2," Art News (Summer 1983):86. Epstein comments further on Schapiro's secession from the Artists Congress. On Schapiro's encounter with Party Communism, see Guilbaut, How New York Stole... pp. 24-27. In 1938 150 artists (including Stuart Davis, Philip Evergood, Max Weber, Raphael Soyer) signed a petition supporting *"the verdicts in the recent Moscow trials of the trotskyite buckarinite traitors."* (Guilbaut, p.27) Guilbaut points out the significance of the fact that Schapiro's 1937 article for The Marxist Quarterly, "On the Nature of Abstract Art," was published one year (Jan-March) after his talk "The Social Bases of Art" at the First Closed Session, "The Artist in Society," of the Artists Congress in mid-February, 1936. Schapiro's struggle to define the artist's role in society in that year 1936-1937 coincides with Rosenberg's dilemma that year, as I will show. Both Schapiro and Rosenberg develop new marxian dialectical theories of art under the pressure of real events.

169."The Melancholy Railings," New Masses (20 July 1937):20.

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170.In July and August of 1935 Popular Front ideology was officially introduced at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. For more on the history of American communism, see Lewis Coser and Irving Howe, The American Communist Party: A Critical History (Boston, 1957), and Paul Buhle, Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left (New York: Verso, 1991).

171.James T. Farrell, diary entry, August 20, 1936, quoted by Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, p.97 and n.5, p.294.

172.Farrell Diary, September 5, 1936, quoted by Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, p.286.

173.Kazin, On Native Grounds, p.382. Farrell's working-class origins and loyalties were unquestionably sincere: *"Unlike all the little people in left-wing letters who loved the working class to death but could never touch them, Farrell was joined by every instinct to men and women who have never known the barest security, who have clawed the earth to live from one day to the next."*(383)

174. For further comments on Farrell's position and influence, see Aaron, Writers On The Left, pp.316-319; and Guilbaut, How New York Stole..., pp.23-24.

175.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.51.

176.Aaron, Writers on The Left, p.297.

177.Kazin, On Native Grounds, pp.419-420.

178.Aaron, Writers on The Left, p.447, n.1.

179.William Phillips and Philip Rahv, "A Protest," New Masses, 25 (19 October 1937), quoted by Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, p.113.

180.Rosenberg, "The Education of John Reed," a review of John Reed by Granville Hicks, Partisan Review (June 1936):28.

181.Ibid.

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182.Ibid.

183.Ibid., p.29.

184.Ibid.

185.Ibid.

186.According to Ibram Lassaw, Rosenberg expressed disillusionment with the failure of the antifascist Front in the Spanish Civil War. (Ibram Lassaw interview, East Hampton, 20 July 1992). In 1937 Rosenberg wrote a poem called "Spanish Epitaph" published in Trance Above the Streets, p.17.

O tall men of Hades,
Have pity on this little one!
All he knew of life was laughing and crowing,
Till the iron dropped on him out of the sky.
O gaunt horses of Hades,
He has not even a weapon
With which to defend himself!

187.Rosenberg, autobiographical notes, c. 2 May 1966. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. Partial version in John Wakeman, ed., World Authors, 1950-1975 (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1975).

188.A desire to support modernist rather than proletarian literature was a large part of the motivation for The Partisan Review's break with the CPUSA. The issue of the Trotskyism has been forefronted by revisionist social historians of Abstract Expressionist cultural politics during the Cold War who have greatly enlarged upon Clement Greenberg's comment that, *"Some day it will have to be told how anti-Stalinism which started out more or less as Trotskyism turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come."* See, for example, the chapter, "New York, 1935-1941: The De-Marxization of the Intelligentsia," in Guilbaut, How New York Stole.... Guilbaut's chapter provides a good historical background for this discussion of Rosenberg's communism, though Rosenberg is not discussed.

After the Partisan Review editors had cut their CPUSA ties in 1937 their position was communist anti-Communism,

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which, as Greenberg said, more or less translated as Trotskyism. But "Trotskyism" actually misrepresents many of the individual contributors to PR, including Rosenberg. Rosenberg was never a member of the CPUSA, and he never joined any Trotskyist group. This caused trouble with friends and family. As late as 1990 Rosenberg's sister-in-law Theresa Konsal still resented Rosenberg's refusal to join the CPUSA (Konsal interview, 19 September 1990), and Lionel Abel continues to hold a grudge against Rosenberg for not actively committing himself to Trotskyism (Abel interview, 17 October 1993).

The notion of a consensual Trotskyism or total agreement among the New York Intellectuals on any public debate is misleading. On Trotsky, Irving Howe remembered that after the 1936 break with the CPUSA some of the PR writers *"gravitated for a year or two toward the Trotskyist group, but ....no version of orthodox Marxism could retain a hold on intellectuals who had gone through the trauma of abandoning the Leninist Weltanschauung."* See Howe, "The New York Intellectuals," in Decline of the New (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970):219. Similarly, William Phillips described the Partisan Review editors as *"never real Trotskyites. I would say that we were vaguely sympathetic to the Trotskyites because Trotsky had been critical of the Communist party in a constructive way."* Partisan Review editors Mary McCarthy, George Morris and Fred Dupee did not get deeply involved in the political debates. For the comments of Phillips, see "Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress," p.510.

Jumonville, in Critical Crossings, presents the diversity of individual positions of the New York Intellectuals on Trotsky, and explains the historical use of "Trotskyism" in the thirties by the Stalinists *"as a derisive epithet for any socialist who did not follow Stalin...the term often became a general label used by the left to refer to independent leftists."* See note no.16, p.239. New Masses articles and cartoons at this time present Trotsky as Hitler's fascist ally in Mexico.

189.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

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190.Rosenberg, "Aesthetic Assault, a review of The Boys in the Back Room, by Jules Romains, New Masses (30 March 1937):25.

191.Ibid.

192.Ibid.

193.Ibid.

194.Ibid.

195.Rosenberg, draft for "Aesthetic Assault," Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

196.Ibid., Jules Romains quoted by Rosenberg.

197.According to Fredric Jameson, *"the proper political use of pleasure must always be allegorical....in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also at one and the same time taken as the figure for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole."*(Jameson's emphasis). See Jameson, "Pleasure: A Political Issue"(1983), in The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, Volume 2: The Syntax of History (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988):73. In this essay Jameson presents a brief history of leftist debates around pleasure as a political issue, beginning with Lenin's tactical puritanism, and including Marcuse's distinctions between real pleasure and a commodity culture fix, Laura Mulvey's feminist critique of male visual pleasure, and especially Roland Barthes' concept of *"jouissance,"* from Le Plaisir du texte (1973). Rosenberg's lifestyle and opinions were a politics of pleasure with, I think, affinities to Barthes. See section, "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium" for which Barthes' A Lover's Discourse provided an epigraph and partial inspiration. Georgi Plekhanov, whom Rosenberg published in The New Act in 1934, contributed importantly to this line of marxian criticism in Letters Without Address (1912).

198."The Melancholy Railings," New Masses (20 July 1937):20. Fred Orton has proposed that Rosenberg's 1937 contributions to the New Masses (rather than to the Partisan Review) might

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suggest that Rosenberg was more sympathetic to Stalinism than he was to Trotskyism. See Orton, "Action, Revolution, Painting," The Oxford Art Journal 14, no.2 (1991). Orton's interpretation is undercut, I believe, but the fact that between June and December of 1937 Partisan Review was regrouping and had ceased publication. See Cooney, chapter "The Break" in The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, pp.95-119). Furthermore, by January of 1938 Rosenberg was in Washington D.C. at work for the Writer's Project. He received a letter dated 7 June 1938 from Partisan Review editor Dwight Macdonald asking him to contribute despite the "personal animosity" between Rosenberg and Partisan Review editors William Phillips and Philip Rahv. See Jumonville, Critical Crossings, pp.139-140. Rosenberg published again in Partisan Review in Summer of 1939.

199.Rosenberg, "The Melancholy Railings," New Masses (20 July 1937):20. Reprinted in Trance Above the Streets (New York: Gotham Bookmart, 1942):31.

200. Here I associate Rosenberg's contempt for despair with his communism; elsewhere in this dissertation, with his Judaism. Rosenberg's tragic vision calls for affirmation in the face of hopelessness. I discuss the pervasiveness of this attitude throughout Rosenberg's criticism in "Art as Tragedy: An Investigation of Harold Rosenberg's Ethical Aesthetic," (Masters Thesis, San Diego State University, 1988).

201. This incident might well have occurred at the same time as the 1938 argument, previously described, that Rosenberg had with his brother David over Rosenberg's editorial choices for American Stuff. Unfortunately, there are no exact dates for either event.

202.Patia Yasin, telephone conversations, 10/1/93, 1/12/94.

203.Harry Roskolenko, "Harold Rosenberg: 1906-1978," Art International (September 1979):62.

204.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.134.

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205.Jerre Mangione, The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972):248.

206.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.134.

207.Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p.251.

208.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.134.

209.Rosenberg, "Literature Without Money," American Stuff, a special issue of Directions vol.1, no.3 (February 1938):6.

210.Ibid.

211.Ibid., p.10.

212.Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p.250.

213.Ibid., p.249.

214.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.132.

215.Rosenberg, letter to Kenneth Burke, 23 May 1938. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

216.Ibid.

217.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.51.

218.Rosenberg, "Everyman a Professional," Art News (November 1956). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.70. The link Rosenberg made between totalitarianism and bureaucratic professionalism was mass-mindedness. My thesis is that this critical perspective shaped and directed Rosenberg's art criticism in the sixties and seventies. See "Tartuffes, Pedants and Con Men" in Part III, "Aesthetic Assault."

219.Rosenberg, "Community, Values, Comedy," Discovering the Present, p.153.

220.Ibid., p.148.

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AESTHETIC ASSAULT

[Romains] wanted...to exalt the spirit of comradeship of which he was dreaming, comradeship which he 'raised almost to the height of a world concept.' So he wrote this jubilant story of a group of drinking pals who set out to perform an act of comic destruction against the sacred cows of the bourgeoisie: The Army, the Church, and the Public Monument.[1]

Rosenberg
"Aesthetic Assault" 1937

...Art History (which is, of course, only the cumulative effect of all the concrete practices in colleges, museums, and publishing houses)....seems so little to take its own subject, culture, seriously that it fails to see itself as a player in this historical field.[2]

Griselda Pollock, 1996

In polemical writing one's murderous impulses are discharged...[3]

Rosenberg
undated note

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TARTUFFES, PEDANTS AND CON MEN

> *The intellectual as he used to be seems doomed.... But...hasn't every intellectual community, even in its heyday, lived constantly on the verge of being taken over by its Tartuffes, pedants, and con men?*
> *Rosenberg (1965)*[4]

"The Vanishing Intellectual," the essay from which the above epigraph is taken, is one in a long, deeply-thought series of articles by Rosenberg on the changing situation for the intellectual and artist in America, the theme that preoccupied him as did no other. In "The Vanishing Intellectual," Rosenberg appears to vacillate as he weighs the chances for the survival of the *"intellectual as he used to be,"* which is to say like himself - an independent and bohemian rather than an affiliated intellectual. It looked to Rosenberg in 1965 as if, on the one hand, the old-style freelance intellectual was doomed to *"absorption into the establishment."*[5] Yet, on the other hand, he thought there was some encouragement to be found in history. After all, Rosenberg reminded his readers, *"Tartuffes, pedants, and con men"* had always threatened to take over intellectual

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communities, just as they were currently threatening his own.

"Aesthetic Assault" is about Rosenberg's "theater of combat" - his war with American establishment art critics and curators of the nineteen-sixties and seventies. This first chapter attempts to situate his argument with those intellectuals he considered the *"Tartuffes, pedants and con men"* threatening his own bohemian community within the larger context of the general crisis of independent critical culture after the Second World War: the questions posed by "The Vanishing Intellectual" and other essays. The focus then narrows to Rosenberg's battles with American academic art historian critics and curators, especially the followers of Clement Greenberg. "Making it Official: Museum Vanguardism and the End of the Avant-Garde," the next chapter, will continue to pose key points of Rosenberg's passionate opposition to official culture against the backdrop of his broader concerns as a public intellectual.

*

Rosenberg's focus on the contemporary art world set his

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work distinctly apart from that of other public intellectuals of his era.[6] In his concern about the larger crisis of intellectual culture, however, he was far from isolated. In fact he contributed to a conversation about "the vanishing intellectual" that involved nearly every public intellectual of the time. Among the New York Intellectuals, the question of how the independent leftist critic was to make the ethical and political swing from the radicalism of the decades preceding the Great Disillusionment of 1936-1939 to the wartime and then postwar situation was the subject of endless public debate.

Before the United States' entry into the Second World War, Rosenberg and a number of other public critics had already noted the ascendency of affiliated intellectuals working for government, business, or academic institutions. In 1941 James Burnham, a member of the New York Intellectual community, had identified what he called the new "managerial elite," a product of "The Managerial Revolution."[7] According to Russell Jacoby's 1987 intellectual history, The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe,

> *...the years following World War II marked a swing period between two intellectual types: independents and bohemians receded before*

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academics and professionals.[8]

The rise of academics and professionals and the fall of independents and bohemians that Jacoby documents in The Last Intellectuals concerned every one of the New York Intellectuals. Rosenberg's upstairs neighbor on East Tenth Street, Dwight Macdonald, who produced the anarcho-pacifist magazine Politics between 1943 and 1949, despairingly referred to the late 1940s as *"the gray dawn of 'peace.'"*[9] Macdonald's biographer, Michael Wreszin, has explained that at this time *"Dwight and others were experiencing a...fragmentation and imminent death, of an American, or at least New York, intelligentsia."*[10] According to Neil Jumonville in Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America, *"the New York group's response to the unsettling gray dawn was to redefine and reshape the meaning of the term intellectual."*[11]

Reshaping the meaning of the term intellectual, which meant redefining the role of the intellectual vis à vis society, was an international concern for all public critics. According to Martin Jay, historian of the Frankfurt School, the sociopolitical repositioning of leftist intellectuals as they responded to fast and shocking

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turns in the circumstances, was *"one of the constant themes of modern intellectual history."*[12] Although resolutely cosmopolitan in outlook, Rosenberg's criticism was with equal principle centered locally, moving outward in concentric circles from Tenth Street, New York City, the United States. And certainly the historical conditions he and other American intellectuals confronted after World War II were unlike those faced by public critics anywhere else. Though somewhat overdrawn, the following assessment of the United States in 1948-1949 by British historian Robert Payne gives a strong, immediate sense of what that situation was from an international perspective:

> *America....no other power at any time in the world's history has possessed so varied or so great an influence on other nations.... It is already an axiom that the decisions of the American government affect the lives and the livelihood of the remotest people. Half the wealth of the world, more than half the productivity, nearly two-thirds of the world's machines are concentrated in American hands; the rest of the world lies in the shadow of American industry, and with each day the shadow looms larger, more portentous, more dangerous...*[13]

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The Fall of Paris

Malice of office...cries of "J'accuse."[14]

Rosenberg, 1940

By the end of the nineteen thirties, Rosenberg had assumed the critical position he would always sustain: a tireless and scrupulous watch over the performance of institutionally affiliated intellectuals. This self-assumed task was fully shouldered with the 1940 essay, "On The Fall of Paris," for Partisan Review. The overnight capitulation of Communist Front intellectuals to Fascism with the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 23 August 1939 and the Nazi occupation of Paris on 14 June 1940 culminated a period of disillusionment with Soviet Communism and the Popular Front that had begun for Rosenberg in the Fall and Winter of 1937-38. He interpreted these events as the utter failure of public intellectualism to safeguard the democratic tradition of individual dissent. The lesson he took from them would overshadow all his writings on intellectuals from then on: as a collective type, the intellectual was never to be trusted.

In Rosenberg's intellectual biography *le débacle* can be

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seen as the last of a series of catalysts - political and personal events occurring between 1936 to 1940 - that determined his personal commitment to independent radicalism. At age thirty four, the Nazi occupation of Paris did not so much form or transform his thought as infuse his convictions and style with something of the will and intonations of an Ezekiel.

"On the Fall of Paris," published in the Partisan Review five months after the Germans entered Paris, is a deeply moving eulogy for the lost and irreplaceable capital of modern culture. The title alludes to that archetype of spiritual failure and homelessness, the fall from grace and eternal exile from Eden. *"Up to the day of the occupation,"* Rosenberg wrote, *"Paris had been the Holy Place of our time. The only one."* The City of Light had been Eden to Rosenberg because it had given *"solid evidence that a creative communion sweeping across all boundaries is not out of the reach of our time."*[15] Rosenberg's modernism and marxism both derived from a revolutionary dream of international creative community for which Paris was the emblem, not Moscow.

The first lines of "On The Fall of Paris" praise the

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city where

> *For a hundred years poets and artists of Paris had risen as to a personal insult against the organized sadism, lies and bad taste of the State, the Church, the Academy. Nowhere had the malice of office been more promptly raked with lucid hoaxes, verses of flame, cries of "J'accuse."*[16]

But to Rosenberg, even before the Nazis had entered the city and completed the destruction of the modern spirit, French intellectuals had betrayed their traditional obligation to uphold it. He accused them of a failure of courage; instead of maintaining an independent critical culture, they had supported the *"undaring"* and *"morally lax"* idea of practical unity. Rosenberg found the serpent in paradise to be Popular Front intellectualism, which, as he wrote elsewhere, *"provided official sanction"* for an *"unprincipled laissez-faire."*[17] Popular Front capitulation to Fascism with the Stalin-Hitler pact was to him catastrophic; Parisian intellectuals relinquished their individual power of action against "*organized sadism, lies and bad taste*"; they surrendered their brilliant heritage of individual freedom for

> *the stupid police pageant of Moscow, with its grotesquely staged appeal to the simple-minded of all countries - this mass assault by the nameless clerks of a State machine upon individual orators,*

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theoreticians, writers, revolutionaries[18]

The fall of Paris to a state machine of nameless clerks was a dreadful morality tale for Rosenberg, a lesson he would not forget - an anxious inspiration for a lifetime of diligent work. The type of bureaucratic intellectual who "provided official sanction" for an "unprincipled laissez-faire" became his eternal adversary. In 1955 he unleashed (as he did many times) his loathing for this persona in its American role - the "middle-class careerist" - and made emphatic the origins of his contempt:

> *The intellectuals and fellow travelers who followed the Communists through the execution of the Old Bolsheviks, the extermination of the POUMists and anarchists in Spain, the Stalin-Hitler Pact, the sabotage of French and British resistance to the Nazis, the partition of Poland, all of which took place in public and behind no curtain of any kind, were not "innocent," to say nothing of "generous and open-minded". These scoundrels were, as a type, middle-class careerists, closed to both argument and evidence, impatient with thought, psychopaths of "radical" conformity... [a] sodden group of Philistines....*[19]

By the end of the half-decade 1935 to 1940, Rosenberg could announce the emergence of what he called *"another modernism"* - the modernism of this *"sodden group of Philistines,"* one diametrically opposed to his own avant-

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garde modernism born and nurtured in Paris and *"dreaming of an absolute power to rearrange life according to any pattern of its choice."*[20] Parisian modernism had, he wrote in "On the Fall of Paris," already been conquered by an enemy that proved itself to be the servant of the mass mind: official affirmative modernism, bureaucratic conformist culture, whether capitalist or fascist. Here is the historical origin of Rosenberg's lifelong equation of bureaucratic with totalitarian society and culture. Rosenberg would forever liken *"another modernism"* with *"a general ebb,"* with moral laxity and cowardice on the part of intellectuals:

> *And the 'defenders of culture'? At the stroke of the Hitler gong, the last tremors in art, literature, science, politics, cease as if at a signal....minds formerly independent slink into institutions for the disgraced....No imagination dares to grapple with the present and the future.*[21] (1940)

These *"minds formerly independent [that] slink into institutions for the disgraced"* were the enemy - intellectuals of officialdom, or "The Bureaucrats," the title and subject of a poem written before 1942:

> *And the organization*
> ....
> *Whom does it inspire?*
> ....

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Is it time already
For the experts?
Will they
Really complete it,
Those cool paid men
Who have just arrived?

The clerks polite and busy
In the remote offices
....[22]

"On The Fall of Paris" identified Rosenberg's *"another modernism"* to be affirmative institutional intellectual culture happy with the status quo, the mental viper Rosenberg would strike at unrelentingly, with no hope of ever vanquishing it, for the rest of his life. In 1956 his article, "Everyman a Professional," for Art News firmly drew the historical connection between the apparatchik of the totalitarian states and the American establishment intellectual of the McCarthy era. As Rosenberg saw it, former Communists - Stalinist or Trotskyist group conformists - deserted the Communist movement *en masse* only to make new *raisons d'être* of their professions in universities and other government and corporate institutions. In Rosenberg's words:

> *The galley slaves of the ideologies scampered back to their vocations declaring the self-sufficiency*

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of each in tones louder than ever.[23]

Thus the mental type that had betrayed the democratic communist tradition of individual dissent in 1936-40, was to Rosenberg the very same persona - the organization man - of the postwar period, as devoted to the conventions of his professional career within intellectual institutions as he had once been to Stalinist dogma.

The consequential place "On the Fall of Paris" had in his intellectual biography was emphasized by Rosenberg himself when the essay was republished in 1959 in The Tradition of the New. He added a footnote explaining that he had put the Paris article first in the section of essays on recent American intellectual history, entitled "The Herd of Independent Minds," because he meant the essay *"on the end of the cultural internationalism once concentrated in and symbolized by Paris"* to serve as the "background" for all that he had written on the "herd" phenomenon of so-called "independent minds."[24]

Unquestionably, this section of The Tradition of the New is the closest to Rosenberg's identity as an intellectual. Every one of the "herd" essays berate the

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American intellectual for bureaucratic thinking.[25] These are articles like "Community Critics vs. modern painting" for Art News (1956), "Death in the Wilderness" (Midstream 1957), "The Orgamerican Fantasy" (Prospectus 1957), "Professors of Man Estranged" (Midstream 1958), "Twilight of the Intellectuals" (Dissent 1958).

In a 1959 review, Henri Peyre described The Tradition of the New as "The Rape of Academe." Peyre praised Rosenberg as *"un critique de combat"* - a type Peyre found to be rare in the United States where, he asserted, academic critics desiccate literature, but familiar to him from the venerable tradition of *"Voltaire, Balzac, Shelley, Heine, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Malraux, Brecht and countless other Europeans [who] had practiced commitment long before the Existentialists."*[26] Though The Tradition of the New was well-reviewed and very soon translated into French, Italian, Spanish and Japanese, Rosenberg's American academic victims were silent.[27]

Rosenberg's determined opposition to the institutionalization of independent intellectual culture explains the adversarial thrust of his art criticism. "On The Fall of Paris" and other "Herd" essays are important to

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this discussion because they locate Rosenberg's critique of institutional intellectualism years before the 1960s began and he turned his heavy guns on the intellectuals of the American art establishment. Among all establishment intellectuals it would be American art critics and curators in the sixties and seventies who would be subjected to Rosenberg's most severe and persistent assault.

The Herd of Independent Minds

In the 1940s and '50s a number of parallels to Rosenberg's essays on the herd of independent minds appeared. These included well-known essays like Newton Arvin's 1945 "Report from the Academy: The Professor as Manager," Malcolm Cowley's 1946 "Limousines on Grub Street," Lionel Trilling's " 1953 "The Situation of the American Intellectual at the Present Time," Irving Howe's 1954 "This Age of Conformity," and H. Stuart Hughes's 1956 "Is the Intellectual Obsolete?"

The Partisan Review 1952 symposium, "Our Country and Our Culture," identifies the centrality of the concern about

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the changing situation for the New York Intellectuals. The symposium was called specifically to discuss the role of the public intellectual in Cold War America. According to Alexander Bloom, a historian of the New York Intellectuals, *"no* [Partisan Review] *symposium so clearly demonstrated a changed perspective as strikingly."* Philip Rahv and William Phillips, founding editors of the magazine begun in 1934 as organ of the CPUSA-sponsored John Reed Club of New York, announced their move from the left margin to the center of the political arena. Speaking for the entire American intellectual left, the editors *"admitted that American intellectuals, once-fervent outsiders who reveled in their marginality, 'regard America and its institutions in a new way.'"*[28] Their earlier radicalism was replaced by a *"new way"* to view postwar United States and its institutions. This new way, the Partisan Review editors agreed, had to be more affirmative than oppositional.[29]

There was never such a consensus among the New York Intellectuals about their own social responsibilities in an overwhelmingly prosperous and powerful America, about whether one serves society best by opposing or affirming the powers that be. But generally speaking, Phillips and Rahv

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were much more right than wrong. For most of the New York Intellectuals the shift in political position was from a radical opposition to both Soviet Communism and Capitalism in the late thirties to a post World War II alliance with democratic capitalism and an emergent internationalist business liberalism.[30] In Arthur Schlesinger's definitive phrasing, the general shift was towards the *"vital center."*[31] Irving Howe recalled in his 1982 intellectual autobiography that *"the strongest force in the intellectual life of the fifties was....a liberalism increasingly conservatized, or a rightward drift of ex-radicals as extremist in contrition as once in assertion."*[32] Some former radicals moved to the right of center; and some, like James Burnham, Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol and Sidney Hook, moved significantly farther right. Dwight Macdonald abandoned radical politics,[33] and Clement Greenberg rejected the role of public intellectual altogether.[34] The old Left-Right political model, however, becomes less and less useful given the heterodoxy that characterized American cultural politics of the postwar era. Certainly Rosenberg's intransigent independence (anti-Communist, anti-Capitalist, anti-Liberal...) cannot be fixed on such a monolinear scale

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of changeling terms.

The many disparate positions cohered on the basis of common concerns. In 1951 Columbia University sociologist C. Wright Mills, in White Collar, responded to the threat of what Rosenberg would call the vanishing intellectual with a strict warning to American intellectuals about the dangers of bureaucratization, and the trading of ethical criticism and public responsibility for salaries and status. Rosenberg was far closer to Mills on this than he was to the liberal centrist conclusions of the 1952 Partisan Review symposium.

Although Rosenberg was among the most frequent contributors of essays and reviews analyzing the new intellectual environment, it is significant that he did not publish them (or anything else) in the Partisan Review between 1944 and 1958. According to Irving Howe, this was precisely because Rosenberg opposed the Partisan Review editors' accommodations to the status quo.[35] Howe's interpretation is supported by a comment that appeared in a 1957 piece for Midstream magazine (but does not appear in the 1959 version published in The Tradition of the New), in which Rosenberg explained that his departure from Partisan Review had been due less to ideological differences than to

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"what might be called a certain mental etiquette...missed in those whose chief rumination turned out to be the status and future of their band."[36]

Just months after the censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy late in 1954, Rosenberg publicly ridiculed Partisan Review authors Leslie Fiedler, Diana Trilling and others for their *mea culpa* group apostasy from marxism, their compromising liberalism, and their falsification of the history of American radicalism. His polemic, "Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past," was published in the new Dissent magazine Irving Howe and Lewis Coser had begun as a forum for the independent anti-communist left.[37] A letter from Rosenberg to Howe about the essay underscores the central importance the issue had for him: *"I had the feeling while I was writing this piece,"* he wrote, *"of discovering for the first time in years a concrete political issue in America for the intellectuals, in terms of their own position and of the larger historical overtones that alone make politics interesting."*[38]

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The postwar establishment intellectual was a persona that troubled and irritated Rosenberg wherever he found it; and he found it everywhere, though most commonly in university departments. His reviews of books by professors of sociology, literature, political science, psychology, and cultural anthropology never failed to uncover and ridicule what were to him the fallacies of positivism, idealism and historicism, and the overall pernicious narrowness of the academic author's institutional formatting, whatever the discipline. All efforts to shape a formula, to make a "science" of human experience, behavior or works of the imagination he unequivocally scorned.

In a 1957 review of William H. Whyte's The Organization Man, published in Prospectus and Les Temps Modernes, Rosenberg dubbed this new intellectual type the "Orgman," and the "sacred groves" of academe he called the "Orgworld."

> *...today Orgmen reproduce themselves like fruit flies in whatever is organized, whether it be a political party or a museum of advanced art....The inhabitant of the sacred groves has...surrendered all choices. Having accepted self-alienation in trade for social place, the post-radical intellectual can see nothing ahead but other-direction and a corporately styled personality. For him the Orgworld has closed for good.*[39]

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Rosenberg's "Orgmen" of the art world were attached to its burgeoning postwar institutions - museums, galleries, art journals, university art departments - and to their personal careers within these institutions. The "Orgman's" conventional professional values Rosenberg believed to be a grave threat to intellectual freedom, and to his own bohemian ideal of creative community and its traditionally oppositional relationship to society at large.

The institutionalization of the art world in the decades following the Second World War signaled and precipitated the probable ruin of Rosenberg's intimate community of artists. The cultural paradigm that gave rise to it and to which it gave rise was in crisis. He feared that bohemia and the historical avant-garde were both to be consumed at the triumphal feast of American democratic capitalism.

On the absorption of the avant-garde into the art establishment and the concurrent dissolution of its social group, bohemia, a recent study by sociologist Diana Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art

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World 1940-1985, starts out with the consensual proposition that *"when Abstract Expressionism began, its members were a tiny enclave who perceived themselves as being at odds with the rest of American society and totally isolated."*[40] Then compellingly, statistic by statistic, Crane charts the astonishingly rapid rise of institutions of contemporary art (galleries, museums, foundations, journals, university departments of art and art history) and the concurrent decline of what she calls the *"vital social network"* of New York's bohemia. The sociologist's data demonstrates how inexorably the commercialization and institutionalization of the art world broke down the old social structures of bohemian community that had supported the historical avant-garde.[41]

Although very few American academic art historians have noted the impact of institutionalization on contemporary art production in these years, scholars from other disciplines have reached conclusions similar to Crane's about the end of the avant-garde and bohemia.[42] Historian Donald Egbert ended his 1967 history of "The Idea of the Avant-garde in Art and Politics" for The American Historical Review with the observation that

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> *...in the Western world the traditional contrast and conflict between the avant-garde artist on the one hand and the bourgeoisie and official establishment on the other - that contrast and conflict so long basic to the very idea of avant-garde - are rapidly being abolished.... the overlapping social and artistic reasons that brought about the origins of the avant-garde even before Saint-Simon gave it its name have almost completely vanished.*[43]

Russell Jacoby's The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe links the end of bohemia and oppositional culture to the triumph of "mainstream" affirmative culture:

> *By the 1960s bohemia, renamed the counter culture, had entered the mainstream. Moreover, the very fabric, the urban texture that sustained bohemia, had by the late 1950s unraveled. Bohemia had lost its urban home and identity. For the generations born in the 1940s and after, bohemia ceased to be either an idea or a place.*[44]

Rosenberg's milieu became a memory for him before the end of the postwar decade. As late as 1947 Clement Greenberg, in an essay entitled "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture" published in the British Horizon magazine, could still describe the poets and painters of downtown Manhattan as *"maudits" "who live in cold-water flats and exist from hand to mouth."*[45] Although three months later Greenberg agreed with Rosenberg that

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isolation and alienation was *"indispensable to any ambitious art,"*[46] in this essay on America's cultural prospects he declared that bohemia's poverty and isolation was scandalous. Accusingly, he lamented the fact that the Village bohemians - the emerging Abstract Expressionists - were still *"as isolated in the United States as if they were living in Paleolithic Europe."* Despite the fact that he evidently still believed, as Rosenberg would always believe, that the alienation of the *"art-fixated misfits"* who he championed was not only the traditional situation, and in fact necessary to radical art, Greenberg nonetheless pronounced *"their isolation...inconceivable, crushing, unbroken, damning."* Moreover, he asserted that it was *"highly improbable" "that anyone can produce art on a respectable level in this situation,"* and called for support from establishment cultural institutions like the Museum of Modern Art, whose *"pusillanimity,"* he wrote, so far had made them *"follow the lead of the most powerful art dealers"* rather than support downtown bohemian artists like Jackson Pollock and David Smith. *"What,"* Greenberg concluded in rhetorical and real dismay, *"can fifty do against a hundred and forty million?"*[47] Within a few years the isolation and

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poverty Greenberg decried was history; and he has since received much deserved credit for stimulating the interest of the New York cultural establishment in Abstract Expressionism. In 1966, recalling the twenty year history of American art *"From Pollock to Pop"* for Horizon magazine, Rosenberg wrote that *"Within a decade after the public first became aware of the 'gestures in the solitudes,' American abstract art was leading a cheering squad in the Rose Bowl."*[48]

Crane's observations about the significance of this moment at the end of the forties, the domestication of the avant-garde and bohemia by the art establishment and the simultaneous shift from a bohemian to a "professional subculture" in which Greenberg played a paternal role, are worth quoting at length:

> *By the end of the forties, the Abstract Expressionists had acquired a nucleus of powerful supporters in the art world, including curators in key positions at the Museum of Modern Art, critics, dealers, and collectors. Many of these individuals represented not so much the values of a social elite as the expertise of a professional subculture devoted to the appreciation of art. Clement Greenberg, a leading member of this group believed, for example, that art criticism should, like science, exhibit logic and precision and be based on general concepts rather than on intuitive reactions to the stimulus of a particular*

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> ***painting. These academically based critics, who were trained in art history and aesthetics, were more theoretically inclined than the nonacademic critics, who were often poets and artists.***[49]

*

These enormous external socioeconomic pressures set up equivalent internal tensions within the artists' community.[50] Mainstream notions of "success" as money and celebrity were overpowering the old bohemian value of art as a personal calling. Attitudes of individual artists' varied, as did their situations. Some were able to maintain their axiological equilibrium. But in a situation where the works of some became valuable commodities while the works of others did not, an atmosphere of resentment strained the once easy relations of the pre-affluent years. Internal schisms appeared. Previously, as Rosenberg recalled, *"certain ruptures were taken for granted"* in the Abstract Expressionist community. *"Foremost among these was the rupture between the artist and the middle class. Commercialism, careerism, were spoken of disdainfully as a matter of course."*[51] But, as Rosenberg saw it, by the mid-

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fifties these middle-class values had seeped into bohemia and undermined what was to him the ground of creative individuality: a freely-formed fraternity of independent artists.

Dore Ashton has also pointed to financial success as the primary cause for the dissolution of the Abstract Expressionist milieu:

> *Not only they, but also their community had altered. Despite the deep-seated suspicion of success on the part of the New York School, success was insidiously attacking their unity. The genuine community of impoverished bohemians, all of whom had shared economic deprivation during the Depression, was disintegrating as prosperity swept post-war America into a different economic frame of reference. It is not easy to hold together even a rudimentary sub-group when the larger group makes room.*[52]

Rosenberg refused to resign himself to the loss of his bohemian culture and community in spite of the fact that there was no rational reason to hope for its return. His view that history had never followed a pre-determined script always gave him good reason for unreasonable hope, but more importantly, as an intellectual attitude, to a tragic thinker resignation (adjustment, surrender...) was anathema. Rosenberg's philosophical equation of identity with

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ethic/idea made his refusal to yield deeply-held principles to new circumstances an existential imperative, since to surrender one's identifying idea is to surrender one's self. The view that Rosenberg was existentially self-identified with his intimate milieu is the axle of this dissertation. From his youth in Brooklyn his "cabal" of creative men friends had manifested, with all its imperfections, his political and personal ideal of *"a community that is nothing else than the united action of its members in their common situation.... no institutions, idols, programs, none of Blake's hated 'mental Deities' standing above the human being and acting as his master."*[53]

To Rosenberg the capitulation of the bohemian resistance - the new accord between the artist and society - was an unmitigated disaster for both artist and society: *"An art that had radically detached itself from social objectives is recaptured as a social resource. In turn, society is deprived of the self-awareness made possible by this major focus of imaginative discontent."*[54] Although it is hardly surprising that most failed to see how fame and fortune could be anything but wholly desirable for artists, Rosenberg loathed the cynicism of the so-called post-

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ideological age, and in fact saw it as delusory and politically suspect. When Clement Greenberg publicly argued against him in 1962 that artists want money and recognition just like everyone else, Rosenberg (though he elsewhere admitted that most artists do indeed want what everybody else wants) lashed out at the smug consensual materialism of the new art intellectuals: "*A rich Action Painter stoically enduring the crisis of society in his imported sports car makes a good butt for comedy but the loudest guffaws come from cynics for whom sales prices are the ultimate measure.*"[55]

*

From a point of view sympathetic to the shift from oppositional to affirmative culture, Belgian art historian Thierry de Duve has explained that by 1959, with the exhibitions of Frank Stella's paintings at MoMA and the Leo Castelli gallery, and the success of Clement Greenberg's Art and Culture in 1961, it was evident that

> *The romantic image of the artist as the Bohemian or the social rebel was no longer plausible in the face of the academization of Abstract*

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Expressionism and its commercial success.[56]

The artists following Abstract Expressionism, de Duve understood, had turned to Greenbergian formalism because

> *The extended series of abandonments, destructions or deconstructions, of pictorial conventions, which Greenberg described as building up the history of Modernist painting were no longer presented as revolts or subversions. This could only appeal to a generation of artists who needed to shake the oedipal weight of their Abstract Expressionist elders while also realizing that they had to compete with them, both professionally and for the same market.*[57]

For de Duve,

> *The refreshing and cleansing effect of Greenberg's text was to eliminate that image and to provide instead a coherent aesthetic and historical rationale for professionalism in painting.*[58]

What Rosenberg found dreadful about academic thought and values - its provision of "*coherent aesthetic and historical rationale for professionalism in painting*" - had, according to de Duve, a "*refreshing and cleansing effect*" on the new artists and critics of the 1960s.

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The "Fantastic Fabricator of Art History"

> *It so happens that I despise all formalist critics, but this may be purely accidental. I mean, there may be perfectly nice guys who are formalist critics who I haven't met, but the ones I have met are all to me disgusting individuals....I see their motives very clearly written on their foreheads, you see.*
>
> Rosenberg, 1972
> Archives of American Art interview[59]

The above statement - flagrantly immoderate and not for publication (but for the record) - is nonetheless a sober expression of Rosenberg's attitude toward the *"priesthood of historico-criticism."*[60] He wanted the whole order overthrown. Rosenberg was not against art history as such; rather, he specifically and fervently opposed the formalist historicism that became the ruling critical authority for contemporary American art and art criticism in the 1960s and '70s.

The new establishment art historian critics and curators, in varying degrees and ways, were followers of Clement Greenberg, the art critic with whom Rosenberg's name is invariably linked as the other original critic of Abstract Expressionism. The two critics - former friends -

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have been recently described by Thierry de Duve as *"feuding brothers"* engaged in a *"mimetic rivalry,"*[61] having chosen divergent paths from the same historical starting point - the traumatic international crisis of public intellectualism that began for both of them around 1937.

In the spring of 1960 Clement Greenberg's lecture "Modernist Painting" was broadcast over Voice of America and began its singular journey of fantastic appeal, misinterpretation and misuse.[62] According to Greenberg's editor, John O'Brian, *"At the time, Greenberg's formulations were read as something close to an ultimatum."*[63]

> *Even artists who firmly rejected the logic of his reduction still took "Modernist Painting" to be a paradigmatic statement. The same was true of a generation of critics, including Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss.*[64]

After a bloody shootout with Greenberg in the early sixties, Rosenberg reserved his ammunition for those who translated Greenberg's formalism into doctrine - those he saw as Greenberg's epigones rather than Greenberg himself. As Rosenberg explained to James Fitzsimmons in 1967,

> *I have no objection to Greenberg developing a fantasy of art history that consists of Pollock to Frankenthaler to Noland-Louis-Olitsky. When this fantasy is repeated on every occasion by the*

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> *claque to which I referred it becomes not only an insolent falsification but a species of force directed against thought as well as against artists.*[65]

Rosenberg regarded Greenberg as *"a fantastic fabricator of art history to a... you might almost say, to a degree of mad genius:*

> *I mean if you can convince presumably educated people that your insanity is a direct reflection of reality you are some kind of a genius....If you then couple this conviction with the ability to promote your beliefs among the collectors, and other people so you can sell these artists and turn them into the outstanding figures of the decade with practically no resistance, I think it is something fantastic. Nevertheless,...I have the right not to be a member of this chorus.*[66] (1975)

It was "*this chorus,*" this *"claque"* (this "herd," in other words) that triumphed in the art world of Rosenberg's decades as an art critic. His argument with Greenberg's followers is a well-known but little examined legend[67] surrounded in the historical silence that has also made of Rosenberg a kind of famous unknown. As J. Hoberman observed in 1986, eight years after Rosenberg's death: *"Like a venerable statue in a busy square, Harold Rosenberg occupies a curious spot - at once memorialized and ignored."*[68]

Greenbergian formalist criticism[69] became simply

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normative "art criticism" in the college classrooms that were producing the majority of the new artists, critics and curators by the nineteen sixties. In a 1987 article for Artforum entitled "The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg," Kay Larson traces Greenberg's "dictatorship" from 1961 and the publication of Art and Culture to its ending in the late nineteen seventies. In these years, according to Larson, Greenbergian doctrine "*assumed the authority of a priori propositions outside which no thought seemed possible.*"[70] It became the theoretical status quo in a way unsurpassed in the history of art history and criticism. A helpful comparison, however, can be made between the success of formalism in art and the influence exerted by the New Criticism on American literature and literary studies at roughly the same time.[71]

The New Criticism, a formalist approach to literature, shares much conceptual and methodological common ground with Greenbergian formalism. By the late 1950s the New Criticism had also become "normal criticism" (simply "criticism") in American university literature departments.[72] The theoretical ties between Clement Greenberg and the New Critics have been noted by Ann Gibson in her study of the

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artist-run magazines associated with Abstract Expressionism:

> *Notwithstanding his debt to predecessors such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell, Greenberg's stance also echoed ideas inspired by poets like T.S. Eliot and may be identified with New Critical writers such as Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate. The touchstone of the New Criticism was T.S. Eliot's notion that the structure of the poem itself, rather than connections between the poem and life, should be the critic's main concern.*[73]

Commenting in 1964 specifically on the relationship between the New Criticism in literature and the developments in art criticism since the war, Rosenberg said that

> *In literature the 'new criticism' conceived an approach to reading novels, poetry and plays that became steadily more engrossed in its own techniques and its own terminology. This critical methodology conquered the university English departments. I see the evolution of a similar approach to painting taking place in the universities.*[74]

The historical alignment between Greenbergian Formalism and the New Criticism is a helpful one because it suggests that the astonishing success of both formalist methods in the recent history of the American university had causal links to deeper underlying socioeconomic changes in postwar university culture.

The observations of intellectual historian Karl

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Schorske offer some insight into the nature of these changes. Schorske devoted much of the introduction to his Fin de Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture (1961) to describing his own struggles to write an "interdisciplinary" history of *fin de siècle* Vienna within the fundamentally altered university milieu of the late 1950s:

> *In the fields of greatest importance to my concern - literature, politics, art history, philosophy ... the several academic disciplines redefined their intellectual functions in ways that weakened their social relatedness. Thus, for example, the New Critics in literature, as they came to power in the academy, replaced the practitioners of literary historicism who had prevailed in English departments before World War II with scholars committed to an a-temporal, internalistic, formal analysis. In political science, as the New Deal receded, the normative concerns of traditional political philosophy and the pragmatic preoccupation with questions of public policy began to give way to the a-historical and politically neutralizing reign of the behaviorists...*[75]

Schorske saw the same phenomena of professionalization - academic formalism and hermetic specialization, and "*scholars committed to an a-temporal, internalistic, formal analysis*" - everywhere he looked, "*in one professional field after another.*"[76]

Rosenberg also saw that the developments in art and art

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criticism were not unique, but part of a general professionalization of intellectual life. *"Specialization,"* he wrote in an article begun in 1965, *"has overtaken all learned pursuits in our society; if art and art criticism have become ingrown, so have literature, music, philosophy, sociology, history. Thus each feels justified in attacking the others for being excessively engrossed in their own techniques."*[77]

The situation described by Schorske, Rosenberg, and other observers can be largely comprehended as a consequence of transformative changes in the American university system that came with the GI Bill and the postwar economic boom.[78] Joseph Goulden's history of the immediate postwar years, The Best Years, 1945-1950, emphasizes *"the profound implication"* of the GI Bill which sent 2,300,000 American war veterans to colleges and universities between 1945-1950.[79]

From 1946 to 1957 enrollment in institutions of higher education rose enormously from 1,677,000 to 3,138,000 students, and the number of university faculty members went from about 136,000 to 344,000.[80] In 1946 12.5 percent of the population aged eighteen to twenty-four was in college; in 1970 it was 32 percent. On the advanced education of

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studio artists, there are the impressive statistics of sociologist Diana Crane from The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985: In 1950 the number of Master of Fine Arts degrees awarded by American universities and art schools was 525; by 1980 it was 8,708.[81]

According to historian of American literary criticism, Vincent Leitch, the rapid massification of higher education is the primary reason for the success of the New Criticism. It was a very effective approach to textual studies that did not, however, require too many years of education before one could earn a doctorate and a university position. As Leitch explains,

> *Not incidentally, the simplified classroom procedures of the New Criticism were well suited to these conditions, unlike the more complicated pedagogies of sociological and historical criticism, which generally required considerable amounts of background education.*[82]

Similarly in 1972 Leo Steinberg observed that American formalist art criticism *"owes its strength and enormous influence to the professionalism of its approach,"*[83] and to *"a working criterion, easily memorized and applied."*[84] From a socioeconomic point of view, then, the dominance of

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formalist methodologies in American university classrooms went along with the rapid growth and bureaucratization of institutes of higher learning; it was causally related to the successful democratization of advanced education in America.

*

Greenbergian Formalism, Greenberg's method in its academic form, achieved such wide acceptance that it came to be called "Modernist" in the United States and England and surprisingly subsumed all other modernisms, including the traditional avant-garde modernism that Rosenberg championed in its late American phase. Kay Larson's 1987 view of what happened under "The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg" was that *"over several decades historical Modernism became conflated with Greenberg's definition of it."*[85] So that in 1982, for example, Francis Frascina could explain in Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology that

> *Strictly it may be claimed that Modernism can be identified as that form of art criticism, theory and history which received its most exemplary expression in Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting' of 1961.*[86]

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"Modernist" and even "Modernism" continue to mean Greenbergian formalism to many important critics and historians of American postwar art history and criticism; yet that is a definition of Modernism unfamiliar to other discourses, and has caused much confusion. Thierry de Duve has noted (1990) that *"readers of Greenberg have often confused 'Formalism' with 'Modernism,'"* a problem for which he says *"Greenberg is partly responsible... because he never explicitly distinguishes the two terms."*[87]

For the sake of clarity, a number of historians of modern art have felt compelled to alleviate this confusion by repeatedly making the distinction for their readers. Donald Kuspit, art critic, historian of modern art criticism and theory, and the author of Clement Greenberg: Art Critic (1979), in an article entitled "The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism," defined "Modernism" as *"that point of view which sees art as the mastery of purity"*[88]: a formalist definition. Kuspit's 1983 essay, "Authoritarian Aesthetics and the Elusive Alternative," a critique of "modernism" as authoritarian, similarly equated "modernism" with "Formalism." Thus the following conclusions:

> *...the sophistication of modernism only seemed to*

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> *empty abstraction of all meaning for those who thought there had to be something 'behind' its surface.*[89] [my emphasis]

To Kuspit, then, it was "modernism" (as "formalism") that failed to comprehend the larger purposes of "modern art"; it was "modernism" that was authoritarian; and "modernism" that had caused *"a crisis in critical method"*[90] in the 1960s and '70s. "Modernism" could not account for a "Modern art" that was

> *... an escape from and criticism of absolute systems....Modern art is not simply critical of the means of art, but of the world in which it locates - of the very meaning of location in the world.*[91]

The Anglo-American academic entrenchment of Greenbergian "modernism" remains in place, if only as a source of confusion. In addressing the question of "What is Modern?" in the introductory chapter of the Open University's 1993 four-volume survey, Modern Art: Practices and Debates, Briony Fer felt it necessary to make the following unavoidably knotted distinction:

> *...Clement Greenberg, who was at the height of his influence in the early 1960s...was only one voice among many...in what has been called a "Modernist" approach to art. Although the terms 'modernist' and 'modernism' are used to refer to the kind of modern practice I have already*

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> *outlined, we shall use 'Modernism' with a capital 'M' to refer to this particular tradition in criticism.*[92]

Speculating on the question of Clement Greenberg's prestige among art historians and critics at the time when his theory held sway, independent art critic Max Kozloff offered the following tale:

> *There is one critic who succeeds in having a lot of followers. In fact in building a school! And a younger generation follows in his footsteps.... They build upon his principles. The other critic seems to have spawned no progeny whatsoever. Here and there someone remembers him, and perhaps writes about him a little bit, but there's no principle of continuity... capable of being synthesized, and above all reduced to, not to mince words, a line.*[93]

There is an analogue for Kozloff's hypothesis that Greenberg's modernism took hold because its principles were *"capable of being synthesized and...reduced to...a line,"* and conversely that Rosenberg's modernism did not take hold because its principles could not be so easily synthesized. The analogue is found in an explanation offered by Vincent Leitch for the similar fate of the New York Intellectuals in the history of American literary criticism. Again the comparison is with the New Critics. *"Ironically,"* Leitch observes,

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> ***The broad scope of the enterprise of cultural criticism meant that the project of the New York Intellectuals successfully resisted the effective codification essential for institutionalization. It was left, therefore, to the New Critics to triumph, however dubiously, in the universities and thereby to assure their long-term influence and survival. The alienation and bohemianism of the New York School - the source of its strength - ultimately became the weakness that kept it from spreading its ideas beyond a narrow circle. Successfully resisting institutionalization, the New York Intellectuals offered themselves to younger generations as a disparate fringe group of cranks and antiquated radicals.***[94]

In other words, eschewal of extra-textual perspectives made the New Critics' theory and methodology easier to codify for institutionalization. And conversely, *"the broad scope"* and the *"alienation and bohemianism"* of the New York Intellectuals' approach to literature was resistant to codification and therefore to institutionalization.

Clement Greenberg's well-known shift from the marxist approach of the New York Intellectuals to formalism after the Second World War historicizes and highlights the political opposition between the two critical methods. According to John O'Brian, editor of Greenberg's four-volume Collected Essays and Criticism, the depoliticized formalism of Art and Culture (1961) reflects Greenberg's complete rejection of the radical criticism he had practiced in the

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thirties for a happy-enough surrender to the burgeoning middle-class American culture and its "managerial" or "cultural elite"[95] by the fifties:

> *The transfiguration in Greenberg's thinking was an about-face. In the space of a couple of years, pessimism about the culture of modernity had given way to optimism....Greenberg was enthusiastic about the new managerial elite who had risen to power in the United States.*[96]

The political stance vis à vis *"the new managerial elite who had risen to power in the United States"* was at the very center of the dispute between Rosenberg and Greenberg, and between Rosenberg and the Greenbergian critics and curators of the sixties and seventies. Formalism was in Rosenberg's mind inextricably linked to a depoliticized, bureaucratic, and therefore affirmative cultural politics.[97]

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"Harold was irrelevant": The Blind Art Critic

> *Value or quality or level is explicitly, nakedly, and excruciatingly central.*
> *Michael Fried (1966)*[98]

> *People who have nothing to say will say that they respond to quality. It's totally insignificant.*[99]
> *Rosenberg (1975)*

In Clement Greenberg's opinion *"Harold was irrelevant."*[100] By Greenberg's criteria, Rosenberg's critical perspective could not be justified as art criticism at all. New York Times art writer John Russell could assert a year after Rosenberg's death in 1978 that Rosenberg had been *"a master tactician, a stern moralist, a veteran surveyor of the scene and a cultural diagnostician of a high order but he was not a critic. He was not, that is to say, a man who could focus on a single canvas."*[101] Rosenberg's flaw, concluded Russell, was that he had always refused to *"declare what [the art works] look like to him, and to hazard an opinion as to their rank among the strictly visual experiences that are open to us."*[102] So normal and secure was this view that by 1966 Michael Fried could confess to feeling a kind of *"desperateness"* when paintings were

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admired for "*irrelevant*" reasons by critics who didn't see the painting as a painting.[103]

It seemed as if Rosenberg had arrived from another intellectual world to cause resentment and confusion, and indeed this was true for those he considered establishment critics. The fact that Rosenberg had been part of the international public intellectual community since the thirties made him unique in this art world, and it was only from this "outsider" perspective that Rosenberg could see that *"art criticism today is looked down upon by other forms of critical thinking as unintelligible jargon immersed in insignificant aestheticism."*[104] For him *"the value of values for art criticism must be the effort to reintroduce art into the framework of humanly serious concerns."*[105]

There was little recognition of what he was trying to do and why. What stands out in his reception history are several vivid and consistent patterns of complaint. The overall configuration makes it apparent that Rosenberg and the new art critics and curators were working with contradictory sets of principles, and that Rosenberg's art criticism was constantly mismeasured against his opponents' criteria. By far the most prevalent complaint, and one

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which has come from artists as well as art critics and reviewers, friends as well as enemies, has been that Rosenberg's art criticism was "blind." According to the painter Paul Brach, for instance, Leo Steinberg agreed with him that Rosenberg was a "blind critic" who had no interest in quality.[106] According to the prevailing model, beyond a specialized knowledge of modern art history, the activities of an art critic were assumed to require a superior "eye," and good "taste," so that a work's "quality" could be evaluated. Measured by these conventions, his critics were right and Rosenberg's writings on art failed as art criticism.

But Rosenberg's criticism emerged from a different axiological position, a set of values for criticism that actually precludes the qualitative appraisal of art objects. In fact, it is not too much to say no aspect of art and the art world other than the artist was important and attractive to Rosenberg in itself. He looked at art objects and the art world more or less as a weatherman watches his instruments, to gauge changes in the creative environment within which the artist works. As he made clear, to him *"the major function of a critic...is to improve the*

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intellectual environment in which the creation of art takes place."[107]

It seems there are countless anecdotes about Rosenberg's notorious blindness. Dore Ashton remembers with amusement, for example, hosting a reception at her apartment after an opening of an exhibition of her husband Adja Junkers's work. Arriving late at the reception, Rosenberg apologized to Junkers for not having had time to see the exhibition. *"That's okay, Harold,"* Ashton remembers Junkers responding, *"you wouldn't have seen it anyway."*[108]

Rosenberg's failure to "see" and to evaluate mildly scandalized many friends in his own community, who handled it as a kind of inside joke. To give another example, the painter Harold Baumbach, a friend of Rosenberg's from youth, was visiting Adolph Gottlieb when Rosenberg telephoned to ask what Gottlieb wanted written about his 1968 retrospective at the Whitney. According to Baumbach, Rosenberg got all the information he needed over the telephone without seeing the exhibition. This was laughable and a little shocking to Baumbach, and he told the story as if he were telling a tale out of school. Rosenberg knew Gottlieb and his work well, but still, Baumbach thought, the

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art critic had fooled his New Yorker readers who would naturally assume he had seen the Gottlieb exhibition before he wrote his article.[109]

Rosenberg's approach, however, does have at least one prestigious precedent in art criticism, one that carried much weight with him. More than once Rosenberg noted that Baudelaire "*spoke slightingly of the careful examination of canvases, and even claimed to have written about the Salon of 1859 without having seen it.*"[110] Rosenberg quoted Baudelaire to define his own objective, which was "*to seek to penetrate deep into the temperament and activating motives of each artist, rather than to attempt to analyze each work minutely.*"[111] Certainly no art critical practice counted more for Rosenberg than Baudelaire's. But to Baumbach and to most of the New York art world at that time it was just ludicrous for an art critic not to examine works of art.

But Rosenberg thought such an approach to art depended on false critical criteria of "taste":

> *Who the hell cares about taste!? I mean this is something that you should have if you're going to decorate an apartment.*[112]

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"Taste" was to him unequivocally an anti-critical value, one of a whole set of inert standards belonging to an established elite for whom art meant prestige objects and investments.[113] He thought taste and the other formalist criteria of his time had become firmly institutionalized as *"bureaucratic assents," "the outstanding menace to critical consciousness."*[114] Furthermore these "*bureaucratically supported articles of faith*" had replaced true criticism.[115] By Rosenberg's standards, an application of pre-established criteria to new art does not even qualify as criticism, since for Rosenberg *"a credo is the opposite of a critical consciousness."*[116] And as to Greenbergian Formalism, its aesthetic historicism made it a "*club of dogma*" to coerce the artist to conform: *"An aesthetician founded on art history wields a club of dogma similar to moralistic criticism in the nineteenth century or political criticism in the Soviet Union."*[117]

His contempt for "taste" as a critical measure of new art in the making accounts for many of his attacks on establishment art critics and historians in the sixties and seventies. For example, irritated that William Rubin (in Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage, 1968) dismissed André

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Breton as an art critic because of his focus on the artist rather than the art objects, Rosenberg called Rubin "*the typical student of the last twenty years in our university.*"[118]

> *He's a connoisseur of certain styles of objects. He's brought back in that horrible word "taste" which had been driven out of the art world. Up to fifteen years ago no one would have dared talk about taste.*[119] (1972)

In fact, all consensual aesthetic criteria were to Rosenberg politically suspect, distrusted as a knowing (cynical) or unknowing (ignorant or deliberate) affirmation of the powers that be. Commenting in 1977 on the exhibition, "Two Centuries of Black American Art," Rosenberg said an issue of major concern had been raised. He was sympathetic to the artists' argument that throughout the history of American art the presumed "universal" aesthetic standards had discriminated against women and minority artists. "*Apparently,*" Rosenberg proposed for the consideration of his New Yorker readers, "*aesthetics can function as a tool of racism...*

> *In any event, the so-called principles of art are a means of affirming the status quo within the loose coherence of taste by which the art world today accepts all anomalies. Whatever its*

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> *aesthetic unevenness, "Two Centuries of Black American Art" is an important exhibition - one central to major issues in art today.*[120]

One might think it would have gone without saying that Rosenberg could not on principle function as a connoisseur. Something is revealed about his times in the fact that judgments of quality were so persistently expected of him. As late as 1991 Clement Greenberg admitted that he had *"never understood what Harold was after."*[121] Looking back, Greenberg thought that Rosenberg did have a good enough "eye," but that he had failed as an art critic because he was afraid to use it. Greenberg could only think that Rosenberg did not perform the conventional task of art criticism because of fear.

> *Sometimes he had a good eye, but he was afraid. When he was asked to jury out in Winnepeg...and he won't know who the artists are, he'll have to be left alone with his eye. Well, he found some reason for not being able to go to Winnepeg.*[122]

Three decades earlier Greenberg had been much more severe in his objections to Rosenberg's blind art criticism. In December of 1962 he published an attack on Rosenberg and his English supporters, like Herbert Read, in an article entitled "How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name" in Encounter,

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a London-based cultural and political journal. Greenberg was indignant that Rosenberg's idea of Action painting had become *"current over night in England as the authorized brand name and certified label of the new abstract painting from America."*[123] The idea of Action painting was called *"amphigoric," "opaquely profound," "freakish,"* and "malicious" among other epithets; significantly, one of them was *"avant-garde,"* which clearly had become for Greenberg a bad thing to be.

The appeal of Rosenberg's concept of Action painting, Greenberg thought, *"is explained only by the supposition that the blind actually prefer being led by the blind."*[124] If the criteria are not aesthetic, not visual, why should the paintings be *"exhibited," "looked at," "and even acquired by others?"* and *"why should one ...be valued more than any other?"* How, in fact, *"could they be differentiated qualitatively?"*[125] Greenberg's conclusion was that minds like those of Rosenberg and Herbert Read had been lead astray.[126] Their distorted view of art arose from a *"lack of elementary grounding in aesthetics."*[127]

Rosenberg's response to "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name" appeared in Art News that same month, December 1962.

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The polemic, "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion," was republished under another title in Encounter five months later.[128] In it Rosenberg asserted that Action painting was the legitimate heir of the century-old avant-garde tradition because of the painters' attitudes, and not, as Greenberg claimed, because of the visual appearance of the paintings. In the footnote quoted below, later eliminated from the version printed in The Anxious Object, he ridiculed what he thought was Greenberg's anti-vanguardist privileging of the "eye." Rosenberg looks petty here arguing on Greenberg's ground, but the awkwardness might highlight the point of difference between the two critics. Rosenberg:

> *In the face of those who think about art, Mr. Greenberg habitually bellows the ancient aesthete's slogan of an "eye." Apparently however, he is reluctant to use his own - he once found purple in a Mondrian.* [Rosenberg's emphasis][129]

*

In the end Greenberg was right; Rosenberg did need to know who artists were before he evaluated their work, but surely not because he feared *"being left alone with his eye"* as Greenberg suspected. Unquestionably it was because

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judgments of quality were inimical to his project, which centered on the artist:

> *To evaluate a modern painting one needs to carry it back to its creator. Taken by itself no single work can be adequately appraised. The connoisseurship which the public expects in its critics cannot be achieved in respect to contemporary work unless the artist is present in a continuum of ideas and practice.*[130]

The above was a published remark, but for an interview about a decade later, Rosenberg was more candid about *"people who believe that they can detect quality":*

> *That's the biggest nonsense in the world! That word is a totally empty word. It can be filled with anything that you want to put into it. People who have nothing to say will say that they respond to quality. It's totally insignificant.*[131]

But from another perspective, qualitative evaluation of the art object was incomparably worse than insignificant to Rosenberg. By so reducing the intellectual discourse around the artist and *"placing the emphasis on the object and its qualities, to the exclusion of the personality of the artist, his unique consciousness, his dilemmas,"* the object was emptied of what makes it a work of art at all. Since for Rosenberg what distinguishes art from craft is *"the intellectual-emotional motive,"* by ignoring it the critic

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has transformed art into craft. In short, qualitative art criticism *"defines art as craft."*[132]

Convinced that art rises to the level of the intellectual discourse around it (as much as the reverse is true), Rosenberg was concerned that,

> *...the present emphasis in art criticism on the end product, rather than on the problematical nature of the art undertaking, opens the way to art produced under direction, as in related professions.*[133]

Adamantly opposed first of all to the professionalization of art, Rosenberg deeply objected to Greenberg's theory, and even more to Greenberg*ism*, because of its effect on the artists' intellectual environment. At best he thought Greenbergian formalism trivial, consisting *"largely of opportunistic sponsorship of trivial novelties and of assertions of personal taste for which support is sought in pedantic references to art history."*[134] Trivial thinking about art makes for trivial artists and trivial art because all are inextricably engaged in a mutually transforming dialogue.[135]

Furthermore,"*Art-as-art favors the 'expert' who purveys to the bewildered."* The "expert" was the enemy of avant-garde modernism, one who would sell its soul, if he believed

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in it, for a mediocre idea of success. Greenbergism was to Rosenberg anti-modernist because it normalized the dissenting cultural tradition of the previous century, thus facilitating its easy commodification, both intellectual and commercial. Qualitative evaluation, by *"deleting from art the artist's situation, his conclusions about it"* and *"'normalizing' vanguard art"* made it so that the art establishment - *"dealers, collectors, educators, directors of government cultural programmes, art historians, museum officials, critics, artists"* - could prosper.[136]

Rosenberg called this institutional formatting of the art work "packaging": a variation on Marx's concept of commodification applied to late 1960s American culture and society. The packaging of art as a commodity for a consumer society was the central concern of his collection, Artworks and Packages, published in 1969. The following statement from the first essay in Artworks and Packages, "Art and Its Double," unites popular media and art institutions on this basis. It can serve as the book's thesis statement:

> *But whether art is made as a package or as an antithesis to the package, it takes on the character of the package in its mode of transmission to the public, that is, through the communication system of the press, including the*

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> *art press, the museums, galleries and other distribution and educational mechanisms.*[137]

Rosenberg's persistent assault on the Greenbergian critic's cultural "packaging" - the *"emphasis in art criticism on the end product, rather than on the problematical nature of the art undertaking*[138] - drew from Marx's famous discussion of "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof" in the first part of Capital.[139] Commodity fetishism and reification - key to the critique of bourgeois culture by Western Marxists since Georg Lukàcs' History and Class Consciousness (1922)[140] - are familiar ideas to American academic art critics in the 1990s, if they were not in Rosenberg's era. The fetish character of commodities is, for example, the center of Walter Benjamin's currently influential Arcades project (incomplete at his death in 1940).[141] In 1990, using terms much like Rosenberg's of 1968, Fredric Jameson explained,

> *The other definition of reification that has been important in recent years is the "effacement of the traces of production" from the object itself, from the commodity thereby produced.... reification in this consumer-packaging sense is very functional indeed; consumerism as a culture involves much more than this, but this kind of "effacement" is surely the indispensable precondition on which all the rest can be*

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constructed.[142]

The *"all the rest"* to which Jameson refers is the symptomatic "relief" of not knowing about the personal labor - physical, moral, spiritual, existential, psychological - of the artist-producer of culture for the consumer society.[143] In other words, the "all the rest" effaced by commodification was everything Rosenberg cared most fervently about.

"A Model of Excellence...the Commentaries of Dr. Meyer Schapiro"

> *I said to him, 'Meyer, how is it that all these formalist creeps have sort of come out from under your cloak?'*
>
> Rosenberg, 1972[144]

Though Rosenberg loathed the formalist historicism of the Greenbergian critics and curators, he joked that he admired art history whenever he found any of it,[145] and he expressed a need to know more about it himself.[146] Though the critic's art history was "*not necessarily the art*

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history of the art historian," Rosenberg never doubted that *"the painter's act could not have taken place without preceding acts of creation by himself and others....It is a truism that all art derives from art."*[147]

He held up to the younger art historian critics *"A model of excellence...the commentaries of Dr. Meyer Schapiro."* Rosenberg's admiration for Schapiro presents in positive terms what he expected from art historians in general and the good role they could play in contemporary art production; it illuminates from the other side his antagonism for the new critics.

Rosenberg praised and put forward his ideal art historian in a 1962 New York Times review of Schapiro's books on Van Gogh and Cézanne for the Abrams folio series, The Library of Great Painters:

> *Schapiro draws on his incomparable knowledge of art and social history, art theory, the artist's background and psychology, the facts surrounding the motif of the painting to frame the work in a universe of associations of which it is the visionary focus. Despite its range, Schapiro's discourse never detaches itself from the painting as a work of art...*[148]

Schapiro was not writing about living artists in the books under review, but he put the precursor artist, in this

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case Cézanne and Van Gogh, at the center of his production in a way that Rosenberg believed was necessary and inspiring for living artists. Schapiro's essays on contemporary American abstract painting were in fruitful dialogue with the thinking of the artists themselves since they, like Rosenberg's criticism, had in large part emerged from conversations with them. In this way Schapiro enriched the intellectual environment surrounding the artist.

According to Hedda Sterne, *"Harold revered Meyer Schapiro."*[149] Though Schapiro was a Columbia University professor of art history, all his credentials were right: He had earned his doctorate by 1929, long before the postwar changes in university culture. His close associations with the downtown Manhattan artists' milieu went back to before the First American Artists Congress in 1936.[150] Like Rosenberg and Greenberg, Schapiro was a New York Intellectual with an East European Jewish immigrant background and ties to the radical politics of the anti-Stalinist left in the thirties. Furthermore, Schapiro transformed but never renounced his political and cultural radicalism after the thirties.[151]

Considering the intimate fraternal nature of

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Rosenberg's creative milieu, I think it crucial that Schapiro was *"just as naturally a talker as any of his contemporaries."*[152] Mary McCarthy called Schapiro *"a mouth looking for an ear."*[153] He was a brilliant - and, it seems, ceaseless - lecturer in art history. *"The flow of his eloquence was not confined to the classroom,"* said William Barrett; it was *"encountered almost anywhere, on a street corner or a subway train, his discourse would pour effortlessly forth...."*[154] *"A passion to know and make known. A passion of a river to flow...,"* concluded Mark van Doren.[155]

Since Rosenberg was himself notorious among the artists for his brilliant and ceaseless talk, Hedda Sterne thought it extraordinary that *"Harold would listen like a child"* to Schapiro's famous *ad hoc* disquisitions that would continue for hours.[156] As I propose elsewhere, Rosenberg was convinced that discourse among affectionate companions, especially at Schapiro's level, was the sine qua non of creative community and the Socratic "begetting of spiritual children." It mattered that Schapiro was deeply admired by Rosenberg's inner circle of artist friends, and that he strongly supported their art. Like Rosenberg, according to

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Saul Bellow, Schapiro *"preferred the company of bohemians and preferred to live among them"; unlike* Rosenberg *"Meyer was not himself a bohemian."*[157]

Schapiro had little sympathy for the formalist "historico-criticism" of the young Ph.D. art historian critics so despised by Rosenberg. Schapiro's 1937 essay for The Marxist Quarterly, "Nature of Abstract Art,"[158] is a basic work of social art history that specifically argued against the formalist view of an autonomous modern art history put forward by Alfred Barr in his Cubism and Abstract Art (1936). Rather than narrowing the possibilities for artists, Schapiro's perspectives expanded them, which is exactly why Rosenberg could present Schapiro as a model of excellence in the 1962 review of Schapiro's monographs.

In 1972 Rosenberg told Paul Cummings that he had recently asked Schapiro about the formalist art historians who had been Schapiro's students at Columbia:

> *I said to him, 'Meyer, how is it that all these formalist creeps have sort of come out from under your cloak?' Well, he, of course, repudiated them completely. You see, he is such a wonderful critic - or at least, historian - that he never neglects the element of form, but he practices what we all want to practice, except the formalists, which is*

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the identity of form and content.[159]

The Politics of Style

> *"Conformism," significant word, manifests itself in the first instance in the use of language. The writer must choose in every sentence between the automatism of his craft and the real content of his mind.*
>
> *Rosenberg*
> *"Form and Art's Revolt Against Illusion"*[160]

> *No more vexed - and mystifying - notion appears in the theory of historical writing than that of the historian's "style." It is a problem because insofar as the historian's discourse is conceived to have style, it is also conceived to be literary. But insofar as a historian's discourse is literary, it seems to be rhetorical, which is anathema for those who wish to claim the status of objective representation for historical discourse.*
>
> Hayden White (1983)[161]

> *Our art-historical esthetes are the deadly enemies of every living artist.*
>
> *Rosenberg* (1974)[162]

The profound significance of style for Rosenberg needs to be elucidated before the quarrel between him and his academic critics can be understood. Rosenberg's essay style

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seems to have been nearly as provocative as what he had to say. For Yves Alain Bois it was "bathetic"; Sidney Tillem thought it "apocalyptic"; Charles Harrison went as far as to call it "rabid."[163] Others have objected more mildly that the style was too epigrammatic, too poetic, obfuscatory, inconclusive.[164] Rosenberg's essay style was indeed epigrammatic, poetic, obfuscatory and inconclusive. But the question of why Rosenberg wrote the way he did has not been asked. It needs to be asked, because the dialectical relationship between form and content in a Rosenberg essay is thoroughly intentional. His meaning inhabited his form. As Lionel Abel observed, he was a *"formalist of radicalism."*[165] To Rosenberg, the essay was a work of literature; as such, its power was in the writing - *"not a power over events but over the forms that give shape to the events in the mind."* Those who knew and read Rosenberg best have recognized this. Saul Bellow's memorial essay, for example, focused entirely on style:

> *I understood that he came regularly to the University of Chicago not in order to be among eminent persons but to preach the gospel of style.*[166]

According to Bellow, *"by his emphasis on the importance of*

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style Rosenberg makes one of his most valuable contributions to criticism."[167]

My thesis is that the purpose - the modernist *"animating spirit,"* as Irving Howe would have it[168] - behind Rosenberg's essay style was not generally understood by the art world in the sixties and seventies. For many in the era of Robbe-Grillet and Frank Stella, the modernist "myth of depth" had been successfully purged. Rosenberg's art world reception history is replete with often hostile objections to what was seen as his hyperbolic lack of proportion about art. Especially for those he disparaged as *"art-historical aesthetes,"* art could not support the weight of meaning and morality he expected of it. Paul Brach, a painter and art writer associated with the Tenth Street School,[169] was one of many who found Rosenberg's attitude ridiculously wanting in a sense of scale. "At The Club," Brach remembered with amusement, *"I questioned Harold's saying that painting was a moral issue. I said that the Holocaust was a moral issue not drips of paint."*[170]

Hilton Kramer explained that "*it was common that Rosenberg was not understood*" because what he was trying to

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do was to make art become life: *"a bogus idea,"* according to Kramer; it was, Kramer thought, only *"natural that it was rejected"* by the art world.[171]

In 1969 Lawrence Alloway strongly objected to Rosenberg's applying to contemporary art the *"Marxist historical overview"* and *"the omnipotence of the literary critic"* (the *"vast, unargued schemes of history, the human condition, society, technology, and of course mass communications..."*). Why, wondered Alloway, can't Rosenberg simply write *"straight art criticism with analytical intentions or with small-scale targets?"*[172] In response to Alloway, Richard Howard, poet, translator, and critic, argued that the fact that *"[Rosenberg's] criticism restores the connection between art and social life [is not] a disqualification....he has been patronized by the protest that he is writing about more than art."*[173]

According to Rosenberg's modernist criteria, the issues of art were indeed the issues of life. To him the polarization of art and life was false and dangerous. It should be noted first of all that "life" to Rosenberg had nothing to do with "nature" in the conventional sense. "Life" meant the social formations produced by man in the

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image of his mind; life was Valéry's *"spectacle of the world of man"*[174] - the whole set of practices and constructions originating in the imagination. Although potentially the best of these acts of mind, new art nevertheless had the same vital source and was made of the same materials as everything that was being made and transformed: politics, institutions, science, technology, fashion, the media, the city....

In January 1966 Rosenberg wrote to Robert Coates about how he saw his job as the "Art World" columnist for The New Yorker. *"Reviewing is not my dish,"* he told Coates. *"But I'm up to my ears in 'the cultural situation' and in acts of creation. That's what I intend to give the reader. Maybe he can become a 'do-it-yourself' reviewer."*[175]

Because the same deeply-felt ethical-social purpose filled all of Rosenberg's work, the essays on art evinced the same polemical structure and high rhetorical style as his writings on literature, politics, and society. Rosenberg was engaged in an ideological battle for the independent creative mind in all arenas. Had they known of this motivational and stylistic equivalence (and it appears they did not[176]), his art world critics would not have been

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appeased. In attacking the enemies of the independent artist, he was performing what he took to be the social task of the intellectual; he was combating in his own community the conformist intellectuals he thought were the enemies of society - or more precisely, the enemies of a good society, a society worth calling human:

> *A society that lacks the presence of self-developing individuals - but in which passive people are acted upon by their environment - hardly deserves to be called a* human *society. It is the greatness of art that it does not permit us to forget this.*[177]

"The politics of illusion," Rosenberg wrote in the preface to Act and the Actor, his major philosophical statement, *"[is] dominant throughout the world."* And to demonstrate how this fact conceptually linked art and politics in his criticism, he quoted earlier remarks he had made on the Johnson administration for the Partisan Review symposium, "What's Happening to America":

> *The United States today is governed by professional illusionists. Not only are officials elected through campaigns of image-building based on fiction and caricature, but once in office their actions are decided not by anticipating consequences to the nation and/or humanity but by the kind of image those actions will enable them to present to the public.*[178](1967)

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Rosenberg's last sentence in the "Preface" to Act and the Actor was, characteristically, not a conclusion but a proposal. If all *"is governed by professional illusionists,"* he suggested,

> *Perhaps the best that modern society can hope for is an improvement in style.*[179]

In his memorial essay on Rosenberg and style, Saul Bellow quoted Rosenberg: *"I have a letter he wrote to me in August 1975. He says, 'We charge into the problem of democracy head on. And what is the problem? Not of the people but of the cultural leaders of the people....The lack of sensitivity to style is simply appalling."*[180]

There are as many examples of how Rosenberg's criticism coheres around the concept of style and illusion (synonymous terms among many in a magnetic field) as there are writings. Because of the single critical perspective, intention, and methodology, signaled by his style and his use of aesthetic categories for political criticism and political categories for art criticism, Rosenberg's essays on art and politics gain meaning when read as a conceptual whole. An essay on Watergate, for example, published in The New York Review of Books, makes sense of what might otherwise seem the

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gratuitous hostility of the charge quoted as one of the epigraphs to this chapter: *"Our historical aesthetes are the deadly enemies of every living artist."*

Both commentaries - the one on "politics" and the one on "art" - appeared in October 1974, and typically, for both friendship was a prime incentive. Rosenberg's contentions about art historian aesthetes emerged out of a public dialogue at the Studio School with Philip Guston, whose anti-aesthetic new painting style - a turn away from a singularly delicate Abstract Expressionism to a brutal politicized figuration - Rosenberg had praised in The New Yorker in November 1970 as a "Liberation From Detachment" that "*risked a fully developed career on the possibility of engaging art in the political reality.*"[181] His positive opinion defended Guston against the consensual rejection by the art world. Guston's grateful letter to Rosenberg can serve as evidence of the bond of communication between art critic and artist that was axiomatic for Rosenberg:

> *Dear Harold,... How - how shall I tell you what I want to say - I am totally bowled over - I find total recognition everywhere in the piece - It is so wonderful that I've read and reread it for two days now and I am in a glow of renewed courage and encouragement .... It is really uncanny in its precision & penetration of the issues in art*

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today.... Love, ever Philip.(Guston's emphasis)[182]

Rosenberg's remarks on the Watergate scandal were for a review of The Mask of State: Watergate Portraits by Mary McCarthy, another close friend. A comparison of these two texts makes clear that Rosenberg's critical approach was the same for both. The New York Review of Books essay on Watergate mounted the same charges of formalism against the Nixon administrations's "politics of illusion," and the journalists who were taken in by it, that were made against the establishment intellectuals of the art world. Rosenberg found the "formalism" of the new critics in every way as symptomatic of the era's penchant for shallow appearances and poseurs as failure of the press prior the Watergate scandals that so decisively disenchanted what remained of American political idealism.

In both cases - the New York art scene and the Washington political scene - Rosenberg found the emptiness of a new intellectual order: formalism, style without meaning,

> *...the aggressive emptiness of the formalist creed that cuts every work down to the same size. Art, it says, has nothing to do with psychology, with the individual, with society. It's a question of*

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> ***linking this work with that one, and if the critic is 'serious' he analyses how a corner of a painting is handled.***[183]

Watergate, too, had occurred because the press and the public were interested only in form while substance was ignored. The American people and the press were not concerned that their political leaders were *"dependable...intelligent, practical, with needed ideals,"* he said. Instead, individuals of substance were dismissed by the style-oriented American press corps who went for a "look": *"To hell with him,"* Rosenberg mimicked scornfully, *"he's not my style! So politics in America is determined by esthetic preferences - and such an esthetic!"*[184]

Rosenberg attacked the contemporary American press for the same mentality that he believed made the *"art historical aesthetes"* the *"deadly enemies"* of the artist. The new journalism, like the public it pandered to, was merely interested in surface, style and sales. By thus devaluing and forsaking their historical task of skeptical, independent inquiry into the performance of politicians, Washington journalists had gone along with the now-familiar presidential ruse that Mary McCarthy called The Mask of

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State. The journalist esthetes didn't look behind Nixon's mask, his *"Hollywood phiz of Sunday-school moralist...,"* Rosenberg wrote, to find the hidden Nixon: *"a tough, mentally dissolute King Ubu."*[185]

Rosenberg's target, however, was not primarily Nixon or the American public. As always, he was attacking intellectuals like himself, in this case political journalists, who he thought had neglected their social duty. Reasons for that failure, whether a lack of concern or a lack of scruples, were all contemptible reasons in his judgment.

On the other hand, Rosenberg did not want to take style (art, artifice...) out of politics. Rosenberg's moral ground was always the middle where real life complexities, ambiguities and contradictions ceaselessly interact and must continue to do so. In notes for a 1964 editorial for Location magazine on "Form and Despair," he wrote that

> *To the primitivist mind style is a synonym for hypocrisy. But the aesthetic is extremely important... especially in American politics where a strong tendency has always existed to discard style and solve problems by means of brute force.*[186]

*

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I have attempted to show something of the purpose behind Rosenberg's essay style. In what follows I will touch on points of difference between his writing style and the style he interpreted as a symptom: the academic style of Ph.D. art historian critics of contemporary art.

Among the personal notes in Rosenberg's papers is a private reflection on the relationship between poetry and life: a unity which he linked in the statement (as if they were one attitude) to politics and the pleasure of polemical combat:

> *There are two reasons for writing: poetry and politics.*
>
> *The search for exact metaphors refreshes (delights) the soul, by stretching (extending) the filaments of consciousness into the soil of <u>total</u> experience. Poetry is gratuitous like life itself.*
>
> *Politics has to do with causing things to happen or preventing them from happening or sabotaging what is happening. This is a pleasure, too, the pleasure of combat. In polemical writing one's murderous impulses are discharged without hurting anyone, except those who can't take action and therefore should not have been in the fight in the first place.*[187]

Rosenberg found intellectual combat exhilarating. *"He enjoyed decimating his opponents,"* was artist June Wayne's frank assessment as a long-time friend of Rosenberg and May

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Tabak. Furthermore, Wayne added, *"it is high time for Rosenberg to be understood for the kind of condor that he was."*[188]

Although the desire to decimate opponents might also have been the personal feeling, it was rarely the public posture of the art historian critics Rosenberg attacked. At this level, the difference in style was largely cultural and historical. Rosenberg's Ph.D. adversaries of the sixties and seventies were representatives of what sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman identified in their study, The Academic Revolution, as the *"national upper-middle class style"* of the American university system.[189] According to Jencks and Riesman, the style is characterized, among other things, by liberalism, tolerance, a sense of fair play, equity, neutrality and moderation.[190]

Rosenberg, by contrast, was very far from being an admirer of this moderate kind of liberal intellectualism. On the contrary, this style signaled the bureaucrat conformist to him, a lack of intellectual conviction, courage and honesty. The harsh lessons he took from the thirties, the Popular Front, and the Fall of Paris were brought to bear on the American academic art intellectual of

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the nineteen sixties and seventies. For him, only capitulation and intellectual surrender could be expected from a position that *"assumes that all questions can be solved through 'moderation' - even lies and philistinism must be treated moderately."*[191]

The pleasure Rosenberg took in the discharge of "murderous impulses" in polemical writing was equaled, he wrote, by the poet's delight in the search for the exact metaphor. Both polemics and poetry are crucial elements of his art criticism. *"The essence of art criticism,"* he once explained of Baudelaire's work and of his own as well, *"is an imagination cultivated in metaphor and the ability to write well."*[192] The art critic must speak the language of artists, which is chiefly the language of images.

Here too, style was deeply significant. *"The medium of the critic's synthesis, like that of the artist, is style."*[193] Just as for the Action Painter, where *"each stroke had to be a decision and was answered by a new question,"*[194] *"the writer must choose in every sentence between the automatism of his craft and the real content of his mind."*[195] Without a self-identifying literary style at the level of art one could not be an art critic at all.

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When he was asked by James Fitzsimmons, editor of Art International, in a letter from 1967, why art criticism is *"so inferior to literary criticism,"* Rosenberg agreed with Fitzimmon's speculation that perhaps *"one reason there is so much wretched writing about art is that the writers who produce it are simply not writers,"*[196] and added that the ability to write affects not just the form but also the content of art writing:

> *I would go further and say that since writing itself is an art, being able to write is the basis upon which a writer understands an artist. Put that in reverse and it explains why non-writer art critics not only don't sound well but actually don't know what they're talking about.*[197]

Much of Rosenberg's contempt for the young historian critics had to do with what he thought was their inability to write well. Failure to develop individual creative writing styles was attributed to a doctrinaire attitude toward their subject and a lack of poetic awareness:

> *Obviously, poetic criticism is not a program that can be attractive to ideologists, system builders, curators or art departments. By its nature it invites abuse, in that it seems to substitute colorful phrases for a serious analysis of paintings and sculptures....*[198]

The new Ph.D. art historian critics, however, were

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products of a university culture and an academic discipline that held a contrary attitude toward style. A personal literary style still remains a vexed issue for historians, largely for reasons of professional ethics, as historian and theoretician of consciousness Hayden White pointed out in 1982:

> *... insofar as the historian's discourse is conceived to have style, it is also conceived to be literary. But insofar as a historian's discourse is literary, it seems to be rhetorical, which is anathema for those who wish to claim the status of objective representation for historical discourse.*[199]

Rather than the artist's and poet's language of metaphors, the language of the art historian was a rule-determined language of empirical documentation, explication and theory. For Rosenberg, such institutionally regulated divisions between the writer, his subject, and his style, the "*splitting of form and content,..locates [a critic] firmly in the academic tradition.*"[200]

It was obvious to Rosenberg that what happened in the sixties was that scholarly style of the art history seminar, which aimed to be logical, impartial, objective, was adapted to art criticism. Though it had never before been the style

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of art criticism, the academic style was assumed by its practitioners to be simply the normal way to write about new art production. To Rosenberg, however, the unquestioned prestige of any normative style was in itself telling. He found in it an imbedded delusion. Claiming objectivity, the academic style of the time expressly denied the passion and responsibility of the individual author. It was, for Rosenberg, an institutionally-taught style, laden with the jargon of the bureaucrat. Existentially uninhabited by its author, in the terms of Rosenberg's generation, this was the Orwellian "Newspeak" of the apparatchik, other-directed "Orgman" intellectual of the art world.

*

For his part, Rosenberg condemned the young academicians in a powerfully poetic and combative rhetoric and terminology taken from the most vigorous of sources: the Old Testament of his early religious training from his poet father; the precursor poets of his Imagist tradition; the skillful polemics of Plato's Socratic dialogues; the battles of American communist factions in the thirties; the verbal

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dueling and wit competitions among the New York Intellectuals;[201] and the smart aleck lingo of New York City streets, the location from which Rosenberg proudly drew his essential intellectual identity.[202] Irving Howe thought of Rosenberg as "*a tough guy from Brooklyn [who] had a way of going for the jugular.*"[203] and this was one of the ways Rosenberg liked to see himself.[204] To Lionel Abel Rosenberg's style was most admirably "*the forceful and willed expressiveness of your typical New Yorker.*"

> *On a lower level of thought, similar operations, in a somewhat similar slangy-minded style, are being carried on at the bars and in the streets.*[205]

To Hilton Kramer, Rosenberg was

> *...formidable and combative - in many respects, the quintessential New York intellectual, resourceful in polemic and sometimes dazzling in style....His style, both in conversation and in writing, was nurtured on that special mixture of Marxism and modernism that came to constitute the distinct* Weltanschauung *of the New York intellectuals.*[206]

Formidable and Combative

Hilton Kramer would have thought a lot about Rosenberg's "*way of going for the jugular,*" because Kramer

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had for many years cast himself as Rosenberg's nemesis, and was more than once fiercely condemned by Rosenberg for his *"ass-kissing ideas,"* as the *"The New York Times' tireless meter-maid of the arts."*[207]

These particular insults - and there were more - were published in the Partisan Review's 1975 Winter issue. The *"ass-kissing ideas"* had been discovered by Rosenberg in Kramer's review of "The Painted Word." Tom Wolfe's famous assault on American abstract art and art criticism had appeared in the April, 1975 issue of Harper's magazine; and the following month Kramer - with a kind of vengeful glee he himself called *"Schadenfreude"* - praised "The Painted Word" in an article entitled "The Revenge of the Philistines" for Commentary magazine.[208]

Rosenberg's animosity towards Kramer was already deep and long-standing,[209] and by 1975 he had vigorously offended not just Kramer, but also John Canaday and almost all The New York Times "Arts and Leisure" editors in defense of his avant-garde values and of the artist friends who shared them. By 1975 he was also at odds with Commentary's neo-conservative editors. So Kramer received a blow meant for all of his past wrongs, for the many wrongs of the "Arts and

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Leisure" art critics, and for the wrongs of the entire anti-modernist alliance that had formed with such relish and speed around Wolfe's "The Painted Word." In attacking Kramer Rosenberg was attacking the entire *"'new-conservative' line applied to art."*[210]

Since Kramer had no argument with Clement Greenberg or Leo Steinberg - the two other "bergs" of the art world whom Wolfe had singled out in "The Painted Word" - his pleased support of Wolfe's anti-modernism was clearly aimed at Rosenberg, especially at the older critic's intransigent insistence on the artist's adversarial posture vis-à-vis the moneyed middle-class. Kramer was satisfied that such an old fashioned vanguardist posture was, in 1975, no longer defensible. What Rosenberg saw as Kramer's complacent pro-capitalist anti-modernism enraged him:

> *Kramer wants nothing less than the 'reopening of some fundamental questions about the relation of art to the society that produces and exalts it.' In the proposed reassessment, 'an art that flatters or at least accommodates itself to established power is not automatically dismissed as contemptible,' The double negative of 'not automatically dismissed' is typical of Kramer's rhetorical sneakiness - his point is that art ought to accommodate itself to power....the cesspools of Kramer's sarcasm...bubble over."*[211]

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Rosenberg held back none of his loathing for what were to him Kramer's accommodations to the powers that be: Kramer's "*cesspools*" of sarcasm, his "*rhetorical sneakiness,*" his "*shrieks*" of bad faith accusations, his "*gurgles*" of admiration and self-affiliation with "*the burlesque-house song-and-dance monologist Tom Wolfe.*"

Rosenberg received numerous requests to publicly attack Tom Wolfe, but he refused to participate in a debate with the popular press enthusiasts for "The Painted Word." Partisan Review editor William Phillips urged Rosenberg to write something because "*All kinds of culturally well-intended people who make up the world of semi-educated opinion are influenced by this kind of stuff.*"[212] Rosenberg wrote back:

> *I have not read this article, and have no intention of doing so. He is Harper's problem, not mine. As for "the world of semi-educated opinion" as you call it. As far as I'm concerned it can go fuck itself together with its intellectual representation.*[213]

A little over a year later Irving Howe asked Rosenberg to write an attack on the new conservatives for Dissent. Rosenberg responded that he was glad Dissent was "*planning to fight the all's-well-with-us mob,*"[214] but added testily

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that since that was exactly what he had been doing all along, why hadn't he gotten more support from Dissent? In any case, *"As for Kramer, I took care of him about a year ago in PR despite worrying by William Phillips."*[215]

Although Hilton Kramer and other "Arts and Leisure" art writers at The New York Times were a vexing misfortune for contemporary art, in Rosenberg's opinion the art history "professors" (always a pejorative term in Rosenberg's anti-academic vocabulary) were worse, if only because there were so many of them. As a group he saw them as *"sterile," "ineffectual," "unfaithful to reality,"* and *"absorbed in cold scholasticism"* - characterizations taken at random from his published articles. For this categorical contempt his professor-adversaries not surprisingly resent him to this day.

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MAKING IT OFFICIAL: MUSEUM VANGUARDISM AND THE END OF THE AVANT-GARDE

> *Still, as important as the problem of money - if not more important in the long run - are the problems of principle that confront museums today in relation to art, the artist, and the art public.*
>
> Rosenberg (1974)[216]

> *An artist is a non-person, a non-entity - just look at a museum board and see if you can find an artist. They're not even accepted by those in the art world.*
>
> Robert Indiana (1976)[217]
> First World Art Market Conference

In America in the nineteen sixties and seventies the art museum became a force in the production of avant-garde art (and an avant-garde audience) as it had never been before. This was a fundamental change. In the prewar years advanced art in America had been *"a voice crying out in the wilderness....fortunate to find a few supporters."*[218] In 1945 Marcel Duchamp quipped that the number of people who really liked avant-garde art was *"maybe ten in New York and one or two in New Jersey."*[219] The New York City museums of modern art that were established between the wars - the

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Museum of Modern Art (1929), the Whitney Museum of American Art (1931), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1937) - had ignored American avant-garde art until after World War II. The Museum of Modern Art, for example, included only two Abstract Expressionist painters in exhibitions before 1948.[220]

During the decades following the war, however, socio-economic, cultural and political forces radically altered the situation for both the art museum and for the avant-garde artist *vis à vis* the art museum. Museums grew larger and increasingly bureaucratic. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, expanded from a staff of 167 in 1948, to 246 in 1959, and to 537 by 1970.[221] The increase in number and size of regional museums and corporate collections kept pace. As a result, according to the 1987 study by sociologist Diana Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985, by the seventies the traditional relationship ("network") between contemporary artists and art museums had broken down. And with it the dialectical tension that had perpetuated Rosenberg's century-old "tradition of the new" collapsed:

> *...the activities of this network became less*

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> *important to museums whose expanded staffs were orienting themselves toward meeting the needs of corporations and government agencies and toward increasing their attendance statistics to demonstrate the breadth of their public appeal.*
>
> *Consequently,...The staffs of these organizations interacted with artists through intermediaries, primarily dealers, in ways that are not without analogies to the relationships between popular culture industries, such as the popular music industry, and the artists who perform and create the material that these industries sell.*[222]

At the root of all this change was great wealth of the United States and the sheer volume of money spent on contemporary art. Beginning in the mid-sixties, government, corporate, and foundation sponsors spent more and more money on the arts, most of which went to museums. The National Endowment for the Arts (1965), for example, spent $1.8 million dollars in 1966 and in 1983, $131 million. In that same period, 1966-1983, corporation spending went from $22 million dollars to $436 million; state governments went from $2.7 million to $125 million, and foundation spending increased from $38 million in 1966 to $349 million in 1982.[223]

To Rosenberg money and the market values of capitalism were the biggest threat to art production in America:

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> *I regard the money mass that has come into the art world in recent years as a form of coercion which is almost on a par with the coercion by the police in totalitarian countries. That is, it's capable of shattering all values and of demoralizing artists, old and young, and, in other words, really, providing an almost impassable barrier to creative work.*[224] (1975)

The "money-mass" - to Rosenberg, a brutally coercive, "demoralizing" force against the independent artist - had also underwritten the enormously expanded American art establishment of the third quarter of the century, including the production of art experts with doctorates in art history and the authority of prestigious universities, foundations, journals, and museums behind them. That the profit culture produced its own intellectuals was for Rosenberg *"one of our great problems."*[225]

He stated his great concern for independent artists attempting to create under such conditions this way:

> *...is a valid art compatible with the capitalist kind of market for anything, including the products of the human spirit and the human mind? Doesn't it tend to destroy the product and the activity of the human mind?*[226]

The ideas of success, power, and prestige associated with American capitalism exerted a kind of atmospheric

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pressure - heavy, but, it seems, largely unnoticed - on the growing number of institutional art intellectuals and on artists whose work was evaluated by the new criteria of institutional vanguardism of which the museum was the final arbiter. In 1962 Rosenberg observed that *"art, including its appreciation, has become an area of conflicting powers"*[227]; by 1974 he could conclude that

> *the current demoralization of the art world is attributable at least in part to museum interference, ideological and practical, with ongoing creation in art. One of the most catastrophic effects has been the dissemination among artists of the belief, by no means misconceived, that merit has no relation to recognition, that thought and imagination are, if not outlawed, secondary to 'what's cooking,' that at the top of the art world the cards are mysteriously stacked by arrangements between museum people, dealers, critics, and tax-benefiting collectors.*[228]

The "catastrophic" effect of museum interference with contemporary art, Rosenberg wrote, was essentially due to the institution's shallow idea of avant-garde art as merely the latest fashion (*"what's cooking"*). Artists had come to a bitter understanding that a self-interested art establishment - *"museum people, dealers, critics, and tax-benefiting collectors"* - was actually determining *all*

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criteria for the reception of their work. The result was demoralization: a situation that, for Rosenberg, who was above all an advocate for the intellectual and spiritual environment of the artist, demanded an aggressive critical intervention.

It would be hard to overstate Rosenberg's concern about the influence of the art museum on the creative environment of artists. It was in their capacity as museum staff - curators and directors - that the institutionalized art intellectuals received his toughest rhetorical abuse. In a series of essays published from the early sixties until his death in 1978, Rosenberg produced an extensive critique of the American art museum. On the whole, this body of work represents an unremitting attack on the ideas and practices of the curators of the era. The most hazardous of these were, in Rosenberg's view, the falsification of art history for ideological purposes, and interference with contemporary art production and reception. Each of these two problems will be discussed in what follows more or less separately. Rosenberg's dispute with academic formalist historicism is evident throughout, sometimes as foreground, but other times as background. For Rosenberg, Greenbergian formalism did

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not hold an exclusive copyright on the errors of academic art historian criticism.

On the Falsification of Art History

> *The issue in replacing exemplary figures with ones calculated to promote values alien to the time is the issue of the falsification of history, an issue which American museums and curators had better learn to take seriously. To use the past as one likes is a crime against the dead, a species of grave robbery, that prevents the living from understanding themselves.*
>
> Rosenberg (1968)[229]

It was evident to Rosenberg that professional art historian critics and curators of his time did not think of themselves as public intellectuals. It seemed to him they saw little if any relationship between twentieth-century cultural politics and their own work; they did not see themselves (as he saw them) as producer-products of an official ideological apparatus. These blindnesses Rosenberg considered intellectually and morally lax and potentially dangerous. Observing art intellectuals closely, he raised the danger of their practices to the highest power. For

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example, he could evoke the most malevolent of cultural administrators as a dark reminder to uptown museum staffs who he knew were guilty of little more than politically irresponsible professionalism:

> *Goebbels envied the Americans their skill in turning the past into a tool or weapon of the present. A museum is an institution designed to retard this talent.*[230]

While the curators tended to see their work simply as a normal professional enterprise and doubtless would have been appalled to see what Rosenberg wanted them to see - the epistemic likeness between themselves and totalitarian ministers of enlightenment and propaganda - to Rosenberg the institutional curator of cultural memory affected contemporary life and art profoundly. From his own historical perspective curatorial alteration of the record for any reason other than accuracy was a disturbing analogue of other falsifications of history, most egregiously, of course, the Stalin Show Trials that Rosenberg regularly evoked, just as he did the guilt-motivated reinvention of the past by ex-communists of the McCarthy confession era:

> *If the Soviets have purloined our nuclear know-how, we have evened the score by mastering her technique of the fission and fusion of memory. To*

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> ***be able to dissolve segments of time is at least as important in modern politico-military struggle as the capacity to sear areas of space. With Communist help, it is now definitely in our power to alter at will the contents of the past twenty years.***[231] (1955)

The motives Rosenberg attributed to the new art critics and curators for their falsifications of history were either a deliberately self-blinding scholasticism, or more often, petty institutional careerism, and usually both at once. The banality of these reasons did not mean they should be overlooked or forgiven. On the contrary, they were at least as odious to him as any other, since Rosenberg identified both scholasticism and careerism with the bureaucratic mind; these attitudes were to him the seed and fruit of totalitarian thinking.[232]

Contrary to the artist's creative use of art history, it was imperative to Rosenberg that the curator not fabricate "creative" revisions; he or she must be scrupulously aware of the politics of memory and serve the past with reverence: "*A museum is not an artist, what is right and necessary for artists is an abomination when performed by museums* [Rosenberg's emphasis]."[233]

"An abomination" might seem intemperate terminology for

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an art critic but it is typical of Rosenberg, and to him the transmission of culture was a matter of the greatest importance because historical memory affects what can be imagined for the present and the future. No one has written more scathingly about the perils of an art museum's rewriting of the past. Rosenberg never doubted that the museum curator must *"maintain the integrity of the past as it was, including its stupidities and malefactions."*[234] The museum must counteract the temptation *"which liberals share with criminals, to let bygones be bygones."* The moral imperative was that

> *Nothing must be re-interpreted, either in the interest of higher ideals or higher attendance figures. In the museum Greeks still fight Greeks, and Eichmann transports Jews to gas chambers without the slightest yielding to the pressure of being watched by Sunday afternoon crowds of New Yorkers.*[235]

Although Rosenberg's critical assessment of Cold War culture through the lens of totalitarian politics was anomalous in the American art world institutions of the era, it was otherwise far from unique. Rosenberg's intimate friend and colleague, Hannah Arendt, produced the classic analysis of the problem, The Origins of Totalitarianism, in

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1948. Another friend, Irving Howe, recalled that for all the New York Intellectuals *"the postwar years were marked by a sustained discussion of the new political and intellectual problems raised by the totalitarian state."*[236] According to intellectual historian Neil Jumonville, antitotalitarian culture critique identified the New York group as a whole:

> *If anticommunism has been the official ideology of America in the postwar period, the New York critics...demonstrated how to integrate antitotalitarianism into culture as well as politics.*[237]

Rosenberg's criticism was part of an international discourse of dissent that has heard many voices, like Walter Benjamin's in 1940, the year Rosenberg wrote "On the Fall of Paris," enjoining the historian in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" not *"to become a tool of the ruling class,"* to remember that *"in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it....even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious."*[238]

The manipulation of historical and contemporary events to justify designs on the present and the future was and

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remains an alarming signal and symptom of authoritarianism to public intellectuals. But to a prosperous American art world self-isolated from political and social realities, Rosenberg's accusations appeared bafflingly incongruous, excessive. Indeed, the notion of an autonomous art and art history seemed so natural to so many in Rosenberg's era that in 1976 the English art historian John Tagg could observe that

> *The image of an autonomous and linear art-historical development is so deeply ingrained...that it is difficult to remind ourselves that it is only an interpretation* [Tagg's emphasis] *and a skeletal one at that, which neglects the changing world-circumstances ....Art-historicist notions have... remained largely unquestioned until recently.*[239]

Tagg's critique of "Art-historicist notions" associated with the dominant formalist paradigm is by the nineties a commonplace, but a necessary reminder to introduce here as background to the polemic between Rosenberg and establishment art intellectuals.

The falsification of history by museum-affiliated art historians is the thrust of a 1969 article by Rosenberg entitled "Ecole de New York." Alarm over what was to him a pernicious rewriting of the past largely explains why

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Rosenberg's New Yorker reader in September of 1969 was informed that *"Henry's Show"* - that is, curator Henry Geldzahler's exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970" - was

> *"merely the latest and largest in a series of history-falsifying survey exhibitions in which works of art have been employed to serve the career strategies of the curators who assembled them or to call attention to their mental fixations."*[240]

Rosenberg loathed Geldzahler's exhibition. Geldzahler was to him one of the new *"Swinging Curator"*[241] types: "*the showman who fits paintings and sculptures into his schemes,*"[242] and that for what Rosenberg saw as the most ordinary, commercial, and self-aggrandizing of motives. Geldzahler had falsified history so as to replace the artist with himself as artist or "curator-producer":

> *The press kit for the show contained a glossy of Geldzahler in shirt-sleeves, as if he were a movie director on location; flanked by an assistant, he was explaining an installation to one of his favorite artists. No doubt was left as to who was in charge.*[243]

In another attempt to rescue the past, "Ecole de New York" carefully retold Rosenberg's own history of Abstract Expressionism. It was not the history of a "school" or

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"movement" - unattractive categories to him - but individual artists brought together by the force of circumstances and shared bohemian values on art and life. Geldzahler's history and thesis were countered point by point, as in the following where Rosenberg redrew the palimpsest of the historical political situation that the *"Metropolitan's critical guides are endeavoring to conceal"*:

> *By the nineteen-thirties, advanced artists were in flight from Central Europe and were trying to form combinations against war and fascism. It is this fatal and irreversible breach of historical continuity that the Metropolitan's critical guides are endeavoring to conceal in their glorification of the "New York School" as the heir of "a continually vital" tradition.*[244]

Not only had the Metropolitan's curatorial erasures polished out the historical circumstances of Abstract Expressionism - the devastation of European culture by war and fascism, they had robbed living artists of hope and purpose, of what was to Rosenberg most precious - their inspiring legacy of creative nonconformism:

> *The legacy that New York artists inherited from Paris consisted of the tradition of overthrow, of unlimited formal experimentation and parody, and of fragments of radical ideas.*[245]

In other words, Geldzahler had eliminated the

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transformative dialogues between the artist and society, and between the artist and his tradition of formal and political radicalism. "Henry's Show" had thus erased the horizon itself - the dynamic impulses that had brought the new forms into being.

*

From Rosenberg's angle of vision it didn't matter if the *"history-falsifying"* occurred at a Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition in New York or at the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem. His analyses of the 1960-1961 trial of Adolph Eichmann parallel his position on the falsification of art history by New York museums. The comparison will show that the situation of art in America was as serious to him as the most important political events of the era.

Rosenberg's impassioned two-part essay on the Eichmann Trial Rosenberg published in Commentary in October of 1961 and March of 1962 was largely a polemic against attempts to falsify the history of the Holocaust through suppression, silence and denial.[246] In the hard terms he used to inveigh against the practices of New York art museums, his

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Commentary articles censured all efforts to suppress memory of Germany's "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem." Rosenberg was contemptuous of those he called liberals who worried that remembering the atrocities would threaten the mental health of survivors. In his judgement, *"ideals of mental health and social amelioration"* must not be weighed against telling the historical truth, since to do so *"was all but to argue for its suppression."*[247]

> *...it is a fact that prominent among those who condemned in advance the proceedings in Jerusalem were liberals representing ideals of mental health and social amelioration. Even among the supporters of the trial, who dared squarely to represent the dead? Who dared to assert that the story of their sufferings must be recounted regardless of consequences?*[248]

Rosenberg's insistence that the true story of the past be told *"regardless of consequences"* was essentially a question of moral courage. *"Who dared,"* he demanded, *"squarely to represent the dead?"*

The point here is not the passion of Rosenberg's position on the Eichmann Trial, but the fact that his demands on the American art museum took the same stance for the same reasons and with equivalent moral certitude and force. Compare, for example, the following warning to

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Whitney Museum curators:

> *To use the past as one likes is a crime against the dead, a species of grave robbery, that prevents the living from understanding themselves.*[249] *(1968)*

Or consider his indictment of William Rubin's Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage":

> *I can think of only one purpose for the "Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage" exhibition - to knock out the philosophical underpinnings of modern art. The show is a remarkable, if not epoch-making, instance of a museum openly intruding into current art history as an active partisan force by posing its own conception of value and its own will regarding the future against the will and ideas of the artists it is displaying....the Museum of Modern Art has become a kind of corporate artist using other people's pictures to produce its own collage and parody.*[250]

However exaggerated these attacks might have seemed to the New York art world of the sixties and seventies, Rosenberg's moral injunction to squarely represent the past always extended to the curator of art exhibitions. This is why he could move without pause from Adolph Eichmann to museum intellectuals like Henry Geldzahler. Just as the Eichmann jurors must hear the whole truth about the past no matter what the consequences, it was absolutely vital that

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the American art museum remain unwavering in its duty to preserve the past.

Across the board, altering collective memory was one of the worst public threats posed by establishment intellectuals, whatever their academic discipline or institutional affiliation. Literary and political intellectuals of the postwar decades heard from Rosenberg the same moral denunciations as Geldzahler did. In 1956, for example, Rosenberg contended that his Dissent magazine essay, "The Herd of Independent Minds," which had ridiculed the "herd" instinct of ex-Marxist intellectuals, had had *"nothing to do with radicalism... but with the falsification of history through the fabrication of a collective 'we.'"*[251] Against Daniel Bell's 1958 contention that the critic should limit his focus to the quotidian, Rosenberg argued that the public intellectual must be concerned first of all about *"the day-to-day falsification of history that goes on in front of witnesses all the time."*[252]

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The Making of Frank Stella

> *It's part of the absurdity of the museum situation that the museum today dominates the creation of new art.*
>
> Rosenberg (1974)

> *Museum directors may well be institutionalized dealers in the future, trading and deaccessioning to get new works and funds.*[253]
>
> Thomas Messer (1976)
> Director, Guggenheim Museum

Rosenberg's ideal museum was a place that fulfilled its *"sacred obligation...to compile and keep intact the record of human freedom and creativeness."*[254] But he realized that historically avant-garde art had always - paradigmatically - presented a real dilemma to the traditional bastion of the art establishment, the museum. From the beginning of the avant-garde in the nineteenth century, canonical works in the tradition, like Gustave Courbet's 1850 A Burial at Ornans and Manet's 1863 Olympia, had infamously emerged out of opposition to official art institutions. Militant strains of vanguard art had been produced in ironic or iconoclastic relation to the museum and its canonizing role.

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Marinetti's Futurist manifesto of 1909, for example, called for burning the museums and their contents; and in 1917 Marcel Duchamp flagrantly mocked the pseudo-radical pretenses of The Society of Independent Artists by submitting a urinal signed "R. Mutt" for exhibition. Following the logic of the heretical aesthetic tradition, in 1960 Yves Tinguely's Homage to New York destroyed itself in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art. But things had changed. By 1960 the oppositional tension between the contemporary artist and the museum of art had collapsed. Tingueley's ostensibly anti-establishment anti-art work had been commissioned by the museum itself. As Allan Kaprow observed in 1964, Tingueley's Homage to New York was *"a publicity gesture on the part of the Museum of Modern Art that benefited both parties."* [255] Because the Museum actually sponsored the ostensibly subversive work, Tingueley's gesture became a satire of genuine opposition to establishment culture, with the artist himself a parody of the avant-garde saboteur of official culture. Rosenberg's view was that *"the art world today [1974] is unable to distinguish between genuine acts of defiance or nonconformity and farcical mimicking of subversion that*

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discredits the radical past of modernism."[256] Looking back on the Museum of Modern Art's domestication of the avant-garde from the perspective of 1982, New York Intellectual William Barrett observed that *"the development of* [MOMA]*...is nothing less than the academization and institutionalization of the avant-garde."*[257]

Rosenberg analyzed the dilemma of the American art historian curators of contemporary art in the sixties and seventies from the perspective of the history of the avant-garde. Art historians knew only too well, he wrote, that the century-old story of the relationship between the academics and the avant-garde read like a list of mistakes in judgment on the part of the established cultural elite. They did not intend to continue what Rosenberg called *"the story of the Ridicule of the Radicals"*:

> *One thing had been learned from the notorious mistakes of the past one hundred years....It was that no new work, no matter how apparently senseless, repulsive or visually vacant, could be rejected without running the risk that it would turn up as a masterpiece of the era. The story of the Ridicule Of The Radicals - of the Impressionists, Van Gogh, Matisse, Modigliani, Duchamp - had become part of the folklore of painting. Today, no one is more conscious of it than the professionals.*[258](1962)

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For Rosenberg, because the art "professionals" feared making the mistakes of their predecessors, and perpetuating the ridicule the radicals, they became "avant-gardist" themselves: a solution he thought disastrous. For him, museum vanguardism was no vanguardism at all; it was a parody, a farce. Nevertheless by the sixties most American art museums did not restrict themselves to preserving the past reverentially, as Rosenberg wished them to do. In fact, Rosenberg complained in 1962, *"in many respects, they have outstripped art itself in pursuit of the new."*[259] The art museum had gone so far towards institutional avant-gardism, he felt, that it had become the principle arbiter of the new art and *"the art historian has been recast into a conscious maker of history, not merely the orderly recorder of accomplishments of former times.*[260]

In 1963 Rosenberg passed along to his New Yorker readers his friend Saul Steinberg's joke that for formalist art history - here specifically referring to Alfred Barr's What is Modern Painting (*"typical of this sort of art appreciation and scholarship"*),

> *...present-day creation consists... of art-historian artists painting art history for art historians.*[261]

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The formalist art historian critics and curators, he added, and the institutions of contemporary art they worked for - *"museums, university art departments, professional publications"* - were failing in their public duty. To him the task of the official institutions was scholarship, stability, integrity. They were to resist on principle the overwhelming pressure of the media and market interest in new art. Instead,

> *...reputations are now being made in art as fast as on Broadway and in Hollywood. The past few seasons have provided the spectacle of museum personnel, critics and professors of current art history being swept up in a race to identify themselves with half-emerged personalities and trends.*[262] (1963)

By 1970 it appeared to him that the professors had won the race for cultural leadership. That year Rosenberg published an article in The New Yorker entitled "Young Masters, New Critics," about the making of Frank Stella as a "young master" by the new critics. The article sums up in specific terms Rosenberg's polemic against establishment art historian professors, critics, and curators for their direct interference with contemporary art.

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Looking back on the nineteen-sixties from 1970, Rosenberg decided that Stella, more than any other artist (Warhol being from a slightly earlier generation) had been the outstanding young artist of the decade. Stella had soared to fame, exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art the year after he had graduated from Princeton, and had earned a retrospective at MoMA at the incredibly early age of thirty-three. This all-too-fast-and-easy success, Rosenberg concluded, came because the artist had most accurately reflected the aesthetic of the sixties, *"or,"* he added cuttingly, *"at any rate, of those forces that were most effective in advancing reputations in it."*

By the end of the first paragraph of "Young Masters, New Critics," Rosenberg had already taken away all that he had given, and launched an indictment that continued uninterrupted to the end. What called forth the brilliant litany of scorn was his view that Stella had earned the status of "young master" at the Museum of Modern Art because his formalist aesthetics mirrored those of art establishment intellectuals who had the power to advance his reputation. *"Stella,"* Rosenberg wrote, *"is inseparable from his critics."*[263] The new critics had found and made famous their

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exemplary academic artist.

Rosenberg drew an analogy between the natural callowness of youth and the kind of values that were admired in Stella's paintings. Here rhetorical reduction helped him strategically, as it often did, to make his point.[264] How could the surface charms of Stella's youthful paintings contain the spiritual and intellectual depths of great art? "Young master" was coined to display the concept's inherent contradiction. If Stella really were a master painter at thirty-three, it would be a nearly unprecedented phenomenon, especially in the history of American art:

> *The American, from Allston to Gorky, who searched for genuine art has been fated to spend half his life in blind alleys.*[265]

America had always presented its vanguard artist with the most trying obstacles, Rosenberg wrote. Historically, by the time an American artist emerged from the arduous labyrinth of development, he was in middle age. In sum, Stella's youth in itself disqualified him for possible measurement by Rosenberg's critical standards - standards that mandated a life-long process of self-discovery and self-fabrication. For Rosenberg this was the first lesson

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of modern art history - both American and European:

> *It is inconceivable that Cézanne, Matisse, or Miró could have qualified for a retrospective in a leading museum after their first dozen years of painting; certainly Gorky, Hofmann, Pollock, and de Kooning did not.*[266]

But in the situation of sixties' official vanguardism, there were new criteria - "a *new intellectual order,*" Rosenberg called it - that by 1970 had become the entrenched pedagogy of the university and the museum:

> *For a coherent body of significant paintings to spring directly out of an artist's early thoughts, a new intellectual order had to be instituted in American art. [William]* Rubin *claims that Stella's paintings 'have revealed their deep and manifold roots in the tradition of modern painting.' No doubt he is speaking of this tradition as it is reflected in black-board diagrams of postwar art history. But the tradition of modern painting itself lies outside the classroom.*[267]

"Black-board" formalist historicism fit the new academic pedagogical artist, Stella, as neatly as it fit his Ph.D. art historian critics, the authors of the MoMA retrospective catalogue: *"Dr. William Rubin," "Professor Michael Fried of Harvard, and Professor Robert Rosenblum, of New York University."* Always careful to designate academic titles - "Dr." and "Professor" - as if they were somehow

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insulting epithets, Rosenberg mocked the catalogue, with gusto and at length, as "*a staggering accumulation of the kind of formalist analyses that brought those paintings into being.*"[268] Here Rosenberg is claiming that Stella's paintings were the creatures of formalist historicism, and not just a parallel development. The essays of Rubin, Rosenblum, and Fried made "*painting itself...an adjunct of aesthetic theology.*" Here, as he invariably did, Rosenberg interpreted academic formalist content as dogma, and the academic style as a strategy of exclusion:

> *Fried's rhetoric is even more impacted than Rubin's. He scratches away at a painting as if it were a bit of bone found in an archaeological dig....Our good doctors vie with each other in a professionalism designed to restrict forming opinions about paintings to those who have signed an aesthetic loyalty oath.*[269]

Rosenberg's battle with the academic art establishment over the making of Frank Stella earned him, as he knew it would, the undying animosity of those he attacked. Among them were art historians who have had a large part in shaping the historiography of this era in American art and determining Rosenberg's place in that history. Not surprisingly, at the time, Rosenberg had no support from

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academic art critics for his critique of institutional involvement in contemporary American art,[270] but in 1990 art historian Anna Chave commented on the art establishment's role in the making of Frank Stella, which has particular relevance here. Chave observed, as a footnote to her own feminist critique of Minimalism, "Minimalism and Rhetoric of Power," that Stella's privileged Princeton background, *"could not have served him better if he had pursued a career on Wall Street."*

> *Soon after [Stella] moved to New York, his Andover schoolmate, Andre, introduced him to Barbara Rose, then a graduate student in art history at Columbia. 'After seeing the black paintings, she [Rose] decided that Stella was the most important artist of her generation.'(Tomkins, 'The Space,'72), and she soon became both Stella's first wife (in 1961) and a critic highly supportive of Minimalist art. The best man at the wedding was fellow Princetonian Michael Fried, soon to become Stella's most passionate and articulate supporter as well as the most influential critic of the day. William Seitz (soon to rise to power at the Museum of Modern Art) and Robert Rosenblum, who taught art history at Princeton while Stella was there, both encouraged and helped him in numerous ways...*[271]

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"A Horrible, Horrible Man!"

As late as 1993 Robert Rosenblum still remembered Rosenberg bitterly as "a horrible, horrible man!"[272] A respected and influential art historian, Rosenblum was ridiculed by Rosenberg in The New Yorker for his part in the 1976 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "The Natural Paradise: Painting in America 1800-1950."[273] The exhibition was a revision of Abstract Expressionism that tacitly repudiated what was to Rosenberg of crucial importance, these painters' international modernist sources and immigrant roots.

According to the curators of the MoMA exhibition the significant source for American Abstract Expressionism was the "natural paradise" of the pre-industrial American landscape, not the cosmopolitan world cities of Paris and New York with their immigrant bohemian cultures. Rosenberg's efforts all along had been to make American culture more international[274] - his ideal was the magnanimous internationalism of prewar Paris; so to him the exhibition's nativist return to rural American roots must have been politically troubling. The son of Polish-Lithuanian Jewish immigrants, Rosenberg's great affection for the United

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States and the artists of Abstract Expressionism had to do with his equation of urban immigrant cosmopolitanism with Americanism: an orientation that was shared by the artists of his community and had formed a bond among them that would naturally exclude the new critics and curators who did not identify so closely with New York bohemia and Ellis Island. The year before MoMA's exhibition, Tom Wolfe, in "The Painted Word," had reintroduced the old arch-conservative appellation for modern art in America, "Ellis Island art," to deride Abstract Expressionism.[275]

Rosenberg's position on Abstract Expressionism was antithetical to the thesis of "The Natural Paradise." For him, what was extraordinary about Abstract Expressionism - what had brought it "world cogency" - had nothing whatsoever to do with the sublime American landscape. Rather, the world relevance of Abstract Expressionism was due (paradoxically) to the fact that this was the first genuinely American art movement. American human largess - a great cosmopolitan immigrant culture, not a vast landscape - was why, for the first time,

> *"the big-city artist had emerged in America, an artist whose "roots" are anywhere....but it reached expression here without traditionalist*

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> *Schmertz, and this is what has brought world cogency to American art."*[276]

Consistent with the paradox of American identity itself, Abstract Expressionism was the first American art movement to achieve international relevance <u>because</u> it was the expression of big-city immigrants, and thus could speak to the existential condition of contemporary man in every city of the world. Rosenberg had frequently asserted the importance of this claim. For example, in 1954 he wrote that

> *...immigrants and sons of immigrants have been leaders in creating and disseminating a style: Gorky, de Kooning, Hofmann, Rothko, Gottlieb, Lassaw, Reinhardt, Newman, Baziotes, Guston....*[277]

Rosenberg then, *"in random recollection,"* listed fifty-five more well-known New York artists - half a page of text makes his point - artists who included the famous *"...native settlers from the far west,"* namely Pollock, Still and Motherwell.

To Rosenberg, Rosenblum had disregarded the artists' sources, experience, and stated intentions - an approach that was typical of the new art historical packaging that left out the artist. Rosenberg's <u>New Yorker</u> essay on "The

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Natural Paradise" exhibition, entitled "MOMA Package,"[278] began by first mocking Kynaston McShine, the Museum of Modern Art's curator of painting and sculpture and director of "The Natural Paradise." Rosenberg pointed to the implicit bad faith of McShine's conversion from the extreme leftism of his earlier exhibition, "Information," to the conservative "nationalist nostalgia" in "The Natural Paradise" four years later. Rosenberg recalled that in the catalog for the "Information" show, McShine had denounced painting as "absurd" given the political, economic and social upheavals of the late sixties, yet in "The Natural Paradise" he no longer felt so scrupulous about the amorality of painting as a medium.[279] To Rosenberg, McShine's unexplained shift in moral position signaled the "Orgman" intellectual whose bureaucratic careerism he was always quick to detect and expose.

But Rosenberg reserved his major artillery in "MOMA Package" for Robert Rosenblum. *"Its presiding genius,"* Rosenberg wrote with heavy irony, *is Robert Rosenblum, a professor of fine arts at New York University. One might say that the hands are the hands of McShine but the voice is the voice of Rosenblum,"*[280] a mock allusion to the Old

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Testament story of the deception of the blind Isaac. Tricked into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, Isaac thinks aloud: "The voice is Jacob's voice but the hands are the hands of Esau!"[281] Rosenberg delighted in such ironic juxtapositions of contemporary shenanigans with the fabled antics of biblical and literary characters and used them often. Besides rattling contemporaries by showing them how they looked in mythic costume, he thought comedy the best critical strategy, the quickest way to dispel illusion. But of course it infuriated its victims.

Rosenberg's relentless offensive persisted throughout the article until he had reduced Rosenblum's revision of American art history to a laughable but dangerous anti-modernist academic "package."

To justify and win his argument Rosenberg, as always, appealed to the authority of the artists; in this case he used as an epigraph Barnett Newman's testimony that,

> *This shrewd popularization of the big lie, that modern art isn't modern, succeeded in establishing the position of respectability modern art now enjoys with museum directors and professional art-lovers, but it wrought havoc with the creative forces struggling for a footing wherever this false thesis took root.*[282]

Newman's complaint that the *"shrewd popularization of the*

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big lie, that modern art isn't modern...has wrought havoc with...creative forces," might just as well have been written by Rosenberg, so completely were they in agreement on the issue of the dire effect of rewriting art history to make Modern art respectable.

Rosenblum had not committed the sins of Greenbergian formalism, but all the same his "MOMA Package," as Rosenberg saw it, had the same effect: it could not contain the experience of any one of the painters. *"One can imagine the horrified reaction of Clyfford Still,"* Rosenberg wrote, *"to Rosenblum's notion that his paintings are 'abstract translations' of Cole and Moran."*[283] This particular "mistake," Rosenberg said, was due to *"the art historian's customary mode of perusing paintings"* only in reproduction.[284]

Rosenberg's rhetorical strategy was to demonstrate how Rosenblum was at odds with every one of the Abstract Expressionist artists he had reformatted as abstract translators of nineteenth-century American landscape painting. In every case the artist's testimonies were used as conclusive evidence in defense of their avant-garde modernism. A famous 1947 statement by Mark Rothko that

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firmly distinguished the artist's own thinking from Romantic transcendentalism was cited by Rosenberg as proof that *"The phrase 'in nature'... puts Rosenblum at odds with Rothko."*[285]

Summarizing his arguments for his New Yorker readers, Rosenberg castigated Rosenblum's scholarship by comparing its level of literalness with the vulgar anti-modernism that *"some thirty years ago"* had defined *"Pollock's drip paintings as 'baked spaghetti,' or the jocular characterizations of Newman's paintings as the closing of elevator doors."*[286]

Not surprisingly, Robert Rosenblum was indignant. He sent Rosenberg a copy of a letter he had published in Art in America denying that he had "masterminded" "The Natural Paradise" exhibition.[287] Rosenblum was exasperated that The New Yorker's editorial policy prevented him from publicly countering Rosenberg's review. His letter to Rosenberg hints at possible legal action:

> *...you should know, if you don't, that the New Yorker is equally responsible for disseminating misinformation, since its editor never even felt a professional obligation to acknowledge the letters I wrote him, correcting your printed assumptions that I had masterminded the show.*[288]

Rosenberg wrote back. Wasn't Rosenblum being *"shifty"*

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and "*disingenuous*" and "*sly - for example, in...not denying flatly, or disproving, your apparent intellectual complicity?*"

> *I'll take your word that you didn't "mastermind" in the sense of going over everything that McShine selected.... But are you contending, given the peculiar intellectual slant of the show, that it originated exclusively with McShine and in complete independence of your ideas? After all, as I recall my piece, I backed up most of my assertions by direct quotation from your essay, and all of them were consistent with the formula of the exhibition.*[289]

The Guggenheim's "Hijacked Surrealist"

Another example of the unforgettable and evidently unforgivable nature of the attacks on the new art historian critics and curators was a New Yorker review of the 1972 Guggenheim Miró exhibition, "Magnetic Fields," co-curated by Rosalind Krauss and Margit Rowell. Rosenberg admired the "inspired title" of the exhibition, an homage to André Breton and Phillipe Soupault, and the decision to highlight the artist's ability "*to arouse feeling through texture and color alone,*"[290] that is, through purely formal values. But

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this was the extent of the praise.

Rosenberg objected to the curators' aim in showing only the "field" paintings, a selection intended *"to recast the accepted concept of the artist as the creator of the teeming imagery of Carnival and The Poetess."*

> *In the opening paragraph of the Guggenheim catalogue, Rosalind E. Krauss, co-curator of the exhibition,...claimed the privilege of staging an artist's work in what amounts to a new performance. The curator-impresario has discovered, she contended, a second Miró - one substantially different from, if not opposite to, the artist familiar this past half century.*[291]

Krauss had rejected the Surrealist Miró, and invented instead her own sixties-style color-field painter. *"In sum,"* wrote Rosenberg with obvious sarcasm,

> *...the Guggenheim Miró is a naturalized formalist who happens to have had an early leaning toward poetry and metaphysical feelings but whose true 'concern' has been similar to that of the American color-field structuralists, such as Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella.*[292]

The curators could only contrive an American color-field painter out of their *"hijacked Surrealist"* Miró by excluding most of his work. The untenable thesis of the show, insisted Rosenberg, was that some of Miró's own work is *"alien to the artist's creation as a whole."* In this

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case, the whole exhibition was based on a notion that would logically end in eliminating the artist altogether from his production. This was the heart of the matter. *Ressentiment* - a jealous desire to eliminate the artist - was the accusation Rosenberg made against the art historian curators and critics of the era; and it was the baneful threat that they might indeed succeed that motivated his own antagonistic project.

Krauss's contributions in the catalog of the Miró exhibition drew almost all Rosenberg's fire.[293] She had, Rosenberg wrote, misunderstood the concept of the field for Miró by insisting that Miró was seeking the solution to the "problem" of representing space without perspectival illusionism. This question of space, Rosenberg argued, was not Miró's problem, but the problem of *"Ms. Krauss and her generation of art critics, 'haunted' by the question of space."*[294] As Krauss had constructed her own Miró, she was also presenting her own problem as Miró's problem. In the process of recreating Miró, Krauss, *"in keeping with her formalist ideology"* tried to *"impose an order on Miró's improvisations."* To do so, Rosenberg pointed out, she had to contradict herself and resort to *"what can only be*

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described as formalist theology." Quoting a line from the catalog essay, Rosenberg attacked Krauss's interpretation and writing style as academic scholasticism: the *"type of neo-medieval nonsense that has taken refuge in art criticism": "formalist casuistry,"* which *"falsifies the manner in which original art is created."* [295]

Rosenberg's charge of "formalist theology" against Krauss has its parallel in attacks against the New Critics by literary critics like Geoffrey Hartman. Hartman's anger about the damaging effects of the New Criticism's "theological dimensions" on American literature and literary studies, the subject of his Criticism in the Wilderness (1980), is taken by literary historian Vincent Leitch to represent the current historical consensus on the New Criticism. Leitch sums up Hartman's argument in words Rosenberg might have used in his attacks on academic Greenbergian formalists for their *"formalist casuistry."*

> *For the New Critics meaning was* not *political,* not *scientific,* not *historical,* not philosophical, not *biographical,* not *sociological; it was* nothing....*a severe and monkish asceticism offering a negative knowledge equivalent to grace. Characteristic of it were restraint, denial, emptiness. The theological dimensions of New Criticism, [were] centered in its hermeneutics of grace and its poetics of incarnation.*[296]

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Significantly, in September of 1972 - four months before Rosenberg's review of the Miró exhibition appeared in The New Yorker - Krauss had publicly broken with Greenberg's "modernism" in an article for Artforum entitled "A View of Modernism."[297] In this article Krauss distinguished her own evolving approach from one that claimed to be innocent of subjectivity, one that was unable to deal with the full range of contemporary art production, like sculpture, film, and photography. Her adherence to Greenberg's "modernism" in the sixties (a term she placed within quotation marks and defined as a methodology) was the result of the repulsion she had felt as a graduate student for the kind of "modernism" commonly associated with the New York art world of the late fifties.

Krauss was clearly repelled by the anti-academic bohemian modernism of Rosenberg, the art writers of Thomas Hess's Art News magazine, and the Tenth Street School that developed in the fifties out the work of de Kooning, Kline and the popular version of Action painting. A number of witnesses and historians of American art and art criticism have made this connection. British art historian Charles

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Harrison speculated in 1974 that *"increasing devotion to a 'modernist logic' of historicity" may have been "partly in reaction against Rosenberg's rabid existentialism."*[298]

Similarly Barbara Rose remembered that

> *...toward the* Gotterdämerung *of the late fifties, the trumpets blared with such an apocalyptic and Wagnerian intensity that each moment was a crisis and each 'act' a climax. Obviously, such a crisis climate could hardly be sustained; just to be able to hear at all again, the volume had to be turned down, and the pitch, if not the instrument changed.*[299]

In the same way Krauss explained that

> *In the '50s we had been alternately tyrannized and depressed by the psychologizing whine of "Existentialist" criticism. It had seemed evasive to us - the impenetrable hedge of subjectivity whose prerogatives we could not assent to. The remedy had to have, for us, the clear provability of an 'if x then y.'"*[300]

In her 1994 The Optical Unconscious - no longer requiring *"the clear provability of an 'if x then y'"* - Krauss again represented *"my own relation to what could be seen as the hegemonic account of modernist painting,"* but this time in the light of her own exploration of subjective vision and *"work that operates 'against the grain' of mainstream modernism"*[301] (meaning Greenbergian modernism,

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interpreted here as still hegemonic.)

Krauss, saw herself in 1994 as an independent critic working *"'against the grain' of mainstream modernism,"* and allowed her allusions - to Huysman's Against the Grain and Benjamin's "optical unconscious" - to evince the degree to which she has shifted toward the Baudelairean and marxian critical tradition of Rosenberg. The personal and poetic writing style of The Optical Unconscious was featured on the book's dust jacket: *"Rosalind Krauss abandons the historian's voice of objective detachment and forges a new style of writing in this book: art history that...has the gait and tone of fiction."* Furthermore, just as Rosenberg's literary essay style was repellent to academic art critics of his era, Krauss was attacked for *"moving far beyond conventional art-historical practice in favor of an extended, post-modern reverie .... Krauss makes loops where she could be drawing straight lines.... The MIT Press should have edited this book."*[302]

Although Krauss has not forgotten Rosenberg's assault on her 1972 "formalist theology" and Procrustean revision of Miró,[303] in 1993, she has acknowledged that when she curated the 1972 Miró exhibition she was indeed blind to the

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surrealist sources and meanings of Miró's work - the same sources and meanings Rosenberg had insisted upon. Krauss has explained that at the time she was unable to see anything beyond the grid of Greenbergian formalism.[304]

Thierry de Duve has recently compared, in temper and motive, Krauss's bitter rejection of Greenberg in The Optical Unconscious to the polemic between Greenberg and Rosenberg:

> *Greenberg's bitterness toward his rival Rosenberg has something exaggerated and terrifying about it, whose only equivalent today is that of Rosalind Krauss toward Greenberg himself.... The parallel has some grounds. What the "formalist" critic never forgave the inventor of "Action Painting" was that for the latter, the act apparently counted for more than the result.*[305]

For Krauss, now reading Pollock against Greenbergian formalism (with much of the revulsion she once felt for the *"psychologizing whine of 'Existentialist' criticism"*), it had become, writes de Duve, *"above all a matter of desublimating Pollock, of tearing away the Apollonian aura in which Greenberg envelops and isolates his best period, and restoring the obscure density of his doubts, his angst,..."*[306] In other words, Krauss has restored the painter (theoretically sublimated by Greenbergian Formalism)

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to his painting: the most fundamental of Rosenberg's values for art criticism.

Although it is still seen by many as the dominant paradigm for art history and criticism, and there is currently a sophisticated "neo-formalist" reaction, Greenbergian modernism has endured a relentless attack from within the discipline from the middle to late seventies to the present.[307] At the same time, a few scholars began to examine the institutionalization of the avant-garde. There is scarcely a word, however, in any of this literature about Rosenberg's decades-long polemic against the critical method that he watched become an orthodoxy capable of blinding its most capable adherents. There is barely a mention of his passionate, singular opposition to the affirmative political/cultural stance its practitioners institutionalized in the nineteen sixties and seventies.

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The Hirshorn Museum: *"An eccentric triumph"*

Not all who were associated with the museum world were attacked by Rosenberg, because not all had professional or commercial values and interests. He wrote with enthusiastic admiration, for example, about Joseph Hirshorn's collection and museum in an essay occasioned by the opening of the Hirshorn museum in October of 1974. Against an art world consensus that the collection was unprofessional and had too many unknown artists and art historical gaps, Rosenberg praised Hirshorn as an exemplary figure for precisely those reasons. At a time when Clyde Newhouse, president of the Art Dealers Association could claim at the celebratory First World Art Market Conference in 1976 that *"Every great collection has been formed by a dealer,"* and a Wall Street journalist present at the conference would confirm that *"they're a monopoly, its that simple,"*[308] Hirshorn's independence from experts in contemporary art was unique.

The Hirshorn museum, said Rosenberg, was *"an eccentric triumph."*[309] Hirshorn was the opposite of Rosenberg's art world adversaries <u>because</u> he was an amateur (in the original sense of enthusiastic devotee) who had *"bought without*

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consulting experts....

> *What comes through is a genuine sense of the art, great and small, of our lifetime - of art history as actual creative events instead of the winnowed formal specimens that preoccupy art dealers, museum staffs, and art classrooms.*[310]

Rosenberg presented the Hirshorn as the exemplary museum just as he presented Meyer Schapiro as an exemplary art historian and Arshile Gorky as an exemplary artist. Hirshorn's inclusive and amateur collection was *"a dramatic counterstatement";*[311] it was the positive pole against which Rosenberg compared the ideological and professional exhibitions of the new curators.

Hirshorn had taken chances on all kinds of new art as it was being produced and had ended up with a kind of tangled but fecund undergrowth that was to Rosenberg unquestionably superior - better for audiences, but most of all, better for artists. Not only did the disorder, abundance, and diversity more accurately represent the art history of the years the collecting had taken place, but the collection was also a much richer source of ideas for contemporary artists. *"I was very enthusiastic about the Hirshorn Museum,"* Rosenberg told an audience a year after

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his article on the Hirshorn had been published in The New Yorker:

> *What I like about it most was that he bought those pictures by the armsful, and didn't have himself trailed by curators and art historians to tell him about which were the best examples of everybody.*[312]

By contrast, it was clear to him that the international art establishment intellectuals made mass-minded decisions motivated by conventional values associated with money and professionalism. In other words, they belonged to "The Herd of Independent Minds," which Rosenberg had identified as his era's greatest threat in the 1940 declaration of intellectual purpose, "On the Fall of Paris."

By 1975 Rosenberg could claim that the professional art historian curators had taken over all the modern art museums of the world. Internationalization of the art bureaucracy had become an utterly desperate matter for art.

> *Curators of the leading museums of the world are constantly in touch with each other, and they have exactly the same taste and the same ideas. It's amazing....Show them that something is fashionable and they at once recognize that not only is it exciting to them but also historically sound. So this is like an international police force....they control all those museums....Same shows. Same taste. Same works. And don't forget, that's where the money is too.*[313]

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Rosenberg had no solutions for the artist to the problem of the overwhelming power of the moneyed establishment. Nothing could be done. *"And you might as well face it. I mean, anything that manages to survive is miraculous."* In the end it was as if Rosenberg envisioned the independent artist up against the institutionalized art world as David facing Goliath. Like David, the artist depended on chance, the miracles that spring from the inherent unpredictability of history:

> *We're forced to depend on miracles....Some guy shows up like Ralph Nader...suddenly defies General Motors, gets away with it, and becomes a very powerful force to assert values in society. Well, that's what the artist has to do. He knows that he's going to be crushed by money. General Motors is bigger than he is. He has to have faith in miraculous intervention, that's all. I mean, it's very simple. You know you've lost the game to begin with and you're all right.*[314]

In this characteristic conclusion, Rosenberg, as always when speaking of the avant-garde artist, was speaking of himself as well, since to him the independent artist and intellectual were together in Baudelaire's boat - brothers in their opposition to conformist society and its house intellectuals who provided the rationale for the commercial interests of the market and the media. His advice to

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artists in 1975 was to do what he did; that is, keep on playing one's chosen and fated part with integrity. This response satisfied no one, but it was typical of Rosenberg's evasion of general prescriptions. The figure that appears at the end of his commentary - oral or written - is most often the jester, the cosmic trickster, so to speak, flipping back into a handstand. Laughter becomes a conclusion. On the recording of the talk at New York University just quoted, for example, Rosenberg's laughter accompanies his explanation that he had known all along - though years of fierce battling with the art world - that he was playing a losing game. *"You know you've lost the game to begin with and you're all right."*

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Endnotes

1.Rosenberg, "Aesthetic Assault," review of The Boys in the Back Room, by Jules Romains, New Masses (30 March 1937):25.

2.Griselda Pollock, "Theory, Ideology, Politics: Art History and Its Myths," The Art Bulletin 78(March 1996):21.

3.Rosenberg, undated note, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. The emphasis on "total," and the alternative word choices in parentheses are Rosenberg's.

4.Rosenberg, "The Vanishing Intellectual," The New Yorker (26 June 1965). Reprinted in Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics as "The Intellectual and His Future"; this citation, p.193.

5.Ibid.

6.This is not to say that Rosenberg's focus on "art" was unique among public intellectuals of his era. Perry Anderson, in his definitive Considerations on Western Marxism (1979; New York: Verso, 1989), pointed out that *"above all, within the realm of culture itself, it was Art* [Anderson's capitalization and emphasis] *that engaged the major intellectual energies and gifts of Western Marxism."* Anderson's list, however - works by Lukács, Adorno, Benjamin, Goldmann, Sartre, Lefebvre, Della Volpe, Marcuse, Sartre and Gramsci - includes only one critical study of a visual artist, Sartre's on Tintoretto. With rare exception, "Art" in this context is literature. Furthermore, only two critical works mentioned by Perry took a living producer or contemporary production as their subject. See Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism, p.76. For the conspicuous historical scarcity of marxian cultural criticism like Rosenberg's, which focused on contemporary art and ideas, see Maynard Solomon's anthology, Marxism and Art (Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1979).

Like Anderson's Western Marxists (his category "Western Marxism" does not include American public intellectuals), the New York Intellectuals concentrated on literature, and they paid little critical attention to the visual arts or

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contemporary cultural production. Lionel Trilling, best known for his work on Matthew Arnold and E. M. Forster, expressed an overt antipathy toward contemporary American literature. See William Chace, Lionel Trilling: Criticism and Politics (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1980):72. Likewise Ronald Sukenick was struck by the degree of Irving Howe's hostility to new writers when Sukenick studied under him at Brandeis. See Ronald Sukenick, Down and In: Life in the Underground (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987):98-99.

7.James Burnham was co-editor of Symposium magazine in the early thirties and published some of Rosenberg's first essays, poems and reviews. See Part II, "Making Harold Rosenberg." Burnham came to Washington Square College in 1929. Under the influence of his colleague Sidney Hook at NYU, he was radicalized and took an active part in the American Workers Party and all the cultural political debates from the thirties forward. See Sidney Hook's sketch of Burnham in Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the Twentieth Century (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1987):192 and passim.

For further discussion of the centrality of the problem of the intellectual's role in postwar America, see Neil Jumonville, Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991); Alexander Bloom, Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World (New York: Oxford U P, 1986), Chapter 10 "The Postwar Mentality: Imagination & Affirmation"; and Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), especially Chapter 4, "New York, Jewish, and Other Intellectuals."

8.Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals, p.79.

9.Dwight Macdonald, cited by Neil Jumonville, Critical Crossings:: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991):xi.

10.Michael Wreszin, A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald (New York: HarperCollins, 1994):240.

11.Ibid.

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12.Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973):xiv.

13.Robert Payne quoted by Joseph C. Goulden, The Best Years, 1945-1950 (New York: Atheneum, 1976):426.

14.Rosenberg, "On the Fall of Paris," Partisan Review 7 (November - December 1940):440. Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.216.

15.Ibid., p.211.

16.Ibid., P.216.

17.Rosenberg, Arshile Gorky: The Man, The Time, The Idea, (New York: Sheepmeadow Press, 1962):86.

18.Rosenberg, "On The Fall of Paris," p.217.

19.Rosenberg, "Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past," Dissent 3 (Spring 1955). Edited version in The Tradition of the New; this citation, pp.236-237.

20.Rosenberg, "On the Fall of Paris," p.220.

21.Ibid.

22.Rosenberg, "The Bureaucrats," Trance Above the Streets (New York: The Gotham Bookmart Press, 1942):21.

23.Rosenberg, "Everyman a Professional" Art News 55 (November 1956). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.66.

24.Rosenberg's footnote appears in The Tradition of the New, p.209.

25.Lionel Abel telephone interview, 30 September 1992.

26.Henri Peyre, "The Rape of Academe," Art News 58 (May 1959):45.

27.Hilton Kramer, not an academic, did respond, and gave The Tradition of the New a hostile review.

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28.Alexander Bloom, Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and their World (New York: Oxford U P, 1986):177.

29.For definition of "affirmative culture" see section, "Harold Rosenberg's Modernism" in the introduction to this dissertation.

30.On the cultural impact of the shift from the prewar nationalism of the "old guard" to the internationalism of the new postwar American "business liberals," see Fred Orton, "Footnote One: The Idea of the Cold War," American Abstract Expressionism, David Thistlewood, ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool U P and Tate Gallery, 1993). Reprinted in Orton and Pollock, Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1996).

31.An allusion to The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom (1949; New York: Da Capo Press, 1988) by Arthur Schlesinger, which for many cultural and political historians defines American Cold War liberalism. Serge Guilbaut introduced The Vital Center into Abstract Expressionist discourse by making it fundamental to the thesis of How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art.

32.Irving Howe, A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982):227.

33.Wreszin, A Rebel in Defense of Tradition, p.240.

34.See John O'Brian, ed., "Introduction," Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume III, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993):xxix.

35.Irving Howe interview, New York, 21 August 1990.

36.Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer, 1957). Rosenberg added that for him (and Paul Goodman and Parker Tyler, who had left PR for the same reasons) *"the most congenial publication was View, a literary organization of strangers."*

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37.Rosenberg, "Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past," Dissent 3 (Spring 1955), and Irving Howe interview, 21 August 1990. Howe recalled with amusement the essay and the attention it brought Dissent. Rosenberg, like all Dissent authors, was not paid for his articles. When asked if he knew that Rosenberg had been publishing on art in Art News when he wrote this article, Howe said he had not known about that at the time and that although he did learn about it later, it had since slipped his mind.

38.Rosenberg, undated letter to Irving Howe, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers,New York.

39."The Orgamerican Fantasy," Prospectus 1 (November 1957):76-78; and "Fantasie Orgaméricaine," René Guyonnet, translator, Les Temps Modernes 14 (October 1958):577-589. Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, pp.283-84.

40.Diane Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987):41.

41.Ibid., pp.41-42.

42.See Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals, Chapter 2, "The Decline of Bohemia." Jacoby cites other sources throughout the book. For a general discussion on the effects of bureaucratization, although not focusing on the social world of bohemia, see Suzi Gablik, "Bureaucratization: The Death of the Avant-Garde," a chapter in Has Modernism Failed? (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984):55-72. On historical socio-economic pressures on culture in New York City, see Marshall Berman All That Is Solid Melts Into Air (New York: Simon and Schuster,1982), and Jane Jacobs' The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Random House, 1961). Jacobs attacks *"current city planning and rebuilding"* (p.3), but says little about historical causes. See, however, chapter 16, "Gradual Money and Cataclysmic Money," pp.291-317.

Postwar prosperity and the rise of consumer culture is the underlying factor that set other factors into motion. The boom of the real estate market, for example, had devastating consequences for New York's Village bohemia as

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rising rents drove out low-income writers and artists. The postwar economic boom is common knowledge, but the statistics are impressive: between 1940 and 1955 the per capita income in the USA tripled; by 1970 the 1955 level had doubled again. In exact numbers: Per capita personal income in 1940 was $539, in 1955 it was $1568, in 1970 it was $3152. [The Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1995 (115th edition) Washington DC, 1995].

43.Donald D. Egbert, "The Idea of 'Avant-garde' in Art and Politics," The American Historical Review 73 (December 1967):365-366. Egbert cites [footnote #73, p.365] William Seitz, who believed he was the first to point this out in a September 1963 article for Vogue, "The Rise and Dissolution of the Avant-garde." Seitz's article did report the situation, but it took no critical position. A similar work of cultural reportage was also cited by Egbert, an anonymous two-part essay on "The Changing Guard" in August and September of 1964 for the London Times Literary Supplement. The essay celebrated the Beats and the new affirmative criticism of Sontag and McLuhan.

44.Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals, p.39.

45.Clement Greenberg, quoted by Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde,47-48. See Greenberg's essay, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," Horizon, October 1947, in John O'Brian, ed., Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism, vol.2, Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), pp.169-170.

46.Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," Partisan Review (January 1948) O'Brian, ed., Collected Essays, Vol.2, pp.192-196.

47.Greenberg, "The Present Prospects," Collected Essays vol.2, pp.169-170.

48.Rosenberg, "From Pollock to Pop: Twenty Years of Painting and Sculpture," Holiday 39 (March 1966):104.

49. Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde, p.36.

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50.Insider versions of changes in the artists' milieu are found in biographies of the individual artists, in Dore Ashton's The New York School, and in John Gruen's The Party's Over Now: Reminiscences of the Fifties - New York's Artists, Writers, Musicians, and Their Friends, 3rd ed. (Wainscott, New York: Pushcart Press, 1989). Ronald Sukenick's Down and In: Life in the Underground (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987) embraces all "underground" American culture beginning at the end of what Sukenick calls the "High Bohemia" of the New York Intellectuals and the Abstract Expressionists in the late forties. On Rosenberg's view of the countercultures of the fifties and sixties, see "Plato's Symposium and Rosenberg's Tenth Street," in Part I, "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium."

51.Rosenberg, "Action Painting Crisis and Distortion, Encounter 20 (May 1963). Reprinted with some changes in The Anxious Object; this citation, p.40.

52.Ashton, The New York School, pp. 210-211. Ashton writes that the highest price at Mark Rothko's 1946 show at the Betty Parsons Gallery was $150. Four years later in 1950 six paintings were sold at an exhibition for $650 to $1300. Diana Crane, in The Transformation of the Avant-Garde (1987), stressed the role of the auction market in escalating the prices of contemporary American art beginning in the seventies (p.3). Before then the auction market had rarely handled this art. In 1973 a painting by Pollock was sold by a collector to a museum for $2 million. In 1983 a de Kooning painting auctioned for $1.21 million. See Crane, note #5, p.159.

53.Rosenberg, "The Pathos of the Proletariat," Kenyon Review 11 (Autumn 1949). Reprinted in Act and the Actor; this citation, p.34.

54.Rosenberg, "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion" Art News 61 (December 1962). Reprinted as "Action Painting Crisis and Distortion, Encounter 20 (May 1963). Reprinted with some changes in The Anxious Object; this citation, p.42.

55.Ibid., pp.40-41. The article is a response to Clement Greenberg, "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," Encounter

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19 (December 1962). It targets all enthusiastic sponsors of the "success" and domestication of avant-garde art: "the young academician and the old salesman"(42).

56.Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," in Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990): 246.

57.Ibid.

58.Ibid.

59.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 7 February 1972.

60.Rosenberg, lecture for a conference on "The Arts and the Public," University of Chicago, October, 1966. A version published in Discovering the Present as "Spectators and Recruiters"; this citation, p.131.

61.Thierry de Duve, Clement Greenberg Between the Lines, trans. Brian Holmes (Paris: Éditions Dis Voir, 1996):32.

62.Thierry de Duve discusses Greenberg's reception and suggests that *"it's high time to ask whose interests are served"* by the ubiquitous misreadings of Greenberg's work. See Duve, Clement Greenberg Between The Lines, p.71, n.47.

Greenberg and Rosenberg were friends in the thirties. Rosenberg and Lionel Abel introduced Greenberg into the Partisan Review circle through Dwight Macdonald in 1937-38. (John O'Brian, ed. Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1888):xxi. For Greenberg's early admiration of Rosenberg and the recollections of Martin Greenberg on the friendship, see "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium."

Clement Greenberg (interview, New York, 22 June 1990) remembered that he felt as embattled and misunderstood in the sixties as he knew Rosenberg felt:

> *Well, poor Harold felt kind of embattled, but he was in demand, His name always came ahead of mine.... Everyone wanted a piece of Harold. Oh man, was I envious.... By hindsight it's now thought that I was on top, but I was not. Pop art*

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> *went over, Minimalism, Conceptualism. Nevertheless the artists I liked managed to sell, but they weren't on top... Louis, Noland, Olitski made money without really becoming big names....And when Pollock prices began to soar...it looked like I had something to do with that. I did not. I have to tell people so often that I wasn't hot in the sixties. It looks that way now for some reason.*

Although this is possibly a somewhat disingenuous picture, it's unquestionably true that Greenberg's criticism was formatted for widespread academic use in the sixties. Since the seventies Greenberg has become something of a scapegoat for the excesses of formalist historicism. Thierry de Duve's characterization of the relationship between Greenberg and Rosenberg as *"the mimetic rivalry of... feuding brothers"*(32) seems true enough in retrospect. Meyer Schapiro implied the same fraternal agon: *"The two of them were unjust to each other."* [Schapiro, telephone interview, 20 September 1992]

63.O'Brian, ed., Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol.4, Modernism With A Vengeance, 1957-1969, p.xv.

64.Ibid. vol.3, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956, p.xxxiii.

65.Rosenberg, Letter to James Fitzsimmons (15 March 1967). Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

66.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

67.Robert Pincus-Witten, for example, told me that to him the old debate between Greenberg and Rosenberg had become a tedious cliché. [CUNY graduate seminar, spring 1988] Unquestionably Pincus-Witten is right. My point is that their argument exists as nothing else, and is *only* cliché. Clement Greenberg's critical theory has received serious attention from Donald Kuspit, Clement Greenberg: Art Critic (Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin Press, 1979), and more recently from Thierry de Duve, Clement Greenberg Between the Lines, translated by Brian Holmes (Paris, Editions Dis Voir, 1996).

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68.J. Hoberman, "Harold Rosenberg's Radical Cheek," Voice Literary Supplement, no.45 (May 1986):10.

69. Rosalind Krauss and others have strongly objected to the use of the term "Greenbergian formalism." See "An Interview with Rosalind Krauss," The Rutgers Art Review 2 (1990):55. Yves Alain Bois has likewise expressed frustration over the reduction of "formalist criticism." See "Whose Formalism?" in The Art Bulletin 78 (March 1996):9-12. My aim is not to perpetuate reductive misreadings and the old debate between the "formalists" and the "marxists"; I want to restore the purpose and complexity of Rosenberg's criticism by situating it within the history of criticism - not criticism as the critics intended, but as it was received and popularized in the classrooms and institutions of art.

70.Kay Larson, "The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg," Artforum 35 (Summer 1987):76.

71.Vincent Leitch, American Literary Criticism From the 30s to the 80s,(New York: Columbia U P,1988):24-26. Of the dominance of New Criticism in the university classroom, Leitch noted that historically, *"this transformation of a particular school into a cultural status quo distinguished New Criticism from all other competing schools."* (25, Leitch's emphasis).

72.Ibid., p.27.

73.Ann Gibson, Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press,1990):27. Gibson shows how the prestige of the New Criticism exerted pressure on the Stephens, editors of The Tiger's Eye, whose theoretical viewpoint was close to Rosenberg's, i.e. it focused on *"the connections between the poem and life."* As Gibson represents it, the argument between The Tiger's Eye and the New Critics is an analog to the debate between Rosenberg and the Greenbergian formalists.

74.Rosenberg, "Harold Rosenberg on Criticism," Artforum 11 (February 1964).

75.Karl Schorske, Fin de Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture (New York: Random House, 1981):xx.

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76.Ibid.

77.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Art on the Edge, p.140. A version of a paper read at Penn State Co-seminar on Curriculum and Research Development (30 August 1965).

78.The history of the American university system has been the subject of a number of studies, all of which stress the transformative changes brought on by the postwar boom. See Christopher J. Lucas, American Higher Education. A History (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996); Mary F. Handlin and Oscar Handlin, The American College and American Culture: Socialization as a Function of Higher Education. An Essay Written for The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1970); and Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, The Academic Revolution (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1968).

79.Goulden, The Best Years. 1945-1950, p.67. The G.I. Bill, Goulden writes, *"marked the popularization of higher education in America. After the 1940's, a college degree came to be considered an essential passport for entrance into much of the business and professional world. And mass America, once the GI Bill afforded it a glimpse at higher education, demanded no less an opportunity for successive generations. Pushed beyond their prewar capacity by the glut of veteran students, colleges and universities vastly expanded their physical plants. Once the space existed, academia filled it, and the educational boom was on.*

80.Ibid.

81.Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde, pp.9-10. Rosenberg was constantly raising the problem of educating artists under these new conditions - a situation that concerned him deeply. For one example, in 1969 he wrote:

> *Even mention of the fact that the typical artist today has been educated in a university is sufficient to provoke outcries. At a conference not long ago on cultural changes in the Americas since the war, I emphasized the shift of art training from professional schools and artists' studios. My mere citing of some figures - for example, only one of ten leading artists of the*

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> *generation of Pollock and de Kooning had a degree (and not in art), while of "thirty artists under thirty-five" shown in "Young America 1965" at the Whitney Museum the majority had B.A.s or B.F.A.s - was taken by a prominent younger painter as implying that he and his age group were academic.*

[Rosenberg, "Educating Artists," The New Yorker, 17 May 1969. Reprinted in The De-definition of Art; this citation p.39.]

Artist-critic Suzi Gablik found it alarming that in 1984 *"the education system in America fabricates as many graduate artists every five years as there were people in fifteenth-century Florence."* See Gablik, Has Modernism Failed? (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984):13-14. Gablik's emphasis.

82.Ibid.

83.Leo Steinberg, "Reflections on the State of Criticism," Artforum 10 (March 1972):38.

84.Ibid., p.43.

85.Larson, "The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg," p.76.

86.Francis Frascina, Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology Frascina and Charles Harrison, eds.(New York: Harper & Row, 1982):518.

87.Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," in Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945 -1964, a collection of papers from the 1986 symposium, "Hot Paint for Cold War," U of British Columbia, Vancouver, September 1986, Serge Guilbaut, ed.(Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1990):252. Although de Duve conscientiously distinguishes between Formalism and Modernism, both are affixed by him exclusively to the Greenberg paradigm: *"For the sake of simplicity, from now on I shall reserve the name 'Modernism as specific self-criticism and I shall use the name 'Formalism' to designate Modernism as generic quality art as art. As far as painting is concerned, 'Modernism' thus refers to its tropism toward aesthetic value as such."*(256) De Duve has returned to the disputed terms of modernism in Clement Greenberg Between the

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Lines (Paris: Éditions Dis Voir, 1996).

88.Donald Kuspit, The Critic is Artist, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research P, 1984):227.

89.Donald Kuspit, "Authoritarian Aesthetics and the Elusive Alternative," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 41, (1983):272.

90.Ibid., p.271. The crisis of criticism and the authoritarianism of the formalist aesthetic is the subject of this article. To Kuspit, the "elusive alternative" to American formalist criticism is represented by the criticism of Hans Sedlmayr, author of Art in Crisis (London 1957). According to Kuspit, Sedlmayr's exemplary approach is nonprescriptive and dialectically engages with world history. Yet nonprescriptive dialectical criticism was also Rosenberg's method, and since Rosenberg's polemic was a direct response to Greenbergian Formalism's "authoritarian aesthetics," it should have more historical relevance than Sedlmayr's.

91.Ibid., p.283. The "crisis of art criticism" has received much attention since the late sixties. See, for example, "Art Criticism in the Sixties," symposium papers presented at the Poses Institute of Fine Arts, Brandeis U (7 May 1966) by Barbara Rose, Michael Fried, Max Kozloff and Sidney Tillem with William Seitz's commentary (New York: October House, 1967); Artforum's 1967 series on "Problems in Art Criticism" defined by contributors Rose, Kozloff, Greenberg, Goldwater as a "crisis"; and Stephen Foster "Abstract Expressionism and the Crisis of Criticism" (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, upcoming). All of Rosenberg's art criticism can be considered crisis intervention from this angle of vision. In a 1987 "Public Debate With Clement Greenberg," Thierry de Duve asked about *"the present crisis."* Greenberg responded *"There's always a crisis. Excuse my rudeness, but there's always a crisis."* See Duve, Clement Greenberg Between the Lines, p.138.

92.Briony Fer, "Introduction," Modern Art: Practices and Debates, Francis Frascina, Nigel Blake, Briony Fer, Tamar Garb, Charles Harrison, Vol.I: Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century,(New Haven and

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London: Yale U.P. in Association with the Open University, 1993):13.

93.Max Kozloff interview, New York, 12 August 1993.

94.Leitch, American Literary Criticism, p.114.

95."Cultural elite" is Daniel Bell's term. The point in inserting terminology from other American cultural historians of the era is to underscore the point that Rosenberg's concerns were larger than those of the art world.

96.O'Brian, "Introduction," Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol.3, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956, p.xxix.

97.Greenberg considered Rosenberg's art criticism "megalomaniacal" for its ambitious political, sociological, psychological, cultural breadth and its objective to enrich the environment of ideas around the artist. [Greenberg interview, New York, 22 June 1990]

98.Michael Fried, "Art Criticism in the Sixties," a symposium at the Poses Institute of Fine Arts, Brandeis U,(7 May 1966). Papers by Barbara Rose, Max Kozloff, Sidney Tillem, and William Seitz, moderator.(New York: October House, 1967):8-9.

99.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

100.Clement Greenberg interview, New York, 22 June 1990.

101.John Russell, "The Action Critic," The New York Times Book Review (22 April 1979):3, 28. Occasioned by Rosenberg's memorial service at the New York Public Library.

102.Ibid., p.28.

103.Fried, "Art Criticism in the Sixties," pp.8-9.

104.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Penn State Co-seminar on Curriculum and Research Development (30 August 1965). Edited version reprinted in Art on the Edge; this citation, p.140.

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105.Ibid., p.141.

106.Paul Brach telephone interview, 20 September 1994.

107.Rosenberg, public question and answer session, New York University, "Art Critics in Residence" 1967. Tape and transcription Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

108.Dore Ashton in conversation with author, 16 September 1989.

109.Harold Baumbach interview, Brooklyn, New York, 12 October 1992.

110.Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," The New Yorker 43 (10 February 1968):92. Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.173.

111.Baudelaire, quoted by Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," Artworks and Packages, p.173.

112.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

113.For Walter Benjamin's similar perspective on "taste" as a commodity value, see Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973):104-106.

114.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Penn State Co-seminar on Curriculum and Research Development (30 August 1965). Reprinted in Art on the Edge; this citation, pp.144-145.

115.Ibid., p.145.

116.Ibid.

117.Ibid., p.147.

118.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, p.33.

119.Ibid.

120.Rosenberg, "Being Outside," The New Yorker 53 (22 August 1977). Reprinted in Art and Other Serious Matters; this

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citation, p.272.

121.Greenberg interview, New York, 22 June 1991.

122.Ibid.

123.Greenberg, "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," Encounter 135 (December 1962):1-5. Rosenberg noted on his copy of this article that *"criticism of Action Painting = notion of self-discourse linked to Existentialism."* Rosenberg saw this common equation as a reduction of his thinking. The capitalization of Existentialism signifies the crucial distinction he made between existential thought and the movement (or "ism") of the fifties, French Existentialism, which he thought superficial and formulaic in its received, popularized version. See Rosenberg's editorial, "Form and Despair," Location (Summer 1964):7-9.

124.Greenberg, "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," p.3.

125.Ibid., p.1. Rosenberg's epithets for academic and institutional art intellectuals have been drawn at random from his collected essays.

126.Herbert Read and Greenberg exchanged letters to the editor of Encounter over this article (February 1963). Read attributed Greenberg's attack on Rosenberg to *"ressentiment"* because Rosenberg *"has of late challenged Mr. Greenberg's supremacy....I think we all, Mr. Alloway no less than myself, were eventually enlightened about the significance of this new American painting by the critic Mr. Greenberg seems so concerned to denigrate. Nothing that Mr. Greenberg or anyone else has written has been so illuminating on the subject as the various articles written by Mr. Rosenberg."*

Greenberg responded that his "Art Writing" article was about the reception of Rosenberg's concept of "Action Painting" in England, not the reception of the painting itself, which he remembered, however, as having been delayed until the Action Painting essay appeared.

127.Greenberg, "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," p.4.

128.Rosenberg, "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion," Art News 61 (December 1962):45+. Published as "The Premises

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of Action Painting" in Encounter 20 (May 1963):47-50. Version published in The Anxious Object as "Action Painting: Crisis and Distortion."

129.Rosenberg, "The Premises of Action Painting," Encounter 20 (May 1963):49. The rest of the footnote acknowledges that indeed the Action Painter is "non-existent" (as an actual person or persons) just as Greenberg and many others have repeatedly complained.

130.Rosenberg, "Harold Rosenberg on Criticism," Artforum 11 (February 1964).

131.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

132.Rosenberg, "Art and Work," version of a talk given at the First World Congress of Craftsmen in New York in 1964, Craft Horizons 25 (May/June 1965), and Partisan Review 32 (Winter 1965). Reprinted in Discovering the Present; this citation, p.65.

133.Rosenberg, "Foreword" to The Anxious Object, p.18.

134.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Art on the Edge, p.140.

135.For further discussion of this point see "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium."

136.Rosenberg,"The Premises of Action Painting," p.47.

137.Rosenberg, "Art and Its Double," Artworks and Packages, p.21. This is a version of a paper entitled "Toward the End of Art History" read at the Paris Baudelaire conference, "La Découverte du Présent," January 1968.

138.Rosenberg, Foreword to The Anxious Object, p.18.

139.Karl Marx, Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, vol.1, The Process of Capitalist Production, Frederick Engels, editor, Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, translators (1867; New York: International Publishers, 1967):71-83. Though Rosenberg's criticism is marxian, he pointedly avoided the terminology of marxist criticism - terms like "commodity fetishism" and "reification" for example.

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140.On Western Marxism as primarily a critique of bourgeois culture and the seminal position of Lukàcs History and Class consciousness, see Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism (New York: Verso, 1989).

141.There are many discussions of commodification theory - reification, fetishization - and its centrality in the critique of contemporary bourgeois culture by Western Marxists. See Fredric Jameson on Jean-Paul Sartre, chapter 4, Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1971). On the Frankfurt School, see Andrew Arato, Introduction to Part II, "Aesthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism," in Arato & Eike Gebhardt, eds., The Essential Frankfurt School Reader (New York: Continuum, 1992):185-224. On Walter Benjamin, see Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991):49 and passim.

142.Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, North Carolina: Duke UP, 1991):314-315.

143.Ibid. See section, "Cultural Reification and the 'Relief' of the Postmodern," pp.313-318.

144.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 7 February 1972, p.121.

145.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

146.In 1963 Rosenberg applied for a grant from the Ford Foundation to learn more about art history. When his application was rejected, he wrote to the director: "*I should like nothing better than to believe that a writer of what you so generously call my 'stature and experience' has nothing more to learn, but without any claim to modesty I do not feel that this is the case with me. In fact I am very conscious of weakness in regard to details of art history, the very field that seemed to be covered by your program.*"(my emphasis). Carbon copy of letter to W. McNeil Lowry, Director, Ford Foundation Program in Humanities and the Arts, 30 April 1964, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

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147.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Art on the Edge, p.146

148.Rosenberg, "Paperback Art Books," The New York Times Book Review, (December 1962). This citation is from Rosenberg's typescript, p.6, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

149.Hedda Sterne interview, 6 August 1992.

150.Donald Kuspit's interpretations suggest similarities between the critical values and perspectives of Schapiro and Rosenberg. *"Schapiro is committed to the historical ideal of freedom and individuality represented by modern art rather than to the art itself, which in fact he rarely analyzes in detail."* See Kuspit,"Dialectical Reasoning in Meyer Schapiro," Social Research 45(Spring 1978):93-129. Rosenberg's dialectic, according to Kuspit, *"never negates itself and returns to the art object."* See Kuspit, "Two Critics: Thomas Hess and Harold Rosenberg," Artforum (September 1978):32-33.

151. For a political analysis of the changes in Schapiro's Marxist art history between 1937 and 1948 see Otto Karl Werckmeister, "Jugglers in a Monastery: From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos," The Oxford Art Journal 17, no.1 (1994):60-64.

152.Alexander Bloom, Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World (New York: Oxford U P, 1986):81.

153.Ibid.

154.Ibid.

155. Mark van Doren cited by Helen Epstein, "Meyer Schapiro: A Passion to Know and Make Known," Part 1, Art News (May 1983):73. Part 2 appeared in following issue, Summer 1983.

156.Hedda Sterne interview, East Hampton, 6 August 1992.

157.Saul Bellow quoted by Epstein, "Meyer Schapiro: A Passion to Know and Make Known," p.85.

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158.Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art,"Marxist Quarterly (January-March 1937):78-97.

159.Rosenberg, Cummings interview, 7 February 1972, p.121.

160.Rosenberg, undated typescript, "Form and Art's Revolt Against Illusion." Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

161.Hayden White, "Historical Interpretation," in The Politics of Interpretation (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983):130, note #19.

162.Rosenberg, "On Cave art, Church Art, Ethnic Art, Art," Art News 73 (December 1974). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.204. This is an edited transcription of a discussion with Philip Guston at the New York Studio School.

163. There are innumerable such epithets to chose from in the reception literature. *"Harold Rosenberg's bathos"* was Yves Alain Bois's description in his polemic "Whose Formalism?" in The Art Bulletin (v.78, March 1996, p.10). *"Apocalyptic"* was used by Sidney Tillem at a symposium at the Poses Institute of Fine Arts, Brandeis University, 7 May 1966, on "Art Criticism in the Sixties," [(New York: October House, 1967):22]. *"Rabid"* is Charles Harrison's description of Rosenberg's criticism in his chapter, "Abstract Expressionism," in Concepts of Modern Art, Tony Richardson and Nikos Stangos, eds. (New York: Penguin, 1974):201, note 1.

164.Many disliked these qualities of Rosenberg's style. An exchange between Rosenberg and Dwight Macdonald in Dissent (Autumn 1958) is illuminating. To Macdonald, Rosenberg's style was *"epigrammatic and gnomic...if he could just once develop a point, he'd become a serious writer."* Macdonald objected to R's "sophisticated obscurantism." *"The trouble with Rosenberg as a thinker is he's so damnably abstract."* Rosenberg's explained that his writing style was *"essentially anti-kitsch (platitude, cliché)"*:

> *The notion that to call writing 'epigrammatic and gnomic' is to set it out of bounds is a typical mass-culture (consumers') notion of writing. It's criterion is the machined 'communication'....the*

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> *tradition of epigrammatic statement as a form of the subjective, the immediate, the intuitive, the visionary, personified by Pascal, Nietzsche or René Char. But of course none of these people ever 'developed a point'..."*

165.Lionel Abel, "For Harold Rosenberg," Dissent 25 (Fall 1978):364.

166.Saul Bellow, "Harold Rosenberg," essay for University of Chicago Harold Rosenberg Memorial Exhibition catalog (1978), p.11.

167.Ibid.

168."Animating spirit" is Irving Howe's characterization of the style of modernism in "The Culture of Modernism," Decline of the New (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970):12. For Howe, postmodern styles displayed no such animating spirit: *"is that not a useful shorthand for describing much of the 'advanced writing' of the years after World War II?"* To Howe, Rosenberg's essay style was literary and modernist. (Howe interview, 21 August 1990).

169."Tenth Street School" refers to the "second generation" of Abstract Expressionists who emerged in the fifties, attended the Club, lived and worked in the neighborhood, and established cooperative galleries on Tenth Street. "The New York School" is Irving Sandler's designation for these artists. Others called them "The de Kooning School." See Irving Sandler, The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); and Sandler's catalog essay on "Tenth Street Then and Now," The East Village Scene, exh.cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, U of Pennsylvania (October 12 - December 2, 1984):10-19.

Rosenberg admired only a few of these painters. His "Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art" is a 1954 meditation on the meaning of the place itself - its absence of style and the inevitability of its demolition.[Art News Annual 1954. Reprinted in Discovering the Present, pp.100-109].

170.Paul Brach, letter to author, 28 September 1994

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171.Hilton Kramer interview, 2 June 1993.

172.Lawrence Alloway, "The Ready-Made Crisis," a review of Artworks and Packages, The Nation 209 (17 November 1969):344.

173.Richard Howard, a review of Artworks and Packages, Craft Horizons 30 (March 1970):9.

174.Paul Valéry, "Our Destiny and Literature"(1937), The Outlook for Intelligence (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U P, 1989):167. I am aware that this perspective is not unique to Valéry, but Rosenberg infallibly cited Valéry when specifically addressing the life (and crisis) of the contemporary mind.

175.Rosenberg, letter to Robert Coates (4 January 1966). Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

176.Paul Brach, Cynthia Navaretta, Michelle Cone, Max Kozloff and others have confirmed that the art world did not read Rosenberg on other topics. In 1975 Pat Pasloff noted on hearing Rosenberg lecture on modernism at Cooper Union that *"Clearly he is accustomed to being misread, if read at all."* Mutiny and the Mainstream, (New York: Midmarch Press, 1992): 10. Originally published in Women in the Arts Newsletter 2, no.6, March 1975.

Similarly, literary and political intellectuals didn't read Rosenberg's art criticism. Irving Howe said he knew very little about art or the art world, and that he didn't see Rosenberg as an art critic but *"as an intellectual coping with the questions of a particular historical moment."* (Irving Howe interview, 21 August 1990). To Lionel Abel it was a shame that Rosenberg had spent so much of himself on the American art world. (Abel interview, 17 November 1993).

177.Rosenberg, "Great Expectations," a commencement address for the Maryland Institute College of Art, 26 May 1971. A version was published as "On the De-Definition of Art," Art News 70 (December 1971), and serves as the introduction to the De-Definition of Art; this citation, p.14.

178.Rosenberg, "Preface," Act and the Actor, p.xxii.

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179.Ibid., p.xxiii.

180.Saul Bellow, "Harold Rosenberg," essay for University of Chicago memorial exhibition catalog (1978), p.11.

181.Rosenberg's essay on Philip Guston's new style was "Liberation from Detachment," The New Yorker (7 November 1970). Reprinted in The De-Definition of Art; this citation, p. 140. On the reception of Guston's new painting style, see Robert Storr, Philip Guston (New York: Abbeville, 1986).

182.Philip Guston, letter to Rosenberg from Rome, 8 December 1970. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

183.Rosenberg, The Case of the Baffled Radical, p.206.

184.Ibid.

185.Rosenberg, "Up Against the News," a review of The Mask of State, and The Seventeenth Degree by Mary McCarthy, The New York Review of Books (31 October 1974):16.

186.Rosenberg, handwritten notes from file "Notes for Location," n/d (1964). Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

187.Rosenberg, undated note, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

188.June Wayne interview, Los Angeles, 19 March 1992.

189.Christopher Jencks & David Riesman, The Academic Revolution (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company,1968):12.

190.Ibid.

191.Rosenberg, "Themes," Discovering the Present: Three Decades of Art, Culture, & Politics. p. 202.

192. Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," The New Yorker 43 (10 February 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.177. Discovering the Present is also the title of a 1972 collection of Rosenberg's essays.

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193.Rosenberg, "Criticism and Its Premises," Pennsylvania State Seminar on Research and Curriculum Development, 30 August - 7 September, 1965. Reprinted in Art on the Edge, this citation p.142.

194.Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," Art News (December 1952). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.33.

195.Rosenberg, undated typescript, "Form and Art's Revolt Against Illusion." Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

196.James Fitzsimmons, Letter to Rosenberg, 20 February 1967. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

197.Rosenberg, letter to James Fitzsimmons, 15 March 1967. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers.

198.Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," The New Yorker 43 (10 February 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.172.

199.Hayden White, "Historical Interpretation," in The Politics of Interpretation (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983):130, footnote #19.

200.Rosenberg, "Set Out For Clayton!" The New Yorker 46 (2 January 1971). Reprinted in The De-Definition of Art; this citation, p.249. The complete sentence: *"In splitting form from content, Marcuse locates himself firmly in the academic tradition."*

201.On this attitude, see Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals 245-250 & passim. Irving Howe characterized the interpersonal relations of the Partisan Review writers as *"closer to the vision of life we associate with Hobbes than with Kropotkin."* (Cooney, p.245).

202.According to his daughter, Patia Yasin, Rosenberg thought it unimaginable for him to live anywhere other than New York City.

203.Irving Howe interview, 21 August 1990. Howe found this tough side of Rosenberg's style amusing.

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204.Ibid. For Rosenberg's view of himself as a New York street kid, see the Dorothy Sackler interview of Rosenberg for the Archives of American Art (28 June 1967).

205.Lionel Abel, "Virile Sophistication," a review of The Tradition of the New, The Kenyon Review 21 (Summer 1959):491.

206.Kramer quoted by Bloom, Prodigal Sons, p.5.

207.Rosenberg, "The Art Scene: Then and Now," The Partisan Review, 42 (Winter 1975). Reprinted in Art and Other Serious Matters; these appellations for Kramer, pp.40-41.

208.Hilton Kramer, "The Revenge of the Philistines: Tom Wolfe & Avant-Garde Chic," Commentary (May 1975):35-40.

209.Hilton Kramer, interview, New York, 2 June 1993. Kramer believes that Rosenberg had forbidden May Tabak to speak to Kramer, and that Rosenberg held a grudge against him for his criticism of "The American Action Painters" and The Tradition of the New. For the origin of Rosenberg's animosity, see the introduction to this dissertation.

210.Rosenberg, "The Art Scene: Then and Now," Art and Other Serious Matters, p.40.

211.Ibid.

212.William Phillips, letter to Rosenberg (3 April 1975). Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

213.Rosenberg, letter to William Phillips, written on Phillips's letter dated 3 April 1975. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

214.Rosenberg, letter to Irving Howe (23 May 1977). Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

215.Ibid.

216.Rosenberg, "The Old Age of Modernism," The New Yorker (5 August 1974):66. Reprinted in Art on the Edge; this citation, p. 281.

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217.Robert Indiana quoted by Gerald Marzorati, "Report on the First World Art Market Conference," Artworkers' News 6 (November 1976), in Judy Seigel, ed., Mutiny and the Mainstream: Talk That Changed Art, 1975-1990 (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1992):50.

218.Barbara Rose, American Art Since 1900 (1967 New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1975):124.

219.Duchamp quoted by Gablik, Has Modernism Failed?, p.12.

220.Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-Garde, pp.119 and 121.

221.Ibid., p.120.

222.Ibid., pp.126-127.

223.Ibid., p.6.

224.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

225.Ibid.

226.Ibid.

227.Rosenberg, "A Risk for the Intelligence," The New Yorker (27 October 1962). Reprinted in The Anxious Object as "Past and Possibility"; this citation, p.31.

228.Rosenberg, "The Old Age of Modernism," Art on the Edge, p.283.

229.Rosenberg, "The Thirties," The New Yorker (30 November 1968). Reprinted in The De-Definition of Art; this citation, page 185.

230.Rosenberg, "Reverence is All," Discovering the Present, p.135.

231.Rosenberg, "Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past," Dissent 3 (Spring 1955). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, pp. 221-222.

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232.Totalitarianism has preoccupied Western public intellectuals generally, not just Rosenberg. As early as 1937 in the Partisan Review New York Intellectuals had called both Soviet Communism and Nazism "totalitarian." The literary criticism of Rosenberg's friend, Kenneth Burke, is overall a critique of what he called "totalitarianism of the mind."

233.Rosenberg, "Reverence is All," Discovering the Present, p.137.

234.Ibid.

235.Ibid.

236.Howe, "The New York Intellectuals," Decline of the New, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982):228.

237.Jumonville, Critical Crossings, p.xiii.

238.Walter Benjamin, "Theses on The Philosophy of History" (1940), Hannah Arendt, ed., Illuminations,(New York: Schocken Books, 1968):255

231.John Tagg, "American Power and American Painting: The Development of Vanguard Painting in the United States since 1945," Praxis 1 (September 1977):63. Since the late seventies there has been an ongoing discussion concerning the political significance of the autonomous posture assumed by US art history and criticism during the Cold War. See, for example, Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, "*Avant-Gardes* and Partisans Reviewed," Art History 4(September 1981):305-327, and essays collected in Francis Frascina, ed., Pollock and After: The Critical Debate (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

240.Rosenberg, "Ecole de New York," The New Yorker 45 (6 September 1969). Reprinted in The De-Definition of Art; this citation, p.189.

241.Ibid., p.190.

242.Ibid., p.198.

243.Ibid., p.190.

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244.Ibid., p.193.

245.Ibid.

246.According to his daughter, Patia Yasin, Rosenberg was obsessed with the Eichmann Trial. She remembers that their apartment was covered with books and papers about it for what seemed to her to be years.

247.Rosenberg, "Trial and Eichmann," Commentary 32 and 33 (October 1961) and (March 1962). Edited version reprinted in Act and the Actor; this citation, p.171.

248.Ibid.

249.Rosenberg, "The Thirties," The New Yorker (30 November 1968). Reprinted in The De-definition of Art; this citation, p.185.

250.Rosenberg, "MOMA Dada." The New Yorker (18 May 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.212.

251.Rosenberg, Letter to the editor, Dissent 3 no.1 (Winter 1956):93.

252.Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," Midstream (Summer 1957). Reprinted in The Tradition of the New; this citation, p.255.

253.Thomas Messer, director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum, quoted by Gerald Marzorati, "First World Art Market Conference," Artworkers News 6(November 1976), in Judy Seigel, ed., Mutiny and the Mainstream: Talk That Changed Art 1975-1990 (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1992):49-50.

254.Rosenberg, "The Museum Today," The De-definition of Art, p.235.

255. Allan Kaprow, Essays on The Blurring of Art and Life, Jeff Kelley, ed.,(Berkeley: U of California P, 1993):56.

256.Rosenberg, "The Old Age of Modernism," The New Yorker 50 (5 August 1974). Reprinted in Art on the Edge; this citation, p.265.

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257.William Barrett, The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982):10.

258.Rosenberg, "A Risk for the Intelligence," The New Yorker (27 October 1962). Reprinted in The Anxious Object as "Past and Possibility"; this citation, pp.28-29.

259.Ibid.

260.Ibid.

261.Rosenberg, "The New as Value," The New Yorker (7 September 1963). Reprinted in The Anxious Object; this citation, p.232.

262.Ibid., pp.227-228.

263.Rosenberg, "Young Masters, New Critics," The New Yorker 46 (6 June 1970):54. Reprinted in The De-definition of Art; this citation, p.131.

264.Rosenberg admitted to an audience at Southampton College, 7 June 1970, that his categorical dismissal of certain artists and intellectuals was a rhetorical strategy:

> *When any critic is very enthusiastic about an artist, he always devotes himself to distinguishing him from everybody else. When he's not so enthusiastic, he always puts him in a category. This is an old strategy, and there's no other way of doing it....*

(Taped recording, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.)

265.Rosenberg, "Young Masters, New Critics," The De-definition of Art, p.130.

266.Ibid., p.131.

267.Ibid.

268.Ibid., p.127.

269.Ibid., pp.128-129.

270.However a number of artists were saying the same thing as Rosenberg at this time. In 1964 Ad Reinhardt told a

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London audience that 1950 was the year *"when the revolution became an institution, when the avant garde became official art."* Andy Warhol's affirmative art is a powerful and conscious parodic exploitation/criticism of the absorption of the avant-garde into commodity culture. Artist/critics like Allan Kaprow recognized the pressures of the institutionalization of the avant-garde by the mid-sixties. See Kaprow's Essays on The Blurring of Art and Life (1993).

Peter Bürger's Theory of the Avant-Garde (1974 in German) examined the post-avant-garde from the perspective of the changing historical relationship between the avant-garde and art as institution in bourgeois society.(Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984). In the early seventies there were many attacks on Greenbergian formalism in art journals. Criticism of Cold War governmental and corporate manipulation of the international reception of Abstract Expressionism began with Max Kozloff and Eva Cockcroft in 1973 and 1974 respectively. As has been noted, Serge Guilbaut and British revisionist social historians of American postwar art, like John Tagg, T.J. Clark, Griselda Pollock and Fred Orton, developed this critique further.

Particularly noteworthy in the context of Rosenberg's anti-institutional art criticism is John Tagg's 1977 comment that

"The effect the welcoming of artists into such institutions had on their work has yet to be researched in detail. That the history of their work was written by scholars from such institutions had directly observable consequences." (Praxis I, no.3, p.76).

See also Michael Kimmelman's 1994 rebuttal to such criticism of American art world institutions on behalf of MoMA, "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," in The Museum of Modern art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994):39-55. Kimmelman (note #75, p.55) quotes T.J. Clark's disappointed observation that the 1980s investigation of the relationship between Abstract Expressionism, Cold War polity, patrons and art world institutions have *"proved their point and offended all the right people,"* but *"turned out not to have the sort of upshot for interpretation that the storytellers had been hoping for."* [Clark, October,(Summer 1994):26.]

For a week-by-week documentation of the ceaseless

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debates in the New York art world between 1975-1990 from the point of view of feminist artists outside the academy and the institutions of the mainstream art world and attempting to overcome "mainstream" avantgardism, see Judy Seigel, ed. Mutiny and the Mainstream: Talk That Changed Art, 1975-1990 (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1992)

271. Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," Arts Magazine 64 (January 1990):62.

272.Robert Rosenblum's first words to me on finding out the subject of this dissertation. October 1993.

273.The Museum of Modern Art, New York. "The Natural Paradise: Painting in America 1800-1950," Oct.1 - Nov. 30, 1976.

274.Rosenberg's views are characteristic of the New York Intellectuals who as a group advocated European modernism and cosmopolitanism and opposed American nativism. See Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals, pp.259-260.

275.Tom Wolfe, The Painted Word (New York: Bantam Books, 1976):36. According to Wolfe "Ellis Island art" was coined in 1923 by Royal Cortissoz, a conservative antimodernist art critic who, with Wolfe's evident approval, *"compared the alien invasion of European modernism to the subversive alien hordes coming in by boat."*

276.Rosenberg, "Tenth Street, A Geography of Modern Art," Art News Annual, (New York: Macmillan) 1954. Reprinted in Discovering the Present, this citation, p.101.

277.Ibid., p.101-102.

278.Rosenberg, "MOMA Package," The New Yorker 52 (1 November 1976). Reprinted in Art and Other Serious Matters, pp.229-238.

279.Ibid., p.232.

280.Ibid., p.230.

281.Genesis 27:23.

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282.Rosenberg, "MOMA Package," The New Yorker 52 (1 November 1976). Reprinted in Art and Other Serious Matters; this citation, p.229.

283.Ibid., p.235.

284.Ibid.

285.Ibid.

286.Ibid., pp.235-236.

287.Sanford Schwartz had reviewed the exhibition in the January/February, 1977 issue of Art in America and had come to the same conclusions as Rosenberg about Rosenblum's role in "The Natural Paradise."

288.Rosenblum, Letter to Rosenberg, 20 April 1977. Rosenberg/Tabak Papers.

289.Rosenberg, Letter to Robert Rosenblum, 1 May 1977, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

290.Rosenberg, "Fertile Fields." The New Yorker 48 (23 December 1972). Reprinted in Art on the Edge with "Avant-garde Masterpieces" [The New Yorker (12 November 1973)] as "Miró: Fertile Fields," pp.22-38.

291.Ibid., p.27.

292.Ibid.

293.Margit Rowell, co-curator of the 1972 Miró exhibition, was sympathetic to Rosenberg's ideas about art and artists at this time. See her La peinture, le geste, l'action: l'existentialisme en peinture (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1972).

294.Rosenberg, "Fertile Fields," p.27.

295.Ibid., p.29.

296.Leitch, American Literary Criticism, p.59.

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297.Rosalind Krauss, "A View of Modernism," Artforum 11 (September 1972):48-51. Donald Judd had condemned the "Greenbergers" as early as 1964 in Studio International. Up to 1974 and Max Kozloff's influence as an editor, Artforum was largely considered the organ of academic formalism. According to Jack Bankowsky it had earned a label as both *"a bastion of high-toned pedagogy"* and *"the primary organ of thought on the vanguard arts"* in the sixties. See *"Etc. Etc., Editor's Letter,"* Artforum, 30th Anniversary Issue (September 1993):3.

298.Charles Harrison, "Abstract Expressionism," in Tony Richardson and Nikos Sangos, eds., Concepts of Modern Art (New York: Harper & Row, 1974):201, note #1.

299.Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," Art in America 53(October/November 1965). Reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1968); this citation, p.280.

300.Krauss, "A View of Modernism," Artforum 11 (September 1972): p.49.

301.Krauss, "We Lost it at the Movies," a contribution to "A Range of Critical Perspectives: The Subject in/of Art History," Art Bulletin (December 1994):579. I am focusing on Krauss because as far as I know she is the only one of the critics formerly associated with Greenbergian formalism who has publicly reflected on her intellectual autobiography from the sixties to the present.

302.Stuart Morgan, "Shadows on Picasso's Wall: Modernist Art History Reconsidered - With Autobiography Tossed In," a review of The Optical Unconscious, by Rosalind Krauss, The New York Times Book Review (19 September 1993):28.

303.Krauss in conversation with author, New York, 5 October 1991.

304.Krauss presented a self-criticism of her early interpretation of Miró at the Museum of Modern art at a lecture given on the occasion of the Joan Miró exhibition 17 October 1993 - 11 January 1994. There are other parallels between Rosenberg and the recent attitudes of Krauss that

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bear on Rosenberg's fight with American academic formalists. One is Krauss's interest in institutional critique. Another are the political/ethical concerns about the independence of criticism that motivated the founding of October magazine in 1976 with Annette Michelson. Indeed, the early Partisan Review was a model of independence from academic and market pressures on criticism. The name October in fact alludes to the Eisenstein film and the trouble Russian modernists had with Stalinist anti-formalism. See Gregory Gilbert and Richard Paley, "An Interview with Rosalind Krauss," The Rutgers Art Review 2 (1990):53-68.

305.Thierry de Duve, Clement Greenberg Between the Lines (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1996):32-33.

306.Ibid., p.33.

307.Yves Alain Bois has described how this moment in the history of American formalism appeared to him when he and Jean Clay entered the scene: *"we discovered...that the vast corpus of American criticism of the late '60s and early '70s...was largely dominated by a reaction against Greenberg. But the terms of this reaction were still entirely ruled by the tenor of his theory."* Painting as Model (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990):xvii.

308.Clyde Newhouse and an unidentified reporter for Wall Street Weekly quoted in Gerald Marzorati, "First World Art Market Conference" 29 and 30 October 1976, Artworkers News 6, no.7 (November 1976), in Mutiny and the Mainstream, p.49.

309.Rosenberg discussion of "Art and Technological Society" (12 March 1969). Recording, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York.

310.Rosenberg, "The Hirshorn," The New Yorker (4 November 1974). Reprinted in Art and Other Serious Matters. This citation, pp. 36-37.

311.Ibid., p.37.

312.Rosenberg, New York University question and answer session, 1975. Taped recording, Rosenberg/Tabak Papers, New York. Rosenberg's edited versions, which appeared in Craft

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Horizons (August 1975), and in The Case of the Baffled Radical as "All About Everything," do not include this discussion of the international art bureaucracy.

313.Ibid.

314.Ibid.

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The Art Criticism of Harold Rosenberg
Theaters of Love and Combat

Conclusion

Theater of Combat

> *The irony of the occasion was that the enemy of scholars and technicians was being honored by a few artists but mostly by scholars and technicians.*[1]
>
> Rosenberg (1968)

The occasion that drew the above comment from Harold Rosenberg was an international colloquium in Paris honoring Charles Baudelaire as an art critic. The purpose of the conference, La Découverte du Présent, a title Rosenberg took for his own as "Discovering the Present," was, he told his New Yorker "Art World" readers, to propose Baudelaire's poetic criticism

> *...as an alternative to the servility and computer mentality prevalent in current writing on art....the kind of art criticism that deals with art objects as belonging to a realm sealed off from the space-time of the human condition.*[2]

There is no question that Rosenberg was speaking for

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himself through Baudelaire. "Discovering the Present" was another polemic against the "scholars and technicians" of his own art world a century after Baudelaire's death, and a transparent statement of how he defined his own axiological position. Like Baudelaire, Rosenberg was the poet-critic and lover of artists; he too was *"the enemy of scholars and technicians."*

Rosenberg's writings on American contemporary art were unstintingly *"partial, passionate and political,"* as Baudelaire had enjoined.[3] And though his Baudelairean critical posture and literary style were favored by the artists of his intimate community (Barnett Newman, for example, delivered a paper asking *"For Impassioned Criticism"*[4] at the Paris Baudelaire conference), on each count it was antithetical to the impartial, moderate, and apolitical posture he so criticized in his academic opponents.

Rosenberg's animosity for the new art professionals of the sixties and seventies was not merely theoretical. It was ontological, deriving from what he called his "mythological substance," his self-created identity.[5] His relentless assault must be understood as retaliation for

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what he saw as intolerable attempts to alter the figure to whom he was devoted: the independent artist. His art criticism was the fruit of an inextricable hate and love raised rhetorically to the mythic level of the Old Testament and Greek tragedy and comedy.

It was to defend his theater of love - the ideological and interpersonal space of inspiration and freedom for the independent artist - that in one article after another Rosenberg battered the academic critics and curators - most of them Greenbergian formalists whom he represented as a new *"priesthood of historico-criticism [that] undertakes to protect the arts against its practitioners."*[6] Rosenberg felt this "priesthood" served art objects as if they were idols of a new religion, but showed no love or care for the critical, creative mind of the living artist. In contrast to Rosenberg's art criticism, which I have characterized as a lover's discourse in which the critic is the artist's "perfect interlocutor," Rosenberg accused the art historian critics of an envious *ressentiment*, of wishing to supersede the living artist, and erase from collective memory the inspiriting creative struggles of precursor artists.

In 1975 Rosenberg laughed when he told two young

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English art critics that *"criticism has been run over and trampled to death by art history!"*[7] A few months before he died in 1978 Rosenberg told another interviewer that he looked back on it all as a personal defeat:

> *I was defeated in the sixties by the overriding power of the public relations of what I consider to be terrible art. There was nothing I could do about it....You keep repeating over and over again that X...is not even an artist....He belongs to the history of the decade and his "work" can bring all sorts of fancy prices from collectors and becomes a staple part of the museums....I've said it and it's produced no effect whatsoever, except to bring denunciations."*[8]

*

In his memorial essay for Rosenberg, Lionel Abel used military metaphors to eulogize his friend of fifty years, as if he were honoring a dead warrior. Abel presented Rosenberg as one of a dying generation of intellectuals and artists who had manned the cultural barricades since the thirties. The list of the fallen included Lionel Trilling, Barnett Newman, Nicola Chiaromonte, Lucien Goldmann, Philip Rahv, Paul Goodman, and Mark Rothko. In Abel's memory,

> *It was as if we had all stood on the top of a fortress surrounded by enemy troops, each one of us with a gun to be fired.*[9]

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Not just Abel, but nearly every obituarist wrote that Rosenberg's death marked the end of an era. For each of them Rosenberg had embodied the spirit of his time. *"Harold Rosenberg's death...brought to an end an era in American art and letters,"* wrote Brandon Taylor.[10] To Hilton Kramer, *"it is no exaggeration to say we are witnessing the closing of a period."*[11] To Seymour Krim, *"Rosenberg's going sweeps a period with it."*[12] And for Mary McCarthy,

> *Harold's death was the conclusion of a series, which began with Heinrich Bluecher, went on with Philip Rahv, Nicola Chiaromonte, Edmund Wilson, Hannah Arendt, and finishes with him. He was the last tall pine in the forest to go down.*[13]

His era's idea incarnate, then, consigned to history. Yet nearly two decades after his death what is there of Rosenberg in the historical accounts? In histories of Abstract Expressionism, Rosenberg's name almost always appears, but with rare exception it is as a tag for the same two or three tirelessly reiterated clichés about Action Painting attended by the same one or two quotations. Rosenberg's passionate and singular assault on the officialdom of the art world in the sixties and seventies is

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absent from the record. Nor, for that matter, have Rosenberg's art historian adversaries themselves assessed the impact of art history (which is, as I have quoted Griselda Pollock: "*the cumulative effect of all the concrete practices in colleges, museums, and publishing houses*"[14]) on contemporary art production in the United States during those decades.

The academization of intellectual life since Rosenberg's time - especially academic specialization - does, I think, substantially account for the large volume of brief and introductory commentary on Rosenberg's criticism. A freewheeling autodidactic intelligence with Rosenberg's expansive range overlaps many university disciplines - art, literature, politics, philosophy, sociology, intellectual history, psychology, etc., etc. - and cannot be contained by any one without doing serious damage to his thought. But for the discipline of art history I believe there is a unique additional factor.

It is evident to me that the irony that Rosenberg found in the Baudelaire conference at least partly explains the shape and direction of Rosenberg's own reception - an art world reception I have already suggested he anticipated and

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even invited.[15] Rosenberg's art criticism, like Baudelaire's, served the living painter of modern life. But the artists to whom Rosenberg was devoted did not write his place in the history of art. That task was left to the art historians of a generation he dismissed almost in its entirety as "scholars and technicians." In other words, Rosenberg's historiographical fate has taken its form and direction largely from the fact that it was left to those who not only subscribed to a modernist paradigm that left them ideologically blind to his critical purposes, but more importantly, those for whom Rosenberg had rarely exhibited anything other than the "murderous impulses" he admittedly relished exercising - verbal attacks that ranged from belittling mockery to annihilating scorn. How much doubt can there be that Rosenberg's interpretive history would be skewed (or ignored) because of the anger of the victims of his unrestrained assault? These would include "aesthetes" who Rosenberg believed too happily served the moneyed powers that be, like Hilton Kramer and other "Arts and Leisure" writers for The New York Times. But more significantly, they were those who became the primary historians of American postwar art - the "professors," the Ph.D. art

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historian critics and curators whom Rosenberg failed to defeat but succeeded in publicly embarrassing. Among them were Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Robert Rosenblum, William Rubin, Henry Geldzahler, and very many others - all important critics, curators, and historians of American art.

Theater of Love

> *Nineteen forty-six to 1952 or 1953 was a remarkable period in American art, and no period since has come close to equaling it.*
>
> Harold Rosenberg 1969[16]

> *THERE IS NOT ONE SINGLE SOLITARY ARTIST HERE TONIGHT!*
>
> May Tabak, A Collage[17]

Nothing could depict the end of Rosenberg's bohemian community of artists and writers more intimately than the final episode in May Tabak's memoir, A Collage. The story closes the last chapter, "Patrons: The Last Party," about the infiltration of the Abstract Expressionist community by the wealthy middle class. Before any of their circle really

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understood what was happening, Tabak recalls, suddenly *"the boys'....Bohemian style had become de rigeur"* among the chic, and offered in Vogue and Harper's Bazaar.[18] By the time of "the last party," probably sometime in the middle to late fifties,

> *...a conclave of these sophisticated bourgeois - to put it simply - had congregated in the Hamptons, each couple with their newly-acquired old lawns and mansion restored to original splendor brought up to date; each with their own culled collection of avant-garde masterpieces bought when the price was right.*[19]

Here is Tabak's story of "the last party": The Rosenbergs had returned to Springs from a week or so in Provincetown. In the mail was an invitation for a party that night at the home of some "rich young collectors." Both of the Rosenberg's loved parties, and by all accounts, since the very beginning in the early forties, it was a rare night when there was not a party in the summertime Abstract Expressionist colony. According to one original settler, Cynthia Navaretta, as long as somebody had a bottle, they had their party - a kind of movable feast.[20] The rich collectors' party, however, was quite different. Its lavishness was described in some detail by Tabak as she

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wandered around and listened to knowing pronouncements on artists' work and bits of conversation about European art tours for connoisseurs. *"I stopped by Harold, who asked, 'Find out where everyone is?' He seemed as restless as I, but he'd come right to the heart of the matter. Where was everyone?"* Tabak went looking for their friends. But to her surprise,

> *I knew everyone there - the lawyers, the designers, the architects, the critics, the museum staffers, the shrinks, the collectors, the dealers, even the big-time framers. It looked as if everyone in the art world was there. I covered the lot. Twice. I returned to Harold. 'Well?' he greeted me. I flopped into the chair beside him. 'Well,' I replied, 'This is some party. The place is crowded with art lovers. Every kind. But get this. I've looked high and low. I've combed the place. THERE IS NOT ONE SINGLE SOLITARY ARTIST HERE TONIGHT!* (Tabak's capitalization) *Get it? There are none of the boys here; none of the girls. There is not one artist here tonight!*[21]

In silent agreement the two made their immediate exit as discreetly as they could manage in their haste, but once inside their car they let themselves laugh freely and derisively at the outrageous joke: an art world party without any artists, without any of their friends. *"We'd been gone for more than a week, but we were not back yet.*

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Still laughing, we drove off to find our party."[22]

It would be good to end this dissertation with the laughter of May Tabak and Harold Rosenberg as they drove off to join the group of friends who had for a time made concrete Rosenberg's ideal world of the Symposium - his "true collectivity in art" - a bohemian community bonded paradoxically by common nonconformist values and the eros of creative friendship. But after "the last party" in the Hamptons two decades of Rosenberg's life were still to pass.

A friend from the early thirties, the writer, Harry Roskolenko, offers a final anecdotal glimpse at what happened to Rosenberg's communal dream and reality. Roskolenko's 1979 memorial essay for Rosenberg concludes with a conversation the two of them had had *"some years back"* over a drink at Rosenberg's East Tenth Street apartment. While Rosenberg wrote a few lines for the back of one of Roskolenko's books, the latter recalled, *"I asked Harold why he no longer gave his famous parties. He said, 'Nearly everybody I know does not talk to everybody else I know - so what kind of a party would that be?'"*[23]

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Endnotes

1.Rosenberg, "Discovering the Present," The New Yorker (10 February 1968). Reprinted in Artworks and Packages; this citation, p.178.

2.Ibid., p.170.

3.Herbert Read used this famous Baudelairean injunction as the title of his review of Rosenberg's The Anxious Object, "Partial, Passionate and Political," Dissent 12 (Spring 1965):244-247. Dore Ashton and others have also noted the affinity with Baudelaire. See chapter "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium."

4.Published in ART News 67 (Summer 1968) and reprinted in Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews, John O'Neill, ed.(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990):130-136.

5.On the idea of "mythological substance" see "Harold Rosenberg's Symposium," "Conclusion: The 'Mythological Substance.'"

6.Rosenberg, "Spectators and Recruiters," Discovering the Present, p.131. The essay is a version of "The Vanishing Spectator," a lecture delivered at a conference on "The Arts and the Public," U. Of Chicago Humanities Division, October 1966. Published in The Arts and the Public, James E. Miller and Paul Hessing, eds., (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966).

7.Rosenberg, Walker interview, 1 January 1975.

8."What is Art? An Interview by Melvin M. Tumin with Harold Rosenberg," Partisan Review 45,no.4 (Fall 1978). Reprinted in The Case of the Baffled Radical; this citation, p.261. The PR interview was conducted on 10 January 1978 and published after Rosenberg's death on July 11, 1978.

9.Lionel Abel, "For Harold Rosenberg," obituary essay, Dissent 25 (Fall 1978):363.

10.Brandon Taylor, "Harold Rosenberg Remembered," Art Monthly (July, August 1979):4.

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11.Hilton Kramer, "Art View: An Era in Art Comes to an End," The New York Times (16 July 1978).

12.Seymour Krim, "Remembering Harold Rosenberg," Commentary (November 1978):65.

13.Mary McCarthy, "Ideas Were the Generative Force of His Life," The New York Times Book Review (6 May 1979):12.

14.Griselda Pollock, "Theory, Ideology, Politics: Art History and Its Myths." The Art Bulletin 78 (March 1996):21. Pollock's definition is part of an epigraph to my chapter "Aesthetic Assault."

On the paucity of institutional art histories generally, Patricia Mainardi has suggested that its cause might in fact be the dominance of the formalist method, which precludes such an approach to art history. See Mainardi, "Introduction," The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1994):1-7.

15.For Rosenberg's attitude toward historical immortality and creating followers from the young art critics of the time, see the introduction to this dissertation.

16."Ecole de New York," The New Yorker (6 September 1969): 171. Reprinted in The De-definition of Art; this citation, p.193.

17.Tabak, A Collage, p.570. Patia Yasin remembers that she typed the draft of A Collage in 1982, and that her mother had worked on it off and on for a number of years.

18.Ibid., p.559.

19.Ibid., p.562.

20.Cynthia Navaretta interview, New York, 13 October 1995.

21.Tabak, A Collage, p.570.

22.Ibid.

23.Harry Roskolenko, "Harold Rosenberg, 1906-1978," Art International 23 (September 1979):62-63.

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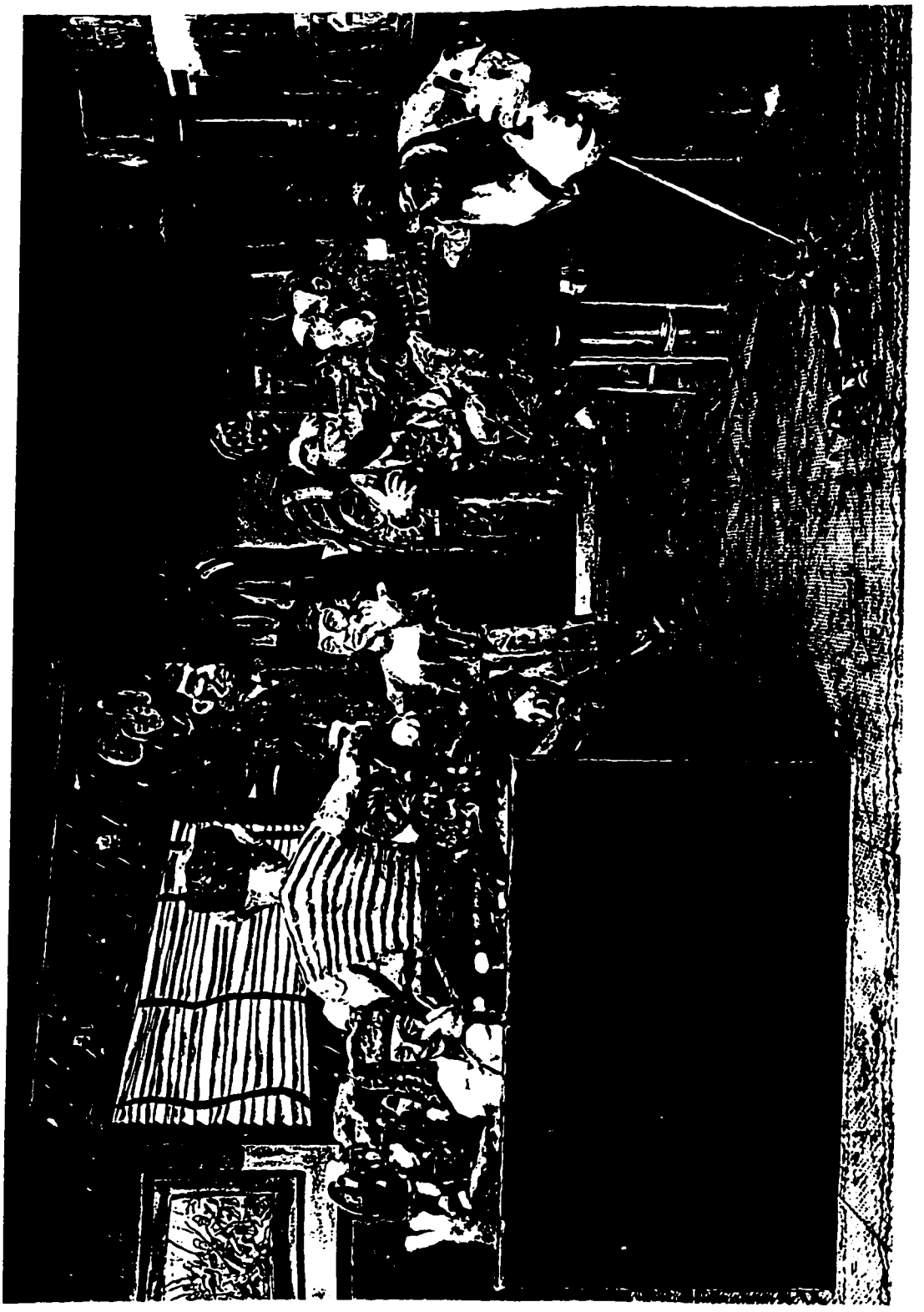


Figure 1 - Red Grooms, The Cedar Bar. 1986

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Figure 2 - Red Grooms, The Cedar Bar, 1986

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Figure 3 - Mark Tansey, Triumph of the New York School, 1984

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Figure 4 - Saul Steinberg - Harold Rosenberg, 1972

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