



Working papers : the artist as critical consciousness
by Larry Eugene Shelby

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS Approved: airman , "Exaiftining Committee
Montana State University
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Abstract:

I. An Inquiry into the Definition of Art and Artist. This paper inquires into the nature and relevance of ex-isting definition of "Art" and "Artist." There is an analogy between the manner which art as an institution and a dictionary definition function. If language (or art) is to remain viable, it must be open to the continual revision necessary as part of the constantly changing social environment.

In the sense that a dictionary is a reference book, an "inbuilt" dictionary is part of each of our mental equipment. The inbuilt dictionary is best altered through the educational system. Lexical items which have become irrelevant to the situations which they are to describe should be restructured.

II. On the De-Definition/Re-Definition of Art. This essay is a rebuttal to Harold Rosenberg's article "On The De-Definition of Art" chosen because it is typical of arguments for defining art by morphological characteristics (i.e., formalist criticism). Approaches of this type have failed to deal with questions raised by "conceptual" artists regarding the existence, function and future of art, and, by implication, the education of the artist.

III. Art: An Open Textured Concept. A condensed version of Morris Weitz' essay "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" was provided. As a theory of aesthetics it is quite sufficient but Weitz presupposes that art is always of an aesthetic nature. This supposition is examined and shown to be incorrect.

Weitz pointed out that art cannot be defined as containing a true definition or set of "necessary and sufficient properties." However, he contends that works of art have "strands of similarities" and this entails deducing 'art' from observable data.

There is no room in Weitz' category for the work of art which operates outside of traditional paradigms, Perhaps, then, it is not the object but rather the context which is significant. A thing is art because it functions meaningfully within an art context not because it is categorized by name.

IV. A Prolegomenon to a Radical Praxis in Art Education. This essay consists of five (5) sections. The first deals with the theory/practice disjunction in both studio art and art history. The reluctance of art historians, as guardians of the ontology, to examine critically their presuppositions sets an unfortunate example for the studio practitioner who has already accepted the theory (art history)/practice (studio) split institutionalized in the curriculums of most art departments.

Section II states that in order to penetrate the morphology of art education, we must first direct our inquiry toward education in general as it is posited by our industrialized society. Rooted within is a positivistic objective consciousness seen largely as an undisputed social good. Rooted within art education is the subjective consciousness that alienates the artist from the rest of the university community. The inactment of critical theory would be in proper order.

Outlined in Section III are the assumptions of critical theory or dialectical reasoning. The term praxis (a

Greek word for action) is introduced as a self creating purposeful activity untainted by random undirected motivation. In Section IV a distinction is made between praxis and practice.

Section IV concludes that in order for the artist student/teacher to transcend the present theory/practice disjunction, a thorough understanding of his/her actions is necessary allowing for control. Theory is implied. By developing a diacritical attitude perhaps the artist can transcend the posture of adaptation and become integrated with the world.

Praxiological alternatives for art education are dealt with in Section V.

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Name

Larry E. Shelly

Date

Aug. 31, 1975

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"If I graduate I will devote part of my life to removing sneaks and creeps from art education."

Les Levine

WORKING PAPERS: THE ARTIST AS CRITICAL
CONSCIOUSNESS

by

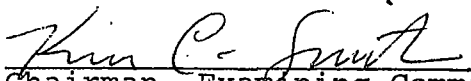
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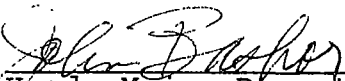
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August, 1975

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VITA

Larry Eugene Shelby was born on November 3, 1943 in Kennett, Missouri. He is the son of J. D. and Dorothy Shelby of Caruthersville, Missouri. Larry spent his childhood in Caruthersville where he graduated from Caruthersville High School in 1960. In 1968 Larry entered the Memphis Academy of Arts in Memphis, Tennessee and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in both painting and printmaking on February 4, 1974.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My initial debt is to Kim Smith who was responsible more than anyone else for my coming to Montana State. I am deeply grateful to Kim for sharing his time and ideas. In the truest sense of the word, he made it possible for a meaningful dialogical encounter. I am sure I express the sentiments of a number of other students whose lives have not been quite the same after studying and working with Kim. It must be noted that we did not study under Kim but rather studied with him. I have known no other teacher who was able to learn as much from his students as his students did from him. Kim possesses a tremendous advantage in that he is in a continual process of re-education, not only in art but in a variety of disciplines, as well as questioning his own past assumptions and, consequently, expecting the same from his students.

My loving appreciation goes to my wife, Jane. Without her editorial assistance and advice a difficult task would have otherwise been impossible.

I would also like to thank my committee, Bob DeWeese, Gunars Strazdins and Kim Smith for their continued support, encouragement and questioning throughout my past two years in attendance at Montana State.

No less of an acknowledgment is in order to my fellow students, Silvie Granatelli, Dorothy Newton Semple, Keith Hammer, Martha Igoe, Jean Harkin, Tim Atkinson, and Marcia Hocevar. Interaction with them has been invigorating and often comforting.

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ABSTRACT

Working Papers: The Artist as Critical Consciousness

I. An Inquiry into the Definition of Art and Artist. This paper inquires into the nature and relevance of existing definition of "Art" and "Artist."

There is an analogy between the manner which art as an institution and a dictionary definition function. If language (or art) is to remain viable, it must be open to the continual revision necessary as part of the constantly changing social environment.

In the sense that a dictionary is a reference book, an "inbuilt" dictionary is part of each of our mental equipment. The inbuilt dictionary is best altered through the educational system. Lexical items which have become irrelevant to the situations which they are to describe should be restructured.

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Section II states that in order to penetrate the morphology of art education, we must first direct our inquiry toward education in general as it is posited by our industrialized society. Rooted within is a positivistic objective consciousness seen largely as an undisputed social good. Rooted within art education is the subjective consciousness that alienates the artist from the rest of the university community. The inactment of critical theory would be in proper order.

Outlined in Section III are the assumptions of critical theory or dialectical reasoning. The term praxis (a Greek word for action) is introduced as a self creating purposeful activity untainted by random undirected motivation. In Section IV a distinction is made between praxis and practice.

Section IV concludes that in order for the artist student/teacher to transcend the present theory/practice disjunction, a thorough understanding of his/her actions is necessary allowing for control. Theory is implied. By developing a diacritical attitude perhaps the artist can transcend the posture of adaptation and become integrated with the world.

Praxiological alternatives for art education are dealt with in Section V.

INTRODUCTION

"Art is guilty of the worst sort of crime against human beings: Silence."¹

"Silence is not nothing to say, it is saying 'I will say nothing' or 'I have nothing to say'. . . . a whole life of nothing to say is a lifefull of saying 'I have nothing to say' or 'I will say nothing'. . . . Anyone who claims language hasn't got a hold on him had better never make the claim, else he utters an absurdity. Anyone who says nothing, (i.e., intentionality), to prove language hasn't got a hold on him, is a demon and practising self-deception; similarly anyone who doesn't say much for the same reason."²

The interlocking thesis of the four essays which make up the content of *Working Papers - the Artist as Critical Consciousness* is that art as it is now constituted is limited and grossly inadequate at providing a meaningful dialogical encounter, both for the experiencing individual and for the much larger cultural community.

¹Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson and Jean Toche, "Toward a New Humanism," The New Art, a critical anthology edited by Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), p. 79.

²Edizioni Di Centro, Contemporanea (Roma: Parcheggio di Villa Borghese, 1973), Art-Language, p. 101.

"Modernist art with its dissonances and torments . . . has become the staple diet of an increasingly voracious army of culture consumers who know good investments when they see them. The avant-garde, if indeed the term can still be used, has become an honored ornament of our cultural life less to be feared than feted."³

My discontent with standard art became critical when I became disillusioned with art's inability to extend itself critically and began asking new questions and consequently began expecting new answers concerning the function and possible future of art. At that point, I began lifting *heuristics* from sources both in and outside of art. That is, I began scrutinizing the work of the art-language community, a body of criticism produced by artists who saw as their task the unraveling of the mythic ideology or false consciousness surrounding the art mystique. This community (A & L) is seeking answers and possible directions from other disciplines. Initially, I began looking at the philosophy of language, structuralism and later dialectical materialism, with the hope of providing for myself and

³ Martin Jay, "Introduction," The Dialectical Imagination (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. XIV.

others a direction of study which would result in *ad hoc* new methods, new concepts and consequently a new language.

My education is primarily that of visual artist not writer. However, this is not to be interpreted as a handicap but to be viewed as the beginning of my education as writer. To state it another way, art education is proposed as an *open-textured concept* (replenishment or re-defining one's scope of activity). In order for an artist to remain viable in a community, he/she must maintain an "*open-texturedness*" with respect to the changing environment of that community. To "*re-open*" the language of art, a return to the root meaning of the words "art" and "artist" (i.e., learning) is in order. This leads to the artist as *praxel-ogist*. Praxis (a Greek word for "action") is informed by theoretical reflection as opposed to mere action. The artist uses praxis as a vehicle of enlightenment or cultural fluency.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE DEFINITION
OF ART AND ARTIST

Each period of time has its own truth.

Max Horkheimer

ART (ärt), n. [*<OFr. < L. ars, artis*]

1. creativeness.
2. skill.
3. any specific skill or its application.
4. a making or doing of things that have form and beauty: see also fine arts.
5. any branch of this; esp., painting, drawing, or sculpture.
6. products of creative work; paintings, statues, etc.
7. *usually in pl.* any of certain branches of academic learning, as literature, music, and mathematics.
8. any craft, etc., or its principles: as, the cobbler's *art*.
9. cunning.
10. *usually in pl.* a trick; wile.¹

ARTIST (är'tist), n. [*<Fr. < It. < L. ars, artis, art*]

1. one who is skilled in any of the fine, especially graphic, arts.
2. one who does anything very well, with a feeling for form, etc.
3. an artiste.

¹Concise Edition - Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (1966).

ART (ärt), n. [ME. <OFr. *arte* <L. *artis*, gen. of *ars*, art < IE. base *ar-*, to join, fit together, whence arm, articulate, Ratio]

1. human ability to make things; creativity of man as distinguished from the world of nature.
2. skill; craftsmanship.
3. any specific skill or its application [the *art* of making friends]
4. any craft, trade, or profession, or its principles [the cobbler's *art*, the physician's *art*.
5. creative work or its principles; making or doing of things that display form, beauty, and unusual perception: art includes painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature, drama, the dance, etc.: see also fine art.
6. any branch of creative work, esp., painting, drawing, or work in any other graphic or plastic medium.
7. products of creative work: painting, statues, etc.
8. pictorial and decorative material accompanying the text in a newspaper, magazine, or advertising layout.
9. a) [ARCHAIC] learning,
b) a branch of learning; specif., [*Pl.*] the liberal arts (literature, music, philosophy, etc.) as distinguished from the sciences.
10. artful behavior; cunning.
11. sly or cunning trick; wile: *usually used in pl.* -- adj. 1. of or for works of art or artist [*art gallery, art colony*] 2. produced with an especially artistic technique, or exhibiting such production [*art movie, art theater*]

ARTIST (är'tist), n. [ML. *artista*, craftsman, artisan <L. *ars*, craft, art]

1. a person who works in or is skilled in any of the fine arts, esp., in painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.

2. a person who does anything very well, with imagination and a feeling for form, effect, etc.²
3. *same as* artiste.

²Webster's New World Dictionary - Second College Edition (Cleveland and New York: William Collins & World Publishing Company, Inc., 1974).

SECTION I - THE RELEVANCE OF EXISTING DEFINITIONS OF ART AND ARTIST

The purpose of this paper is to open some lines of inquiry in to the nature and relevance of existing definitions of art and artist. Some observations are included and some possible procedures for the redefining of these terms are suggested.

Any language is continually in a state of change as long as it is spoken. These changes usually go unnoticed. A language is sustained through the process of learned imitation within a language community; therefore, changes in language occur slowly as either new words, changes in the meaning of words, or changes in syntax. These changes are often the result of modifications in the environment of the language community. For the most part this paper will deal with the change in meaning of words (i.e., the denotation).

Each language is composed of a large number of words and idioms referred to as "lexical" items or components. The dictionary functions as a catalogue for these items giving necessary information about the way they fit into the particular language system. The information about any particular item is referred to as a "lexical entry." The ordinary user of the dictionary probably refers most often

to the definition or semantic part of the lexical entry consisting of the formulation of the meaning or meanings of the particular item listed. It should be as concise and complete as possible.

Dictionaries are always open to revisions through addition of new lexical entries. However, this can be misleading; a dictionary is a living social institution and must answer the questions the user asks. These questions may not be inclusive of the everyday usage. For instance, a user may wish to know the history of the origin of a word.

A dictionary of common usage, however, concerns itself with neither slang, technical or specialized vocabularies. Only the frequent, durable and consistent use of a word in books and magazines, makes the term worthy of inclusion in a current dictionary.

Two words of special interest to the artist are the terms "art" and "artist." Up to nine or ten years ago the common semantic models for "art" were painting and sculpture. (See entries 5 and 6 under Art, footnote 1; entries 5 and 6 under Art, footnote 2, entry 1 under Artist, footnote 2.) This held true for the avant-garde as well as for the amateur. Although the content of painting and

sculpture (e.g., figurative versus non-figurative imagery) has often been debated (resulting in much stylistic leap-frogging), the usefulness of painting and sculpture as mediums for structuring any content other than the materials involved has rarely been subjected to sustained criticism.

To paraphrase Terry Atkinson in Art-Language, 1969, Volumn 1, No. 1, art since 1966 has questioned the idea that the visual arts (as they have come to be known) must remain visual. Artists have begun to express the content of their ideas through the semantic qualities of written language. The institution of art (the art school-gallery-museum-critic-collector matrix) currently functions normatively much like a dictionary definition. A language to remain viable in a community must maintain its "*open texturedness*" (see Essay #3 "Art: An Open Textured Concept") with respect to the changing environment of that community. To "*re-open*" the language of art, a return to the root meaning of the words art and artist (see entry 9 under art, footnote 2) is in order.

Many of these inquiries into the definition of art (theory) are being read within an art context as part of the art condition. Theory presented within the gallery context questions the "object" (ontological) basis of art.

Other members of the British art-language group have spent considerable time investigating the linguistic structure, both of plastic art (semiotics) and its support languages (criticism). For very specific reasons they have chosen to concentrate on the support languages. The support language is collective, offering access to the cognitive structures underlying the entire community; specialized languages such as those found in the plastic arts subsist within this greater cognitive framework. An example from western art would be the development of linear perspective that objectifies the separation of subject and object that is found in the structure of the spoken language.

In the following quote from Great Western Salt Works, Jack Burnham discusses the work of Joseph Kosuth, American editor of Art-Language. Kosuth maintains that the value of a work of art is to be found in the internal consistency of the work. This notion of internal consistency has its major codification in the cubist program (analytic phase) in the early 1900's. Kosuth extends the cubist notion of excluding reference to the physical world to excluding reference to the material aspect of the art object itself.

Drawing parallels between art and language, Kosuth defines art as a series of analytic propositions which have no value as information outside the context of art. Here his investigation into linguistic analysis and logical positivism are crucial. Like logic and mathematics, Kosuth views art as a system of tautologies which, while self-contained, depend upon the context of the real world for social meaning but not verification. He doubts the validity of phenomenological considerations which have been attached to the art experience.³

Whether or not I agree with Kosuth's above contention is irrelevant to this paper. I am not trying to give a definition of art, but rather to point out how language models can be employed to deal with the semantic problems arising from the attempt to redefine art.

Procedures for finding a new and more relevant definition for the terms "art" and "artist" (re-defining the scope of activity) would include the use of professional magazines and journals from other disciplines. These journals provide both relevant usage of terms, concepts and methodologies that might be employed by the artist, while the journal itself provides the artist with a format model for the presentation of theoretical material generated within the context of art. I have included a table which

³Jack Burnham, "Alice's Head," (1970) Great Western Salt Works (New York: George Braziller, 1974), p. 57.

gives a sampling of the literature that has to date been generated in this area.

The objective of such a program would be the adequate description of all language phenomena and more specifically the correct description of the terms "Art" and "Artist." The purpose of these pages has been to suggest lines of basic research which may ultimately be of significance to a *lexicography of art*.

A dictionary is a reference book. In a sense we all carry around a dictionary as part of our mental equipment. Geoffrey Leech in his book Semantics refers to this as the "*inbuilt*" dictionary. In the second part of this paper, it is this inbuilt dictionary with which I wish to deal.

SECTION II - THE INBUILT DICTIONARY - A LIVING SOCIAL INSTITUTION

In an interview in the book, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object, Lucy R. Lippard was asked this question by Ursula Meyer:

Do you think visual art may eventually function in a different context altogether?

LL: Yes, but there's going to have to be an immense educational process to get people to even begin to look at things, to say

nothing of looking at things the way
artists look at things. . . .⁴

This immense educational process to which Lucy Lippard refers brings to mind the educational process which Alvin Toffler suggests in his book Future Shock.

As for curriculum, the Councils of the Future, instead of assuming that every subject taught today is taught for a reason, should begin from the reverse premise: nothing should be included in a required curriculum unless it can be strongly justified in terms of the future. If this means scrapping a substantial part of the formal curriculum, so be it.

This is not intended as an "anti-cultural" statement or a plea for total destruction of the past. Nor does it suggest that we can ignore such basics as reading, writing and math. What it does mean is that tens of millions of children today are forced by law to spend precious hours of their lives grinding away at material whose future utility is highly questionable. (Nobody even claims it has much present utility.) Should they spend as much time as they do learning French, or Spanish or German? Are the hours spent on English maximally useful? Should all children be required to study Algebra? Might they not benefit more from studying probability? Logic? Computer programming? Philosophy? . . . Mass communications?⁵

⁴Lucy Lippard, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object (New York, 1973), p. 7.

⁵Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York, 1972), p. 409-410.

Following Toffler's line of thinking, if children are going to spend time learning (i.e., inbuilding) art, would it not be pertinent for them to learn (inbuild) about concepts in art which they could apply to the present and especially to their futures rather than inbuilding concepts pertinent only to the past?

Toffler goes on to say that the strict compartmentalization of curriculum is not based on contemporary human needs and imposes unnecessary standardization on schools. Curriculums are often determined by college requirements which further reflect vanishing social requirements and vocations.

In updating education Toffler suggests the use of curriculum review boards which would not design a permanent all-purpose curriculum but rather sets of temporary curricula which would be evaluated and renovated with time.

Especially relevant to the idea of revising our in-built dictionaries is Toffler's observation that "today's 'fact' becomes tomorrow's 'misinformation'." He further states that this, however, is not an argument against learning of information but an argument for how to manipulate restrictive data. The individual in tomorrow's

society will constantly change his job, residence, and persons he comes in contact with.

Toffler agrees with psychologist Herbert Gerjvoy of the Human Resources Research organization that an individual must learn to classify and reclassify all information in ways useful to him and be able to look at problems from several different directions. Gerjvoy is quoted as saying "tomorrow's illiterate will be the man who has not learned how to learn."⁶ Put another way, tomorrow's illiterate will be the person who hasn't gained control of his own inbuilding process.

It seems ironic that in the 1974 definition of "art" the archaic meaning is given as learning. This idea is at the heart of much contemporary art seeking to redefine itself. *Art is a learning process and learning is an art process.*

Bernard Venet in 1967 selected and made a list of topics from specific disciplines or areas of knowledge which he would exploit over a period from 1967 through 1971.

⁶Toffler, p. 414.

--Astrophysics	
--Nuclear Physics	1967
--Space Sciences	
--Mathematics by Computation	
--Meteorology	1968
--Stock Market	
--Meta-Mathematics	
--Psychophysics (Psychochronometry)	1969
--Sociology and Politics	
--Meta-Mathematics again (Mathematical Logic)	1970

In Conceptual Art Ursula Meyers quotes Bernard Venet as saying on January 9, 1971:

I do not present my work as art, but I present mathematics and other scientific disciplines for what they are, i.e., pure knowledge as such. My proposition is: Cultivez-vous, Exploitez-vous, Eliminez-vous. (Educate yourself, Exploit yourself, Eliminate yourself.)⁷

The inbuilt dictionary is best altered through the educational system which teaches the individual to restructure lexical items at a time when they become irrelevant to the situation they are to describe.

⁷Ursula Meyer, Conceptual Art (New York, 1972), p. 214.

Sampling of Professional Art Journals

Author	Title	Date	Type	Nation
Meyer, Ursula	Conceptual Art	1972	Book	Amer.
Kosuth, Joseph	Art After Philosophy	1969	Essay	Amer.
Atkinson, Terry Bainbridge, David Baldwin, Michael Burn, Ian Hurrell, Harold Harrison, Charles Howard, Grapham Pilkington, Philip Ramsden, Mel Rushton, David	Art-Language Art-Language Press	1967 1975	Journal	Brit.
Lippard Lucy	Six Years: The Dematerial- ization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972	1973	Book	Amer.
Burnham, Jack	Great Western Salt Works Real Time Systems Les Levine: Business as Usual Alice's Head Willoughby Sharp Interviews Jack Burnham The Artist as Shaman Objects and Ritual: Toward a Working Ontology of Art	1973	Book	Amer.

Sampling of Professional Art Journals (continued)

Author	Title	Date	Type	Nation
	Contemporary Ritual: A Search for Meaning in Post-Historical Terms			
Karshan, Donald	Conceptual Art and Concep- tual Aspects	1970	Catalogue	Amer.
Boice, Bruce	The Axiom of Indifference	1973	Magazine	Amer.
Butterfield, Jan	An Uncompromising Other Way	1974	Magazine	Amer.
Witten-Pincus, Robert	The Constant as Variable	1972	Magazine	Amer.
Heller, Preston and Menard, Andrew	Criticism In Absentia	1973	Magazine	Amer.
Boice, Bruce	Joseph Kosuth: 2 Shows	1973	Magazine	Amer.
Horvitz, J. Robert	Beyond Reductivism	1974	Magazine	Amer.
Witten-Pincus, Robert	Three Ideas and Seven Procedures	1971	Magazine	Amer.

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ON THE DE-DEFINITION/RE-DEFINITION OF ART¹

Introduction

The subject of this essay is the rebuttal of an article written by Harold Rosenberg and entitled "On the De-Definition of Art." Rosenberg's article is reproduced here in its entirety. Our primary reasons for choosing this particular article are:

- (a) Rosenberg's article is typical of formalist criticism that is either incapable of or unwilling to deal intelligently with the questions being raised by "conceptual" artists regarding the conditions of art's existence (ontology), art's function in society, the future of art, and, by implication, the education of the artist.
- (b) Rosenberg's article has been presented within this department as an argument for defining art by morphological characteristics (i.e., paint on canvas) rather than by concept (intension). In this sense, the article chose us.

¹In collaboration with Kim Smith.

It is not our intention to attack or ridicule individuals in this department, but rather our intention is to attempt bringing the level of discussion on the subject of art in general, and "conceptual" art in particular, to a higher level by attacking arguments. We feel that the questions being raised by "conceptual" artists are important questions having bearing on the future of this department. The result of the debate of these questions, which is beginning among students and faculty in this department, will hopefully be a program of education with direction (based on awareness of the issues) to replace the muddled "laissez-faire" program we currently have that attempts to cover all options while sacrificing excellence.

We invite rebuttal to the arguments we present here.

ROSENBERG 1

AN EXCITED VIEW, RECENTLY BECOME PREVALENT IN ADVANCED ARTISTIC AND ACADEMIC CIRCLES, HOLDS THAT ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS ARE WAITING TO BE SOLVED BY THE MAGICAL TOUCH OF ART. SO INTENSE IS THIS ENTHUSIASM FOR WHAT THE ARTIST MIGHT ACCOMPLISH THAT MERE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE ARE PRESENTED AS UNDESERVING OF THE ATTENTION OF THE SERIOUS ARTIST.

REBUTTAL 1 (KS)

Rosenberg's quarrel seems not to be with the artist's attempt to solve the problems of society, but rather with the manner in which the solution is attempted. As long as solutions are attempted within the confines of painting and sculpture, i.e., object making, "the magical touch of art" so sarcastically referred to with regard to conceptual artists, keeps society from degenerating to a sub-human level (See Rosenberg 13). Were we to accept the social role for art that Rosenberg suggests, it is a fair question to ask if painting and sculpture, as they are presently formally constituted, perform this role either in the best or in the only possible manner.

To question painting and sculpture's ability to perform a social role, we must more clearly define what that role is and what it should be. Many conceptual artists are actively engaged in such an inquiry. When one accepts, as Rosenberg has, a non-negotiable definition of art as being the formal object qualities of painting and sculpture, one precludes any real questioning of social function since "by definition" art's primary function is to exist as an aesthetic object.

An analogous situation might be found in the current investigation of energy needs in this country. Following Rosenberg's example we might define "energy" as being oil and only oil, since oil has been a major source of energy in the past. Defining energy as oil precludes the discovery of alternative and perhaps more desirable energy sources. An alternative source such as nuclear power would first have to satisfy the condition of being oil (by definition) before it could qualify as being energy. Most would agree that this would be a curious if not idiotic situation (to be in) with regard to energy considering the implicit survival questions. That critics can make and get away with such definitions in art is a sad reminder of art's superfluous role with regard to contemporary society.

ROSENBERG 2

THERE ARE ALREADY ENOUGH OBJECTS, WRITES AN ARTIST,
AND THERE IS NO NEED TO ADD TO THOSE THAT ALREADY
EXIST.

I CHOOSE NOT TO MAKE OBJECTS, WRITES ANOTHER. IN-
STEAD, I HAVE SET OUT TO CREATE A QUALITY OF EXPER-
IENCE THAT LOCATES ITSELF IN THE WORLD.

REBUTTAL 2 (LS)

Rosenberg has committed a scholarly error in failing to provide the artists' names as well as the context of

the above statements. However, this writer is at least familiar with the content of the statements if not the context. No doubt, it comes as a surprise to the above-mentioned critic that an artist is capable of recognizing that it is no longer a viable form of activity to continue making objects. This must be a disquieting thought to a critic whose belief system is rooted in a stylistic and methodologically-based proceduralism (i.e., shape, color, form, texture, etc.) as opposed to perception (conceptual mechanisms).

The critic and art historian have traditionally been responsible for processing art information, and this processing has taken the form of aesthetic judgments resulting in art values. For example, household artifacts of earlier times which did not exist as art are now considered as such when seen within the framework of existing values.

Aesthetics and art are often confused leading to the common misconception that the art lies within the object (i.e., painting and sculpture). However, it is necessary to make distinctions. Decoration has traditionally been one of art's purposes. Therefore, any branch of philosophy (specifically aesthetics) which deals with beauty,

and thereby taste, is obligated to deal with art. This has perpetrated the belief that the two are one and the same. Any object in the world can be the subject of aesthetic contemplation. This means that aesthetic judgment has no relevance to the object's function in an art context. Art which depends exclusively upon aesthetic considerations is determined to function as decoration and is consequently semiotically meaningless.²

ROSENBERG 3

AND HERE IS A CLINCHER BY THE SCULPTOR ROBERT MORRIS, WHO CONCLUDES IN A RECENT ARTICLE THAT THE STATIC, PORTABLE INDOOR ART OBJECT (A RATHER NICE MATERIALISTIC WAY TO DESCRIBE A PAINTING OR SCULPTURE) CAN DO NO MORE THAN CARRY A DECORATIVE LOAD THAT BECOMES INCREASINGLY UNINTERESTING.

Note: Refer to Footnote (3) for context of the above statement.

²Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," Conceptual Art, ed. Ursula Meyer (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1972), pp. 158-9.

³Robert Morris, "Art of Existence; Three Extra-Visual Artists' Works in Progress," Artforum, 1971, p. 28.

It seems a truism at this point that the static, portable, indoor art object can do no more than carry a decorative load that becomes increasingly uninteresting. One waits for the next season's polished metal boxes, stretched tie dyes and elegantly applied liquitex references to art deco with about as much anticipation as one reserves for the look of next year's Oldsmobile--Ford probably has a better idea.

REBUTTAL 3 (LS)

The following quote by Joseph Kosuth should shed some light on the relevance of Morris' statement.

Aesthetic considerations are indeed always extraneous to an object's function or 'reason-to-be.' unless of course, that object's reason-to-be is strictly aesthetic. An example of a purely aesthetic object is a decorative object, for decoration's primary function is 'to add something to, so as to make more attractive; adorn; ornament,' and this relates directly to taste. And this leads us directly to 'formalist' art and criticism. Formalist art (painting and sculpture) is the vanguard of decoration, and, strictly speaking, one could reasonably assert that its art condition is so minimal that for all functional purposes it is not art at all, but pure exercises in aesthetics.⁴

The object artist (i.e., painter and sculptor) is undergoing the solemn misfortune of realizing that he/she has maintained an ideology that is indeed impotent. Formalistic painting and sculpture have been reduced to mere permutation/combinations of formal elements (color, shape, line, etc.) at best arranged to be harmonious to the senses. "Field painting," for example, accentuates the unfoldment and effects of color juxtaposition with an emphasis on the continuity of the field. In contrast, "spatial abstraction" emphasizes the interplay of abstract patterns

⁴Kosuth, loc. cit., p. 159.

revealing the physiognomy of rectangles, circles, ovals, squares and triangles. Formalist object art remains true to the cubist program (analytic phase) of internal consistency excluding reference to the physical world. From the above description formalist object art can be described as a tautology and a meta-language. As a self-contained system it is tautological in the same manner as mathematics and logic whose propositions have nothing to do with the physical world although we conveniently apply them in this way. Formalist art is a meta-language in that the picture plane speaks of the picture plane, paint speaks of paint. In essence, the painting speaks of itself: a language speaking about itself.

Such styles as pop, metaphysical funk, neodada differ from formalist art. They are not tautological and do not function as meta-language. Instead they propose to make social statements through the use of cultural residue as subject matter (e.g., war, racism, alienation, etc.). The object depicted is of utmost importance and the formal elements (color, shape, line, etc.) are subordinate to the message. However, problems arise when there is an attempt to engage such works hermeneutically. It is submerged in ironic twists and paradoxes and is intensely subjective

and remote as to conceal the artist intention. Each individual has his/her own enigmatic, ironic and paradoxical private language. The work is experienced in much the same way as formalist art; content becomes subordinate to the sensualness of the paint and the harmonious arrangement of formal elements. The work may be intended as a social statement but essentially the work is speaking to the viewer about color, form, etc. Because painting and sculpture are inseparably bound to formal elements, they are rendered impotent.

In an attempt to deal with art on art's terms, artists are beginning to present information which does not need processing in aesthetic terms or reorganizing by the critic. Those art historians and critics that attribute a stylist impetus to the idea of dispensing with the object are completely misreading, or, in most cases, not reading the propositions put forth. It must be pointed out that it is not necessarily the artist, or the art object, that is undergoing epistemic invasion but the foundation that supports the art object. So dispensing with the art object can be read as heuristic in its objectives, i.e., the process of examining art's foundations. Visual manipulation becomes inappropriate and incompatible with the idea of

examining art's presupposition. If artists did not make an effort to ponder these states-of-affairs, art would be rendered as impotent as painting and sculpture.

ROSENBERG 4

IN CONTRAST TO THE MEAGERNESS OF ART, THE ARTIST IS BLOWN UP TO GIGANTIC PROPORTIONS. HE IS DESCRIBED AS A PERSON OF TRAINED SENSIBILITY, A DEVELOPED IMAGINATION, A CAPACITY FOR EXPRESSION AND DEEP INSIGHT INTO THE REALITIES OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE.

REBUTTAL 4 (KS)

(A) ". . . THE MEAGERNESS OF ART . . ."

- (1) The artists that Rosenberg is criticizing feel that art is meager only vis-a-vis painting and sculpture, not vis-a-vis art.
- (2) Look for a moment at the current use that is made of "art" (sculpture and painting); "art" provides cultural prestige and power for wealthy collectors;⁵ "art" makes money for gallery owners; "art" makes an "art scene"; "art" decorates the walls of

⁵See Hans Haacke's "Manet" that was to have been shown in a show called "Projekt '74'" at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne. See Jack Burnham's "Meditations on a Bunch of Asparagus," Arts Magazine (Feb., 1970), p. 72-75.

middle-class homes; "art" lends prestige to businesses; "art" sells cigars. "Art" makes the "artist" into a commodity to be bought and sold "while the supply lasts." Compare this current "art" use with the central cultural role that art has historically played and most would agree that outside of the 19th century, art and artists have seldom before played such "meager" roles as they are now playing.

- (3) Many minority groups who have become tired of being "screwed, chewed, and barbequed," have investigated their origins in order to develop cultural forms that are not easily co-opted by those wishing to exploit those forms to ends detrimental to that minority. Conceptual art represents an attempt by artists to explore art's origins and to avoid exploitative co-option of artists and art forms.

(B) "... . THE ARTIST IS BLOWN UP TO GIGANTIC PROPORTIONS."

- (1) Rosenberg writes as if this were a phenomenon unique to non-object making artists. The "blown-up" artist phenomena first appears, with any regularity, in the Renaissance period. The appearance of this phenomenon in the Renaissance is not the result of a genetic quirk that affected only artists giving them enormous egos, but rather its appearance reflects a general ability in the culture, to begin to think of individuals as separate from their roles in the society. For a discussion of this, see McLuhan's discussion of "the King's two bodies."⁶
- (2) Many times more people know of Van Gogh the Man-Myth than have ever experienced Van Gogh's paintings. It is the life of Van Gogh that is meaningful to most

⁶Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Gallyaxy (University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 120.

people. The paintings and reproductions of paintings function to commemorate a life rather than functioning as aesthetic objects of and for themselves. It may be true in some sense that artists are products of painting (see Rosenberg 12). It is also, however, abundantly clear in the case of Van Gogh, that Van Gogh's paintings are a product of his life. In essence, the expressionist theory of art (Rosenberg's reputation rests on his work as an abstract expressionist critic) holds that art is the outward expression of an inner necessity. When Rosenberg asserts that artists are the products of particular disciplines, such as painting, he seems to be suggesting that the discipline dictates the inner necessity. Instead of the monkey wiggling the brush, for Rosenberg, the brush wiggles the monkey.

- (3) With Jackson Pollock in particular and abstract expressionism in general,

attention is focused on the artist's and critic's actions in front of the canvas. These actions were given heroic proportions by critics who saw in these actions the microcosm's search for meaning in a meaningless macrososm.

ROSENBERG 5

THE ARTIST HAS BECOME, AS IT WERE, TOO BIG FOR ART. HIS PROPER MEDIUM IS WORKING IN THE WORLD: ECOLOGY --TRANSFORMING THE LANDSCAPE--CHANGING THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE. AMONG THE FOLLOWERS OF BUCKMINSTER FULLER THIS SUPER- OR BEYOND-ART ACTIVITY IS CALLED, SIGNIFICANTLY, THE WORLD GAME.

REBUTTAL 5 (KS)

- (A) "THE ARTIST HAS BECOME, AS IT WERE, TOO BIG FOR ART."

What these artists are saying is that they are bored with the trivial formal problems left to painting and sculpture.

- (B) "HIS PROPER MEDIUM IS WORKING IN THE WORLD:
. . . ."

The lineage of this desire by artists to "work in the real world" is rich and honorable. One need only point to Leonardo whose work had

scientific import; to the fact that many Renaissance artists were mathematicians, their painted work representing some of the best treatises of the subject at that time; to the fact of political involvement by artists of the last century and the political impact of their work, to see that art has traditionally functioned as a tool for "working in the real world." Abandoning a tool such as painting which is no longer useful for "working in the real world" is perhaps the first step an artist must take in returning to the art tradition.

(C) ". . . TRANSFORMING THE LANDSCAPE . . ."

Unless Rosenberg means to suggest that artists in general are motivated by base desires to push material around, why should he single out "beyond art" artists as having those base motives?

(D) ". . . THE WORLD GAME."

The world "game" is used to connote a sense of joyousness, not a lack of commitment.

ROSENBERG 6

THIS AGGRANDIZEMENT, AND SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT, OF THE ARTIST SEEMS ON THE SURFACE TO REPRESENT AN EXPANDED CONFIDENCE IN THE CREATIVE POWERS OF ARTISTS TODAY. EVERYTHING CAN BE DONE THROUGH ART, AND WHATEVER AN ARTIST DOES IS A WORK OF ART. WHY IS THE CHELSEA GIRLS ART? ANDY WARHOL REFLECTED IN AN INTERVIEW, AND ANSWERED, WELL, FIRST OF ALL, IT WAS MADE BY AN ARTIST, AND SECOND, THAT WOULD COME OUT AS ART. YOU HAVE THE CHOICE OF ANSWERING, AMEN!-- OR, OH, YEAH?

REBUTTAL 6. (KS)

Warhol is not a typical conceptual artist; in fact, by most definitions, is not a conceptual artist at all. Warhol is "conceptual" to the extent that his work functions as a heuristic for discovering the mechanisms by which certain classes of non-art objects or concepts are transformed into art objects and concepts.

ROSENBERG 7

ACTUALLY, THE ARTIST WHO HAS LEFT ART BEHIND OR-- WHAT AMOUNTS TO THE SAME THING--WHO REGARDS ANYTHING HE MAKES OR DOES AS ART, IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE PROFOUND CRISIS THAT HAS OVERTAKEN THE ARTS IN OUR EPOCH. PAINTING, SCULPTURE, DRAMA, MUSIC, HAVE BEEN UNDERGOING A PROCESS OF DE-DEFINITION. THE NATURE OF ART HAS BECOME UNCERTAIN. AT LEAST, IT IS AMBIGUOUS. NO ONE CAN SAY WITH ASSURANCE WHAT A WORK OF ART IS--OR, MORE IMPORTANT, WHAT IS NOT A WORK OF ART. WHERE AN ART OBJECT IS STILL PRESENT, AS IN PAINTING, IT IS WHAT I HAVE CALLED AN ANXIOUS OBJECT: IT DOES NOT KNOW WHETHER IT IS A MASTERPIECE OR JUNK. IT MAY, AS IN THE CASE OF A COLLAGE BY SCHWITTERS, BE LITERALLY BOTH.

REBUTTAL 7 (LS)

Actually, the artist has left art behind, if, indeed one considers art's purpose an aesthetic one. The standards which Rosenberg and others through their functioning as critics have imposed for the judging and justifying art, are arbitrary. Rather than accept new criteria which deal with art in terms relevant to its intent, Rosenberg assumes that "anything" can be art or--what amounts to the same thing--that nothing which exists outside his criteria can be art. Rosenberg further assumes that the artist himself does not understand what he is about, but rather arbitrarily proclaims "this" and "that" to be art.

Painting, sculpture, drama, and music have been undergoing a process of de-definition (see Kosuth, Footnote 7) but this is part of the process of re-definition.

⁷Kosuth, ob. cit., p. 161.

Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art. If an artist accepts painting (or sculpture) he is accepting the tradition that goes with it. That's because the word art is general and the word painting is specific. Painting is a kind of art. If you make paintings, you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art. One is then accepting the nature of art to be the European tradition of a painting-sculpture dichotomy.

By the definition of re-definition we know that if a term is to be re-defined, then, at least part of the existing definition will no longer be pertinent and must then be "de-defined."

Rosenberg concludes that the nature of art has become so ambiguous that we can no longer say what is or is not art. He has hinted at an inability on the part of artists to come to grips with a high critical standard for determining what constitutes art. The source of Rosenberg's problem is a fixed standard (Rosenberg's) versus a standard that is constantly open to question and revision. Conceptualists are actively involved in the questioning and revising of criteria. In fact, it is often this questioning itself which becomes the art product, as in the case of art-language.

ROSENBERG 8

THE UNCERTAIN NATURE OF ART IS NOT WITHOUT ITS ADVANTAGES. IT LEADS TO EXPERIMENT AND TO CONSTANT QUESTIONING. MUCH OF THE BEST ART OF THIS CENTURY BELONG TO A VISUAL DEBATE ABOUT WHAT ART IS. GIVEN THE CHANGING NATURE OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY REALITY AND THE UNBROKEN SERIES OF UPHEAVALS INTO WHICH THE WORLD HAS BEEN PLUNGED SINCE WORLD WAR I, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT THE PROCESSES OF CREATION SHOULD HAVE BECOME DETACHED FROM FIXED FORMS AND BE COMPELLED TO IMPROVISE NEW ONES FROM WHATEVER LIES READY AT HAND. IN COUNTRIES WHERE HIGH ART IS

MAINTAINED ACCORDING TO THE OLD DEFINITIONS--AS IN THE SOVIET UNION--ART IS EITHER DEAD OR ENGAGED IN UNDERGROUND REVOLT. SO ART MUST UNDERGO--AND HAS BEEN UNDERGOING--A PERSISTENT SELF-SEARCHING.

REBUTTAL 8 (LS)

It is agreed that constant questioning is an advantage of the uncertain nature of art. It is precisely this self-searching that has given the conceptual art movement its impetus. That high art cannot be maintained (anywhere) according to old definitions is also agreed.

ROSENBERG 9

HOWEVER, IT IS ONE THING TO THINK ABOUT ART IN NEW WAYS--AND ANOTHER NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT AT ALL, BUT TO PASS BEYOND ART AND BECOME AN ARTIST IN A PURE STATE. THE POST-ART ARTIST CARRIES THE DEFINITION OF ART TO THE POINT WHERE NOTHING IS LEFT OF ART BUT THE FICTION OF THE ARTIST. HE DISDAINS TO DEAL IN ANYTHING BUT ESSENCES. INSTEAD OF PAINTING, HE DEALS IN SPACE; INSTEAD OF DANCE, POETRY; FILM HE DEALS IN MOVEMENT; INSTEAD OF MUSIC, HE DEALS IN SOUND. HE HAS NO NEED FOR ART SINCE BY DEFINITION THE ARTIST IS A MAN OF GENIUS AND WHAT HE DOES WOULD, IN WARHOL'S PHRASE, NATURALLY COME OUT AS ART. HE NEED NO LONGER CONFINE HIMSELF TO A SINGLE GENRE OR FORM LANGUAGE, SUCH AS PAINTING OR POETRY --OR EVEN TO A MIXTURE OF GENRES, SUCH AS THEATER OR OPERA--HE CAN GO FROM ONE MEDIUM TO THE OTHER, AND INNOVATE IN EACH THROUGH REFUSING TO FIND OUT WHAT IT IS ABOUT. OR HE CAN BE AN INTER-MEDIA CREATOR WHO BLENDS THE VISUAL, THE AURAL, THE PHYSICAL, INTO A SUPER-ART PRESUMABLY ABLE TO ENCOMPASS ALL EXPERIENCE INTO SOMETHING HE CALLS A QUALITY THAT LOCATES ITSELF INTO THE WORLD.

REBUTTAL 9 (LS)

If art is limited to a purely aesthetic concern, then the artist has indeed gone beyond art--but not to a fictional state. If to no longer place all faith in the physical manifestation of the art but rather in the art concept is to deal in essences, Rosenberg is again correct. Conceptually speaking, the "value" of a work of art cannot lie in its physical presence but only in its power to generate concepts and thus to influence other artists. It has been stated earlier that critics and historians have previously been held responsible for bestowing art value through their functions as art information processors. Jack Burnham has noted some of Les Levine's thoughts on the effect of art tradition on "new" art forms.

All art may appear to bring us more information, but in fact it is only sustaining our notions of "good art" with perhaps minor modifications. In reality the concept of art is built into all art. By learning about the art tradition, Levine feels, we pre-program all further responses to any new art stimuli. More effective artists realize that for a brain programmed to absorb only ritualized art experiences, 'new art' is the result of interrupting only a tiny portion of the art-viewing program. So far only one artist has substituted a totally non-art experience for art. This, of course, was Marcel Duchamp.⁸

⁸ Jack Burnham, Great Western Salt Works (New York: George Braziller, 1974), p. 41.

