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Against the Will to Silence: An intellectual History of the American art journal *October*
between 1976 and 1981

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Abstract

The thesis provides a critical staging of the major themes and associated texts appearing in the American art journal *October* between 1976 and 1981. *October*'s project is defined here as the conceptualization of a particular notion of the contemporary avant-garde to politics, and the bringing of European theory into the purview of American art practice. Such a complex weaving together of representation and discourse is interpreted as the formation of a destabilizing dialectic, understood as a succession of critical interventions that respond with varying degrees of continuity and disjunction, to a single ongoing problematic. This dialectic is linked to the writings of *October* as the journal shifts its rhetorical locations in an attempt to break down the normative pictorial and discursive frames of reference. The resulting process of re-interpretation attempts the undoing of the modernist visual stereotype, a stereotype that functions under the dominant social metaphors of plenitude, autonomy and harmony, rather than the subsequent metaphors of fragmentation, instability and dispossession. The thesis gives particular emphasis to this idea in relation to the changing conditions of art's reception, the journal's major themes and related texts and the nature and operation of the publication's critical practice. The body of the thesis is divided into three interrelated case studies that act to stage this problematic. These studies form the matrix of the thesis and present a combination of theoretical discourse, interviews, and a synthesis and summary together with ideas for further research. The cultural locations considered as case studies are: the first essay published in *October*'s first issue, Michel Foucault's 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', the interplay of Foucault's narrative combined with Magritte's picture, is interpreted as a metaphor for the mediations of post-structural visual criticism itself as its practitioners seek to institute language into the visual sign. Secondly, the Peircean index understood as a de-disciplinary principle, this case study discusses two related issues central to *October*'s re-construction of the object of criticism. The first being to provide the photographic with an art-theoretical rationale that might be used to disassemble the high modernist aesthetic and its modes of representation; the second being associated with the journal's critique of the nature of the sign. And finally, the *Pictures* exhibition, organised at Artist's Space New York, in the fall of 1977. The combination of ideas about originality and appropriation represented by this exhibition—and its associated theoretical texts—have become emblematic of the vocabulary of a certain post-modern theory exemplified by *October*. Each of the case studies provides insight into a particular aesthetic issue and acts to refine a theoretical explanation. In this way the thesis traces *October*'s role in the transition from a culture of autonomous art to a culture of the textual.

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Introduction

...art is not a timeless manifestations of human spirit but the product of a specific set of temporal and topical, social and political conditions. The investigation of these conditions defines for us the activity of postmodernism. (Editorial, 1979, pp. 3-4)¹

The following thesis provides a critical staging of the major themes and associated texts appearing in the American art journal *October* between 1976 and 1981. This is achieved by an extensive use of the case study. Data are collected via interviews (conducted by the author),² observation and written documentation. Data are then presented, analysed and evaluated in the form of focussed incidents, what might be described as ‘conceptual clusters’ located within historical conditions and the theoretical literature, these clusters act in concert to form the matrix of the thesis.³ The studies are: 1) ‘*October*, La Glace sans tain’ (Muir, 2002)⁴; 2) ‘An Act of Erasure: *October* and the Index’; and 3) ‘Signs of a Beginning: *October* and the *Pictures* Exhibition’ (Muir, 2003)⁵. The case studies are used to examine institutional and individual responses to art and criticism functioning under different types of aesthetic and ‘political’ regimes (conditions of reception). Thus, the case study acts as a tool to allow detailed textured analysis of theoretical issues operative during the journal’s initial developmental history. The case studies are not

¹ ‘Editorial’, *October* 10 Fall 1979, pp. 3-4.

² See Appendix 1: semi-structured interviews conducted by the author with professors Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson and Joan Copjec (New York City, March 2002 and February 2003).

³ Thanks to Professor Mignon Nixon.

⁴ Muir, Peter 2002. ‘*October*, La Glace sans tain’, *Cultural Values*, Vol. 6, no. 4, October 2002, 419-441, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, Philadelphia PA, USA.

⁵ Muir, Peter 2003. ‘Signs of a Beginning: *October* and the *Pictures* Exhibition’ *Word & Image*, Vol. 19, No. 4, October-December 2003, pp. 1-11, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.

intended to act as stand alone studies of individual art historical events or sites, but to give empirical colour to a discussion of wider aesthetic forms and their interaction within disciplinary fields. A major advantage of this approach is that it allows for the development of theory based on observations of local level institutional and interpersonal interaction found in the case study sites. According to the editors of *October*, Rosalind Krauss (Founding Editor), Annette Michelson (Founding Editor), Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Hal Foster and Denis Hollier,⁶ and in light of the results of an extensive literature search, both in the United Kingdom and the United States [specifically through *The British Library*, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* and *The National Endowment for the Arts*], this is the first history undertaken in regard to the magazine and it therefore represents an original contribution to the theoretical literature.

The thesis is structured in the following way. Together with the present section the first case study forms the introductory part of the thesis. This case study considers the beginnings of *October's* critical practice, the cultural significance of *October*, its editorial board and their relation to academic discourse, and the development of *October's* 'house style' in comparison with other contemporaneous critical writing on art theory. The case study also provides an introduction to the theoretical and historical background to *October's* project; and acts to frame the theoretical issues addressed in case studies 2 and 3.

October's critical practice, as the editors put it, their '...active mediation of post-structuralism', is woven around three central motifs described by the editors as

⁶ Personal communication with Carrie Lambert (managing editor of *October* 2000).

‘...overlapping areas of theoretical endeavor’. (Editorial, 1987, p. xi)⁷ These areas act to guide the thesis in its exploration of *October*’s project and can be broadly designated as:

1) critiques on the structure of the sign, represented particularly by the semiotic order of the ‘index’, ‘...Almost from the outset the index, for example, appeared to us as a particularly useful tool....a concept that could work against the grain of familiar unities of thought, critical categories such as medium, historical categories such as style, categories that contemporary practices had rendered suspect, useless, irrelevant’. (p.xi)

Also 2) the constitution of the human subject, ‘...Now we have begun to analyze the body as it is constructed by different discourses– the erotic body, the hysterical body, the sacrificial body, body as screen, as threat: the body as singular no longer’, (p.xi) and 3) critiques on the ‘siting’ of the institution, that is, the role of the museum, the ‘academy’, and the theoretical locations of art and its theory. The editors put it this way, ‘....we watched in dismay as art institutions resurrected the claims of disinterestedness. Our attention was therefore redirected toward those institutions– the artist’s studio, the gallery and museum, the corporate patron, the discipline of art history’. (p. xi)⁸ Further, *October*’s practice can be seen to have developed within two overarching debates, a debate on the nature of perception and a debate on the conditions of artistic practice.

Any art-historical account of these intellectual activities must negotiate two related methodological problems. The first being a matter of differentiation: how can the critical production of *October* be singled out and characterized? To put this in a slightly different

⁷ The editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October the First Decade, 1976-1986*, MIT press, 1987, Introduction p, xi.

⁸ Disinterested attention is not equivalent to uninterested attention, what disinterest amounts to here is interest without ulterior purposes. For a comprehensive explanation see Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Art*, Routledge, New York, 1999, pp. 156-189.

way, how does one provide a critical account of *October* within the context of contemporary art history and art criticism? The second methodological problem is that of identification. How does one map and classify *October*'s practice in terms of its actual cultural and aesthetic agency? For example, its editorial stance and consequent contributions to the American debates on the problem of originality, or autonomy, or sublimity, or authorship, and their implications in relation to the redefinition of the 'object' of art criticism and the conditions of art's reception.

The thesis seeks to do two related things to achieve these methodological goals. Firstly, establish the nature of *October*'s criticism as an oeuvre within the context of art journals, art criticism, art history and the wider debates in humanities in the United States. This addresses the methodological issue of differentiation and revolves around the central issues of autonomy and subjectivity. This account confronts the contingency and historicity of *October*'s critical practice and its impact on representation in the late '70s and early '80s. Most notably, those theoretical and critical demarcations that were made by its editors in order to identify some orders of material and practices— rather than others— as being appropriately artistic and thus worthy of their critical attention. Here one must also consider the wider literary, critical and art historic context in which *October* was founded, that is, in relation to the perceived 'crisis in the Humanities' occurring in academic institutions, public bodies and literary and artistic publications in '70s and '80s America under the incursions of French literary theory, what have been described as '....the culture wars now raging throughout the Western world'. (Editorial, *The New Criterion*, 1982)⁹ In the visual arts, the 'neoconservative'¹⁰ side of the debate is often

⁹ The Editors: *The New Criterion*: www.newcriterion.com / home page, reprinted from 1982.

associated with writings appearing in the magazine *New Criterion*. The developing visual politics and critical activism of *October* can be seen as an expansion of this wider cultural dispute. As noted by Annette Michelson, ‘...We founded *October* for something, but we also founded it *against* something. (Newman, 2000, p. 436)¹¹

Secondly, and as a continuation of the overarching themes of subjectivity and autonomy, the thesis presents a series of in depth inquiries into the operation of *October*’s activism within contemporary art-critical debates. This addresses the methodological issue of identification and is represented by the case studies ‘*October*, La Glace sans tain’, ‘An act of Erasure: *October* and the *Index*’, and ‘Signs of a Beginning: *October* and the *Pictures* Exhibition. These case studies provide insight into a particular aesthetic issue and act to refine a theoretical explanation. Further, the art-historical sites these case studies are reflecting on demand a consideration of the changing notions of spectatorship, sublimity and the conditions of reception provoked by the interventions of the neo-avant-garde and the development of the Minimalist canon.¹² Within this highly ambiguous

¹⁰ One strand of the American right was constituted by a group of New York neo-conservative intellectuals who had their leading outlet in the monthly journals *Commentary* and the *New Criterion*, this group emerged from the neo-conservative element of *Partisan Review*. The editor of the *New Criterion*, Hilton Kramer, is a modernist art critic of substantial reputation, who left his prominent position at *The New York Times* to establish a monthly journal of critical opinion in the spirit of T.S. Eliot’s culturally Modernist and politically conservative *The Criterion* of the twenties and thirties. The politics of *October* were strongly resisted in the art world by the *New Criterion* (founded by Hilton Kramer and Samuel Lipman in the Fall of 1982). Politically Kramer was an implacable anti-Communist and pro-American neoconservative.

¹¹ Newman, Amy 2000. *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974*, Soho Press Inc., New York, p. 436. [emphasis in original]

¹² The thesis acknowledges the special influence of three scholarly works: T.J. Clark’s, *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Thames & Hudson, 1984), which acted as an intellectual exemplar (if not a model) for the thesis, Rosalind Krauss’ *Passage in Modern Sculpture* (MIT Press, 1977) which consists of seven case studies, ‘...the method has more to do with the process of the case study than with the procedures of a historical survey’, (Krauss, 1977, p. 3) and in particular, Krauss’ *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (Thames & Hudson, 1999), a case study on the work of the artist Marcel Broodthaers which explores the nature of the aesthetic medium at the heart of much modernist art practice.

context the case studies consider the cohesive intervention of the three major Octobrist themes that collectively sought the formation of a new ‘poststructural subjectivity’ in the viewer of the artwork; the cultural critique of the institution (allegorical impulses, originality and appropriation), the discourse on the nature of the sign (semiotics interpretations of the visual) and the discourse on the body (here represented by Foucault’s scopic-regimes as a kind of power-nexus).¹³

The cultural locations to be considered as case studies are: 1) ‘*October*, La Glace sans tain’, this essay considers the beginnings of *October*’s critical practice and the significance of a work by Michel Foucault, ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’. The theoretical issues/problematics raised by this essay became key to future debates in and around *October*; the essay becoming something of an emblematic means by which *October* might be distinguishing from other visual art critical practices. The spiralling interplay of Foucault’s narrative, combined with Magritte’s picture, is interpreted as a metaphor for the mediations of post-structural visual criticism itself as its practitioners sought to institute language into the visual sign, a project that attempted to produce a theoretical rationale—and perhaps a justification—for images being treated as if they were texts; thus, paraphrasing Foucault, introducing into the plenitude of the image, a certain disorder.

¹³ It was in analysing texts by the writers Mallarmé, Lautreamont, Joyce, Woolf, Robbe-Grillet, Bataille, etc., that semiology’s assumptions about the speaking subject (*parole*) and its relation to the system of language (*langue*) became increasingly unstable and eventually untenable. Often, these texts turned their attention to the substance of their own material in a process of self-reference, in other words: to the ambiguities and complexities of language. The effect of this attention was to reveal the production of meaning as a continuous mutating activity of signifiers. The fixed relations of the sign and meaning, in what became known as the ‘realist text’, were now displaced and redistributed. Rosalind Krauss defines this new space as the ‘paraliterary’, a space of ‘debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not a space of unity, coherence, or resolution that we think of as constituting the work of literature. For both Barthes and Derrida have a deep enmity towards the notion of the literary work’. (Krauss, Rosalind 1980. ‘Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary’, *October*, 13, Summer, reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 292-93.)

The case study provides an outline of the determining conditions that led to the development of this 'linguistic turn' and an associated reflection on Foucault's text that seeks to direct attention specifically towards its semiotic and discursive implications in relation to the developing oeuvre of criticism exemplified by the magazine. 2) 'An act of Erasure: *October* and the *Index*', this essay discusses two related issues central to *October's* re-construction of the object of criticism. The first being to provide the photographic with an art-theoretical rationale that could be used to disassemble the high modernist aesthetic and its modes of representation, its symbolic unities of thought. The second is associated with the journal's critique on the nature of the sign, a mediation that would include the frameworks that establish the social and aesthetic codes of perception. In particular, the editors highlight the semiotic order of the *index*, which they describe variously as being a useful tool, as being mute, as a trace or imprint rather than an (universalizing) ordering principle. Thus its structural logic, here revealed in a perceived new specificity of the photographic, is set up in figurative opposition to modernist notions of medium and style. And 3) 'Signs of a Beginning: *October* and the *Pictures* Exhibition', this study considers *October's* promotion of the *Pictures* aesthetic as part of a sequential campaign it waged against formalism and modernism using the developing language of poststructuralist visual criticism. At the beginning of the 1980s *October's* attention was directed towards providing the photographic with a new theoretical rationale in relation to contemporary issues of originality, appropriation, simulation, and repetition within a perceived *reification* of objects. The resulting combination of ideas about originality and appropriation became the vocabulary of a certain post-modern theory exemplified by *October*.

When Clement Greenberg's ideas became a cogent proposition (to be further mediated by Michael Fried) it brought an apparent order and inevitability to the interpretation of the art object, as Greenberg writes in his well known *Artforum* essay 'Complaints of an Art Critic' (1967), criticism is a 'subliminal operation' within which the critic should reveal 'helplessness' before art, and keep '....prejudices, leanings and inclinations....from interfering with qualitative judgments'. (Greenberg, 1967, p. 8)¹⁴ Such readings placed formalism¹⁵ at the center of art and criticism in America and recognised the principle of 'quality' as formalism's highest value, '...Quality [the disinterested character] is the very thing that determines the formality of the beautiful object; it must be pure of all attraction, of all seductive power, it must provoke no emotion, promise no enjoyment'. (Derrida, 1987, p. 74)¹⁶ In this way criticism converged upon the essence of art, 'its grace'.¹⁷ (See case studies 1 'October, La Glace sans tain' and 3, 'Signs of a Beginning: October and the Pictures Exhibition')

¹⁴ Greenberg, Clement, 'Complaints of an Art Critic', *Artforum*, Oct 1967, p. 38. The point one should make here is that Greenberg's criticism for example, in 'Master Léger' (1954), 'American-type Painting' (1955), and his seminal essay 'Modernist Painting' (1961) are all quite definitively about art, rather than culture, they are straightforward traditional art criticism rather than anything outside this aesthetic frame.

¹⁵ For a full description and analysis of form and formalism see, Noël Carroll's *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* 1990, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 107-153.

¹⁶ Derrida, Jacques, 1987. *The Truth in Painting*. (Originally published in 1978 as *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris) Chicago University Press, p. 74.

¹⁷ According to Michael Fried, '...I meant the epigraph ['Art and Objecthood'] to be taken as a gloss on the concept of presentness...My point, I would say today, was that at every moment the *claim* on the viewer of the modernist painting or sculpture is renewed totally...A further feature of the epigraph is its obvious 'sublimity' (Fried, Michael, *An Introduction to My Art Criticism*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1998, p. 44-47.) Speaking in 1997 Fried confirms the validity of his position, '...Everything I stood out against went on to triumph, and everything I most believe in came to be regarded as invalid or marginal. But of course I continue to think that it's history that's wrong, not 'Art and Objecthood', by which I mean that I have found little to admire in the art that's dominated the scene for the past twenty-five years and that I continue to believe that the artists I once championed have done most of the work that really matters during that time'. (an interview with Michael Fried 1997, in *Refracting Vision* 2000, (eds) Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts and Toni Ross, Sydney, Power Publications).

Greenberg sees the modernist project as a self-purifying dialectical process valorized by ‘opticality’, ‘...Greenberg developed a theory that painting is about vision, vision alone. You could then produce the theory of opticality. The visual must then eliminate any extraneous materials, anything that belongs to any other discipline. The critic can therefore come in and produce a quasi–philosophical or quasi–Kantian theory of painting, on top of that’. (Owens, 1992, p. 306)¹⁸ Speaking in *A Voyage on the North Sea, Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (1999), Rosalind Krauss sets out Clement Greenberg’s understanding of the theoretical conduit connecting the viewer and the artwork, isolating his notion of opticality as the painting’s specific mode of address, its dialectic,

...No sooner had Greenberg seemed to isolate the essence of painting in flatness than he swung the axis of the field ninety degrees to the actual picture surface to place all the import of the painting on the vector that connects viewer and object. In this he seemed to shift from the first norm–flatness–to the second–the determination of flatness–and to give this latter a reading that was not that of the bounding edge of the physical object but rather the projective resonance of the optical field itself–what in ‘Modernist Painting’ he had called the ‘optical third dimension’ created by ‘the very first mark on the canvas [which] destroys its literal and utter flatness’. This was the resonance he imputed to the effulgence of pure color as he spoke of it, not only as disembodied and therefore purely optical. But also ‘as the thing that opens and expands the picture plane’. ‘Opticality was thus an entirely abstract, schematized version of the link that traditional perspective had formally established between viewer and object, but one that now transcends the real parameters of measurable, physical space to express the purely projective powers to a preobjective level of sight, ‘vision itself’. (Krauss, 1999, p.29)¹⁹

¹⁸ Stephanson, Anders, 1992. An ‘Interviews with Craig Owens’, reproduced in *Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power, and Culture*, Craig Owens, The University of California Press, Oxford, p. 306. Greenberg’s notions of visual purity were represented by Abstract Expressionism primarily by Pollock, and Postpainterly Abstraction, represented by Frankenthaler, Louis, Noland, Stella, and Olitski. What is emphasized is visual purity, individual creativity, artistic emotion and expression. Modernist critics as promoters of these values, validate their lineage in terms of the traditional European concern of self-realization.

This optical dimension (the dialectical conduit between ‘art’ and the beholder) requires the elimination of any ‘...extraneous materials, anything that belongs to any other discipline’, and signifies, according to Krauss, modernist art’s ‘...hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse’. (Krauss, 1979, p.9)²⁰ (See case studies 1, 2 and 3)

In such an atmosphere (of sublimation) aesthetic criteria and technical competence in art tend to be derived in relation to a preexisting canon in which artworks manifest, ‘...certain universal or transcendental qualities, which explain their persistence through time and their appeal beyond the confines of their own social and geographical origin’. (Wolff, 1983, p.17)²¹ The autonomy of art in relationship to that canon remains a more or less uncontentious matter.²² Hal Foster describes the repercussions of this kind of historical and aesthetic attitude, ‘...history is presented as a narrative–continuous,

¹⁹ Krauss, Rosalind 1999. *A Voyage on the North Sea, Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, p.29. Krauss cites ‘Louis Noland’ 1960 and ‘After Abstract Expressionism’ (1962), in Clement Greenberg, op. Cit., vol. 4, pp. 97 and 131, also ‘Modernist Painting,’ p. 90.

²⁰ Krauss, Rosalind 1979 ‘Grids’, *October* no. 9, p.9.

²¹ Wolff, Janet, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983, p. 17.

²² The art historian Ernst Gombrich argued eloquently in his work *Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960) that artistic change is fueled by the artist’s desire to amend and improve the illusionistic power of the techniques inherited from the traditions of the past– this conviction is widely known as the resemblance theory of representation. Gombrich described this process and cultural motif in terms of ‘making’ and ‘matching’. Making would correspond to the representational tools passed down in a precedent sense, and matching concerned the artist’s personal and subjective observations of the real world of perception. As Gombrich would have it, and I presume to conflate his text, the correspondence between his or her image and the physical world enabled artists to develop ever more sophisticated means of obtaining an illusionistically satisfying characterization of nature. (Gombrich, Ernst, *Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Princeton University Press, 1960). The idea that the history of art and the humanities in general is a record of the ways in which the artistic production of different ages may be distinguished and rationalized on the basis of form is ultimately based on an idealist Kantian view of aesthetic value. The essentialist or universalist (for example and with an acknowledged simplification; Erwin Panofsky, Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, Heinrich Wölfflin, Henri Focillon,), claims that works of art should command the same response from all human beings regardless of their location in time and space (respectively atemporality and trans-historicism), this places greater emphasis on the allegedly eternal harmonies of form rather than the unreliable and changing contingencies of the culturally specific meaning of politicized subject matter.

homogeneous, and anthropocentric—of great men and masterworks’. (Foster, 1984 [1982], p. 191)²³ At moments of transition, when the social ground of art is a matter of uncertainty and contest, the canon of art and the principles of autonomy by which artistic practices define themselves become matters of controversy and dispute.²⁴ At such historical moments the unquestioned canon (the aesthetic norm, art’s *thetic* boundaries)²⁵ is re-identified as the construction of a dominant (hegemonistic) social order.²⁶ As Mark Poster notes, in relation to the adoption of critical theory as an oppositional critique, ‘...Critical theory goes against the grain of a legitimating process endemic to power formations, a discursive mechanism through which the finitude of institutions is naturalized and universalized’. (Poster, 1989, p. 3)²⁷ (see case study 1) Indeed, it seems that under such legitimising conditions the very consistency of autonomy itself is what art tends to mean. The individual work of art being made the emblem of the legitimating

²³ Foster, Hal 1984. ‘Re, Post’, in *Art After Modernism, Rethinking Representation*, (ed.) Brian Wallis, The New Museum of Contemporary Arts, New York, p. 191. Originally published in *Parachute* 26 (Spring 1982), pp. 11-15.

²⁴ During the 1960s formalism began to erode as art came to mean more than ‘self-critical’ painting and sculpture, and criticism began to reach beyond Greenbergian and Friedian strictures. Now the basic terms and conditions of artistic categories had changed, and with the changing of terms came changes in the conditions under which art was practiced. The political turbulent sixties had opened up new artistic possibilities, under pressure from the artists themselves, in response to new technologies, cultural attitudes, and personal lifestyles. The ideological factors implicit in their radical artistic innovations brought greater emphasis on the political, social, and cultural environment in which these works were seen. See: Arthur C. Danto, *Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton University Press, 1997.

²⁵ Julia Kristeva coined the term *thetic* to analyse the threshold of language (its acquisition and utilisation), and define a line between what she called the *sémiotique* and the Symbolic. The *sémiotique* is disruptive, anarchic and a continual challenge to the Symbolic order, here represented by the modernist normative aesthetic. See Kristeva, Julia 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Walter, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 43.

²⁶ According to Gramsci, hegemony requires the successful mobilization and reproduction of the active consent of dominated groups, and is concentrated in certain organizations, for instance the church, schools, mass media, schools and universities and so on. It is articulated by intellectuals who develop ideologies and a set of parameters of the educational system. See: Stewart R. Clegg 1989. *Frameworks of Power*, Sage Publications, p. 160.

²⁷ Poster, Mark 1989. *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism, In search of Context*, Cornell University Press, New York, p.3.

process: representing the eternal, or the abiding, or the unchanging value; its own absolute (normative) nature indefinable except within its own terms. As Griselda Pollock points out, such positions ‘...produce an ideological, ‘pure’ space for something called ‘art’, sealed off and impenetrable to any attempt to locate art practice within a history of production and social relations’. (Pollock, 1980, p. 57)²⁸ *October*’s dialectic, its succession of critical interventions that respond with varying degrees of continuity and disjunction to a single ongoing problematic, sought the dissolution of this pure space of art’s universality in an attempt to disrupt the normative pictorial and discursive frames of reference. In this way the pre-existing values of modernist art, its valorisation of quality, autonomy and opticality were challenged by a postmodern recourse to language, negating as Krauss would have it, ‘modern art’s will to silence’. (Krauss, 1979, p.9)²⁹

Speaking in 1987 the editors inform us that,

...A journal is produced according to the demands of time and in the midst of debates that will intensify, shift, or disappear but whose outcome we cannot, in principle, know. Intellectual work consists, nevertheless, in articulating a position, in defining for oneself a moment, a prospect from which an argument can be made. (Editorial, 1987, p. xii)³⁰

This history, this ‘prospect’, is played out within competing aesthetic and cultural systems— their debates, their texts, their images and their art objects. The critical production of *October* in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s reveals a kind of transitional

²⁸ Pollock, Griselda, ‘Artists, mythologies and media—genius, madness and art history’, *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1980, p. 57.

²⁹ Krauss, Rosalind, 1979. ‘Grids’, *October* no. 9, p.9.

³⁰ The editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October the First Decade, 1976-1986*, MIT press, 1987, Introduction, p. xii.

dynamic in which the rhetoric and practice of criticism participated in the creation of a new aesthetic and a new role for the art critic. Craig Owens comments on the reciprocal relationship between artist and critic in the New York cultural milieu of this period, ‘...We were writing not necessarily *about* these critical and oppositional practices but *alongside* them. There was an exchange there, and one’s criticism was conducting the same work in a different arena’. (Owens, 1992, p. 63)³¹ Joan Copjec confirms this unique creative situation, ‘...working alongside the artists, that was a very important aspect of its [*October*’s] project’. (source, the author)³² At this unique historical moment in American art and criticism linguistics, rhetoric, semiotics and various models of textuality become the ‘natural’ language for reflecting upon the arts, the media and other cultural forms.³³ This process of re-interpretation—*October*’s ‘active mediation of post-structuralism’—attempts the undoing of the modernist visual stereotype, a stereotype that functions under the dominant social metaphors of plenitude, autonomy and harmony, rather than the subsequent metaphors of fragmentation, instability and dispossession. The following case

³¹ Owens, Craig 1992, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, University of California Press, California. [emphasis in the original].

³² See Appendix 1.

³³ The following scholarly articles developed the major themes and particular forms of critical language that would identify the new American visual theory, and have been of crucial importance in developing this thesis: Rosalind Krauss’ essays, ‘Grids’ (*October* no. 9 Summer 1979), ‘In the Name of Picasso’ (*October* no. 16 Spring 1981), ‘Sincerely Yours’ (*October* no. 20 Spring 1982), ‘The Originality of the Avant-Garde’ (*October* no. 18 Fall 1981), ‘The Photographic Condition of Surrealism’ (*October* no. 19 Winter, 1981), ‘Notes on the Index, I & II’ (*October* nos. 3 and 4 Spring and Fall, 1977), ‘Le Witt in Progress’ (*October* no. 6 Fall 1978), ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (*October* no. 8 Spring 1979), and ‘The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum’ (*October* no. 54, 1990, pp. 3-17). Benjamin Buchloh’s ‘Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions’ (*October* no. 55, 1990, pp. 105-143), ‘Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression’ (*October* no. 16, 1981), and ‘Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art’ (*Artforum*, Sep, 1982, pp. 44-56). Craig Owens’ essay ‘The Allegorical Impulse, Toward a Theory of the Postmodern, Parts I & II’ (*October* nos. 12 and 13, 1980), Annette Michelson’s ‘The Prospect Before Us’ (*October* no. 16, 1981), Douglas Crimp’s ‘Pictures’ (*October* no. 8, 1979) and ‘The Museums Old/The Library’s New Subject’ (*Parachute*, no. 22, Spring, 1982, p.37-43); also Gilles Deleuzes’, ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’ (1989, no. 50, pp. 96-107), as well as Jonathan Crary’s ‘Spectacular, Attention, Counter Memory’ (*October*, no. 50, 1989, pp. 96-107).

studies give particular emphasis to this idea in relation to the changing conditions of art's reception; the journal's major themes and related texts; and the nature and operation of the publication's critical practice.

To conclude this section I would like to return, very briefly, to the methodological issues of differentiation and identification specifically in relation to *October's* visual identity. *October* and its relationship to its audience can be interpreted as a kind of image, and this image has a public life. Speaking in 1987 the editors put it this way, '...A magazine is a public enterprise, a mode of address, a form of collective speech.' (Editorial, 1987, p. x)³⁴ In relation to this idea of collectivity, one might suggest that such texts are the result of a kind of cultural collaboration in which factors other than the ideas and will of the authors play a part.³⁵ To put this in another way, the nature of the public support also defines the audience for the text, determines its particular form and influences its writing. The editors of *October* describe their readership, '...The speaker imagines his or her audience. We began by imagining ours as the one for which we had always written. It was an audience specialized in commitment to the visual arts, one made up of artists, critics, scholars, students.' (ibid)³⁶ Annette Michelson extends this apprehension,

³⁴ The editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October the First Decade, 1976-1986*, MIT press, 1987, Introduction p, x.

³⁵ The periodical publication remains the main vehicle of critical production. The topology of art periodicals is straightforward, on one side lie a range of established scholarly journals with a solid readership and steady income based on sales and art trade advertising (for example *Art in America* and *Artforum*); on the other side, there exists an assortment of reviews produced on small budgets aimed at a restricted, and committed readership. The art journal *October* has an authorial and visual identity sustained by the directives of a more or less consistent editorial staff extending their influence and directives over almost three decades.

³⁶ The editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October the First Decade, 1976-1986*, MIT press, 1987, Introduction p, x.

...we [at *October*] were very very interested in the fusion of theory and practice and appalled that so many intellectuals that we knew were dependent on journals like *The New York Review of Books* and what was left of *Partisan Review*, [and] various academic journals that we saw as irrelevant and totally dead, and so we really wanted to see if we could not form another readership, part of which could be seduced away from *Art News* on the one hand and *The New York Review of Books* on the other. (source the author)³⁷

W. J. T. Mitchell proposes that, ‘...[a] verbal image is the ‘picture’ in ‘logical space’ that is projected by a proposition.’ (Mitchell, 1986, p. 26)³⁸ As well as being a picture in logical space *October* presents an object in physical space. Writing in the first issue the editors define the importance of the journal’s format (Figs. 1 & 2), an appearance that stood in stark contrast to magazines like *Art in America* and *Artforum*. According to the editors,

...*October* wishes to address those readers who, like many writers and artists, feel that the present format of the major art reviews is producing a form of pictorial journalism which deflects and compromises critical effort. Limited and judicious illustration will contribute to the central aim of *October*’s texts: the location of those coordinates whose axes charts contemporary artistic practice and significant critical discourse’. (Editorial, 1976, p. 5)³⁹

Thomas Crow [a current member of *October*’s advisory board] outlines the cultural signifiers he associates with *October*’s visual identity,

...The *October* editors made a measured iconoclasm into policy, declaring in a Quaker-like way that its look would ‘be plain of aspect, and its illustrations determined by considerations of textual clarity,’ in order to emphasize ‘the primacy of text and the writer’s freedom of discourse.’ Conforming to ancient rhetorical formulae, illustration itself came under suspicion as an inherently ‘lavish’

³⁷ An interview with Annette Michelson conducted by the author New York City, 2003.

³⁸ Mitchell, W.J.T 1986 *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 26.

³⁹ The Editors, ‘About October,’ *October* 1, 1976, p. 5.

embellishment, and an elegantly austere graphic style was put forward as an outward sign of the gravity appropriate to the historical occasion. That quality was all the more appropriate in that the journal's component of explicit theorizing came largely from writers whose main commitment was the word. [And] On a more polemical level (in rhetoric one would say forensic), visual austerity stood as an indictment of the complicity of mainstream art magazine with the corrupting commerce in art objects, the irredeemable enemy of 'intellectual autonomy'. (Crow, 1996, pp. 87-88)⁴⁰

This restrained 'Quaker-like' presentation can also be detected in Hilton Kramer's journal *New Criterion* that eschews illustration entirely, and limits advertising to decorative typography. This kind of visual strategy (representing 'rhetorical seriousness' and an 'indictment of commerce') is set in contrasted with Robert Pincus-Witten's description of the opulent and sensuous visual nature of the image and 'surrogate artwork' of the *Artforum* of the 1980s,

...*Artforum* not only persisted but prospered during the fizzy '80s. Yet it strikes me that it became less an organ of art criticism than a certain kind of artwork, a visual repast that one month might tempt, another repel. Through a skillful amalgam of image and design, *Artforum* provided the intellectual cuisine that its writing sustained in only a limited sense. (Pincus-Witten, 1993, p. 196)⁴¹

Further, Pincus-Witten describes his interpretation of some of the repercussions of *October*'s critical realignment, directing the reader's attention to *October*'s primary audience,

...These editors [of *Artforum*, speaking of Krauss and Michelson], with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, set off to found *October*, which, by the end of the '70s, would supplant *Artforum* as the compelling voice for the dissemination of new ideas in contemporary art, at least insofar as the university circuit was concerned. It was

⁴⁰ Crow, Thomas 1996 *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, Yale University Press, pp.87- 88. Crow cites from 'About October,' *October* 1, Spring 1976, p. 3.

⁴¹ Pincus-Witten, Robert, 'The Page Was My Party,' *Artforum* Vol. 32, no.1 September 1993, p.196.

admittedly wearying to slog through the tapioca of Octobrist prose, but the trek was no less valuable for its gumminess. (ibid.)

The literary archive represented by *October* provides us with a sign of its own intelligibility, being an example of what Michel Foucault refers to as an *œuvre*, that is, ‘...a collection of texts that can be designated by a sign of a proper name.’ (Foucault, 1972, p.31)⁴² Or as W.J.T. Mitchell would have it,

...Texts and speech-acts are after all, not simply affairs of ‘consciousness,’ but are public expressions that belong right out there with all other kinds of material representations we create— pictures, statues, graphs, maps, etc. We don’t have to say that a descriptive paragraph is exactly like a picture to see that they do have similar functions as public symbols that project states of affairs about which we can reach rough, provisional agreements. (Mitchell, 1986, p.20)⁴³

The writings (‘public symbols’) associated with the journal *October* between 1976 and 1981 represent a particular aesthetic promoted in America under the authority of French literary theory. As noted by Douglas Crimp, ‘...the perception of *October* was that it was probably the journal that was most central in theorizing postmodernism in the visual arts.’(source, the author)⁴⁴ This intellectual position stands in dialectical opposition to the dominant aesthetic sensibility of the time which is characterised by variations of connoisseurship and formalist theory (see case studies 1 and 3). Representing, as Hal Foster would have it, ‘...Purity as an end and decorum as an effect; historicism as an operation and the museum as the context; the artist as original and the art work as

⁴² Foucault, Michel, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, (trans.) A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972, p. 31.

⁴³ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 20.

⁴⁴ An interview with Douglas Crimp, conducted by the author NYC 2002.

unique—these are the terms which modernism privileges and against which postmodernism is articulated.’ (Foster, 1984, p.191)⁴⁵ The following case studies trace *October*’s role in this articulation as the journal participates in the transition from a culture of autonomous art to a culture of the textual.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Foster, Hal, ‘Re: Post’, *Art After Modernism, Rethinking Representation*, (ed.) Brian Wallis, The New Museum of Contemporary Arts, New York, 1984, p. 191.

⁴⁶ The thesis takes into account the received qualitative (and historical) method; that is, it contains an interpretation of human actions functioning within particular layers of social reality. The thesis will consider the historical period under review— the late ‘70s and early ‘80s in America in relation to what might be termed ‘the crisis in the humanities’— as an observable historical phenomenon. That is, it has a specific temporal identity, that can be described in empirical terms, though the analysis and deployment of visual and documentary evidence.

Case study 1 *October, La Glace sans tain*⁴⁷

This case study considers the beginnings of *October's* critical practice and the significance of a work by Michel Foucault, 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'.⁴⁸ The theoretical issues/problematics raised by this essay became key to future debates in and around *October*; the essay becoming something of an emblematic means by which *October* might be distinguishing from other visual art critical practices. The importance of Foucault's text in relation to *October's* critical practice was revealed in correspondences with Rosalind Krauss in August 2001. Foucault's self-referential essay can be seen as 'crucial' not only to Rosalind Krauss' intellectual development, but also to the continuing debate on the nature of text and image in which the journal would be involved. The spiralling interplay of Foucault's narrative, combined with Magritte's picture, might be interpreted as a metaphor for the mediations of post-structural visual criticism itself as its practitioners sought to institute language into the visual sign, a project that attempted to produce a theoretical rationale—and perhaps a justification—for images being treated as if they were texts; thus, paraphrasing Foucault, introducing into the plenitude of the image, a certain disorder. Such a weaving together of representation and discourse is interpreted as the formation of a destabilizing dialectic. Understood here as a succession of critical interventions that respond with varying degrees of continuity and disjunction, to a single ongoing problematic: a dialectic (*sémiotique*) that can be linked to the writings of

⁴⁷ 'La Glace sans tain'. The mirror without silvering was the language that could cut two ways. It was to reflect the speaker back to himself even as it was to be transparent, allowing the speaker's subjectivity to flood past him and merge with the whole of the outside world.

⁴⁸ This is the first essay in the first issue of *October*, *October* 1, Spring 1976, pp. 6-21. The text was originally published in *Les Cashiers du chemin*, no. 2, January 1968, pp. 79-105. The *October* version is accompanied by two letters from René Magritte to Michel Foucault dated May 23 and June 4 respectively (1966); the latter includes an illustration, a drawing by Magritte itemizing and annotating the internal structural features of a pipe—'find attached a diagram/drawing of a pipe'. Further citations are from the *October* text.

October as it shifts its rhetorical locations (critical interventions) in an attempt to break down the normative pictorial and discursive frames of reference; becoming in essence, a de-disciplinary and de-formative critical practice. The following case study provides an outline of the determining conditions that led to the development of this ‘linguistic turn’ and an associated reflection on Foucault’s text that seeks to direct attention specifically towards its semiotic and discursive implications in relation to the developing oeuvre of criticism exemplified by the magazine. The case study is supported by interviews with Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp (conducted by the author in March 2002), and Annette Michelson (conducted by the author in February 2003).

...*October*’s project has always been to bring European theory into the purview of American art practice because we really felt that a lot of things were incredibly relevant. In the first issue we published Foucault’s ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ in translation, Richard Howard did the translation, and so that was partly the project. The other part of the project was to deal with art practice in complex enough and developed enough articles to characterize new departures. (Krauss, Rosalind; source the author, 2002)

The written interpretation of art constitutes a distinctive genre; it has its own strategies, styles and modes of presentation. In itself, it represents an object of study, the American art journal *October*, founded in the spring of 1976, is an ‘archive’ of such texts.⁴⁹

October’s project can be defined as the conceptualization of a particular notion of the

⁴⁹ *October*’s personnel (2001-2002) Editors, Rosalind Krauss (*Founding Editor*), Annette Michelson (*Founding Editor*), Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Hal Foster, Denis Hollier, Mignon Nixon. Managing Editor Lisa Pasquariello. Advisory Board, Parveen Adams, Emily Apter, Carol Armstrong, Leo Bersani, Homi Bhabha, Susan Buck-Morss, Jonathan Crary, Thomas Crow, Manthia Diawara, Andreas Huyssen, Gertrud Koch, Miwon Kwon, Stuart Liebman, Mignon Nixon, Allan Sekula. According to Janet Fisher, Associate Director for Journal Publishing at the MIT press, *October*’s circulation as of 23 May, 2001 stands at 3600, 800 of those being outside the U.S. *October*’s production and design was undertaken by Charles Read, and type set in *Baskerville*, the journal measures 23 cm X 18cm and was initially published by The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, and distributed by Jaap Reitman. (see appendix 1)

contemporary avant-garde to politics, and the bringing of European theory into the purview of American art practice. Such a complex weaving together of representation and discourse is interpreted in the following case study as the formation of a destabilizing dialectic: understood here as a succession of critical interventions that respond with varying degrees of continuity and disjunction, to a single ongoing problematic. A dialectic (*sémiotique*)⁵⁰ that can be linked to the writings of *October* as it shifts its rhetorical locations in an attempt to break down the normative pictorial and discursive frames of reference. This process of re-interpretation attempted the undoing of the modernist visual stereotype, a stereotype that functioned under the dominant social metaphors of plenitude, autonomy and harmony, rather than the subsequent metaphors of fragmentation, instability and dispossession.

Michel Foucault's essay 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (1968) is the first text to appear in the first issue of *October* and can be seen as emblematic of the continuing debate on the nature of text and image in which the journal would be involved. The spiraling interplay of Foucault's narrative, in relation to Magritte's picture, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the mediations of post-structural visual criticism, as its practitioners sought to institute language into the visual sign; a project that attempted to produce a theoretical rationale for images being treated as if they were texts. Further, this essay can be seen as illustrative of a means of distinguishing *October* from other visual arts criticism and

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva coined the term *thetic* to analyse the threshold of language (its acquisition and utilisation), and define a line between what she called the *sémiotique* and the Symbolic. The *sémiotique*- here represented by *October's* critical practice- is disruptive, anarchic and a continual challenge to the established Symbolic order- here represented by the modernist normative aesthetic. Kristeva emphasises the flow of the *sémiotique*, depending on one's perspective it can be creative and fecund or a destructive threat to language and the subject. (See Kristeva, Julia 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Walter, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 43).

theory operative in the 1970s. Paraphrasing Foucault, what were the ‘modes of existence’ of this de-disciplinary critical practice?

October is as a discursive agency that has played a determining role in framing and re-framing both international art practice and critical theory for almost three decades; being initially comparable to, and now exceeding *Artforum* and *Art in America* in its cultural standing and its ability to exercise aesthetic power over a particular audience. The critical writings of *October*, particularly those appearing between 1976 and 1981, established a kind of post-modern academy of just not art criticism, but of ‘critical activism’, representing the dissolution of the boundaries between artist and critic. An academy based initially, as acknowledged by the editors, on a ‘recuperation’ of the Constructivist project, a moment in time seen to represent a conjunction between diverse interdisciplinary artistic practice and discursive critical theory. This discursive moment was, according to these writers, unfinished. Aborted by the consolidation of Stalinism and subsequently distorted by the recuperation of the Soviet avant-garde into Western mainstream idealist aesthetics. A mainstream considered to be inexorably linked to the agenda of what came to be widely termed late capitalism with its associated reification of cultural signs. In the radical politics and artistic practices of the 1950s and 1960s—exemplified by the New York ‘neo-avant-garde’—the *October* group, under the stewardship of Rosalind Krauss, perceived a similar correlation between the contemporary arts; however, this correspondence was considered to lack a consolidation with critical theory perceived within Russian Constructivism. The writers of *October* saw a transitional area in their own historical moment— a moment that might fulfil the completion of the cultural practices of both the 1960s and the Constructivist project of

1917-1946. In consideration, Douglas Crimp outlines his perceptions of *October's* project,

...I think that in some ways the perception of *October* was that it was probably the journal that was most central in theorizing postmodernism in the visual arts. That wasn't what its project was initially of course, postmodernism came into the picture a little bit later, [originally] it was an interest in a particular notion of the modernist avant-garde, its constitution and practices in the present, in the work of let's say the minimalist generation of artists. (Crimp, Douglas; source the author, 2002)

Such redefining narratives were initiated and later extrapolated in relation to another younger generation of artist by writers such as Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Yvonne Rainer, Hollis Frampton, Joan Copjec, Tom Lawson and Kate Linker. This was an academy of art criticism vehemently opposed by other contemporary 'humanist' writers like Robert Pincus-Witten, Robert Storr, Roger Kimball, Richard Hennessy and in particular in relation to publications such as *New Criterion*, *Partisan Review*, *The New York Review of Books* and *Salmagundi*. Rosalind Krauss described to me the cultural conditions, under which *October* functioned,

...Hilton Kramer [had] started *New Criterion* (1982). It seemed to me that what was happening in this country was that the public sphere was contracting and that more and more vehicles were there for neo-conservative positions, but for liberal and left wing there were less and less, and *October* therefore, was incredibly important and we shouldn't let it die. (Krauss, source the author, 2002)⁵¹

⁵¹ For a more complete description see appendix 1: The American right was constituted by a group of mainly New York neo-conservative intellectuals who had their leading outlet in the monthly journals *Commentary* and *The New Criterion*; this group emerged from the neo-conservative element of *Partisan Review*. The editor of the *New Criterion*, Hilton Kramer, is a modernist art critic of substantial reputation, who left his prominent position at *The New York Times*, to establish a monthly journal of critical opinion in the spirit of T.S. Eliot's culturally Modernist and politically conservative *The Criterion* of the twenties and thirties. The politics of *October* were strongly resisted in the art world by the *New Criterion*, founded by Hilton Kramer and Samuel Lipman in the Fall of 1982. Politically Kramer was an implacable anti-Communist and pro-American neoconservative. In an aggressive fashion, and in the name of the modernist canon and transcendent aesthetic quality, Kramer stood opposed to postmodernist art, art

These divergent positions, conservative and neo-conservative, left wing and liberal, should be seen in the context of a wider post-war debate within the humanities in the United States concerning issues of autonomy, cultural memory and expression.

In a 1981 editorial, Annette Michelson wrote that, '...the journal [*October*] was taking shape [in] a difficult transitional moment in which the modernist canon, the forms and categories which had defined it, the practices for which it provided a framework of intelligibility, were everywhere in question'. (Michelson, 1981, p.119)⁵² According to her perception, basic aesthetic terms such as quality, originality, authenticity, and transcendence became problematic as never before. The literary theorist Gerald Gaff confirms the repercussions of this developing intellectual context, '...assumptions that were once agreed on became controversial... [We] no longer share the tacit agreement we once did about basic words—'literature,' 'culture,' 'meaning,' 'value,' 'tradition,' ...you name it'. (Gaff, 1988, p.21)⁵³ Hal Foster describes his intellectual relationship to the cultural positions operating during this period,

...Yet not long ago there was a sense of a loose alliance, even a common project, particularly in opposition to rightist positions, which ranged from old attacks on modernism in toto as the source of all evil in our hedonistic society to new defense of particular modernisms that had become official, indeed traditional, the modernisms of the museum and the academy. For this position postmodernism was 'the revenge of the philistines' (the happy phrase of Hilton Kramer), the vulgar kitsch of media hucksters, lower classes, and inferior people, a new barbarism to be shunned, like multiculturalism, at all costs. I supported a postmodernism that

history, art criticism and especially art theory. Kramer rooted the thinking of the *October* group in the counterculture of the late 1960's He held that the perpetuation of dissident attitudes responsible for what he considered the sorry condition of American culture.

⁵² Michelson, 'The Prospect Before Us,' *October* 16, Spring 1981, p. 119.

⁵³ Graff, Gerald, 'Where Do We Go from Here?', *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1988, p.21.

contested this reactionary cultural politics and advocated artistic practices not only critical of institutional modernism but suggestive of alternative forms— of new ways to practice culture and politics. (Foster, 1996, pp. 205-206)⁵⁴

The editors of *October* called for the critical analysis of postmodernism and the support of theoretically significant contemporary art; at the same time rejecting the traditional aesthetic paradigms of form and formalism, abandoning its evaluation of the aesthetic components of the individual art work and interpretations of quality that had become the emblems of established art theory, ‘...Quality [the disinterested character] is the very thing that determines the formality of the beautiful object; it must be pure of all attraction, of all seductive power, it must provoke no emotion, promise no enjoyment’. (Derrida, Jacques; 1987, P. 74)⁵⁵ The writers associated with *October* had been exposed to alternative ideologies with the intellectual power that formalism had once possessed, that is, the new and increasingly influential semiotic post-structuralism.⁵⁶ Instead of the continual gloss placed on formalism by writers like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, *October* championed the French theoreticians who analysed the ideological assumptions and implications of signs, language, literature, literary theory and criticism. In contrast, and as a reaction to such evaluations, the editorial board of the magazine *The New Criterion* outlines their position on these issues, positions that defend the value and integrity of cultural memory,

⁵⁴ Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 205-206.

⁵⁵ Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The Truth in Painting*. (Originally published in 1978 as *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris) Chicago University Press, USA.

⁵⁶ It should be noted that semiotic definitions of visual representation had been available since the 1930s, when the Prague School first introduced them, the work of the Czech literary scholar Jan Mukarovsky being particularly important in this respect. See: Mukarovsky, Jan, ‘Art as a Semiotic Fact,’ (trans.) I. R. Titunik, 1934, reproduced in *Semiotics of Art, Prague School Contributions*,(ed.) Titunik and Ladislav Matejka, Cambridge MIT Press, 1976, pp. 3-9.

...*The New Criterion*, founded in 1982 by the art critic Hilton Kramer and the pianist and music critic Samuel Lipman, is a monthly review of the arts and intellectual life. Written with great verve, clarity, and wit, *The New Criterion* has emerged as America's foremost voice of critical dissent in the culture wars now raging throughout the Western world. A staunch defender of the values of high culture, *The New Criterion* is also an articulate scourge of artistic mediocrity and intellectual mendacity wherever they are found, in the universities, the art galleries, the media, the concert halls, the theater, and elsewhere. (Editorial, 1982, no page number)⁵⁷

In terms of visual arts practice, the kind of medium specific formalism elaborated by the art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell and refined by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, had established a model for art based on the intrinsic autonomy of modernist painting in particular; pledged as it was to the ideals of purity, atemporality, significant form and opticality. Discontented artists were now drawn to the legacies of the historical avant-garde as a means by which to exceed this perceived modernist hegemony. Their purpose was to define the 'institution of art' in an epistemological inquiry into its aesthetic categories, either to destroy it in some viral sense by attacking its formal conventions, or to transform it according to the material practices of a revolutionary/emancipated society. In either case, their purpose was to somehow reposition art in relation to space and time as well as social and political practice. Thus, for many North American and Western European artists in the late '50s and early '60s, the strategies of surrealism, dada and constructivism offered historical alternatives to the high modernist model dominant at the time. This is the writer and critic Craig Owens (a former student of Rosalind Krauss' and a contributing editor who left *October* in 1980)⁵⁸ speaking in 1987,

⁵⁷ The Editors, *The New Criterion*, www.newcriterion.com / home page October 1999.

⁵⁸ Craig Owens was replaced by Joan Copjec: see an interview with Joan Copjec Appendix 1.

...For me the term [referring to the term postmodernism] and the discussion became important around 1975, before Lyotard. He meant nothing at this point, and I hadn't even heard of him. It was specifically a reaction to the hegemony of formalist theory, which had claimed or appropriated the term modernism. Modernism meant what Clement Greenberg had said it meant. The definition therefore excluded things like Duchamp, dada, surrealism; things that were not part of high modernism. So one became aware at a certain moment that practices of the late 1960s and 70s no longer could be discussed within that High-modernist paradigm; and if they were it was only to see them as somehow degenerate, perverse, corrupt, as representing the loss of purity, the loss of purpose, the loss of high culture. Obviously a lot of the practices went back to such moments as Duchamp and the readymades in 1913 or 1915, back to dada and surrealism. These links were very clear; but in order to theorize them, to deal with contemporary production without evaluating it in terms of categories and criteria of High modernism as elaborated by Greenberg and Michael Fried, it seemed necessary to elaborate a counter discourse. (Owens, Craig; 1992, p.299)

As Owens points out, the legacies of surrealism made up one strand of this developing discourse, and it is at this historical site that the case study begins its inquiry into *October's* inclusion of the linguistic sign into modernist art. An inclusion that would attempt to break down '...The barrier...between the arts and vision and those of language [which have] been almost totally successful in walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and defending them against the intrusion of speech. (Krauss, 1985, p.9)

Within a year of the publication of André Breton's first *Manifesto du Surréalisme* in December 1924,⁵⁹ the painter Joan Miró was exploring the theoretical space, 'the space

⁵⁹ The Manifesto was written in October 1924 and published in December 1924 in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, (trans.) by R. Seaver and H. R. Lane, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1972. Twelve issues of the Surrealist Revolution were produced between December 1924 and December 1929, 1924 was also the year of the first surrealist group exhibition in the Galerie Pierre, Paris, also the year of the 'Declaration' of 27th January, signed by twenty-six surrealists, the following year saw the invention of the game 'La Cadavre Exquis'. In the 1930s several figures on the fringe of Surrealism— Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, Carl Einstein, and Gaston Bachelard— contributed to the intellectual debates centering around advances in psychoanalysis, relativity and quantum physics, the 'invisible forces' directing human nature.

in-between' the verbal and the visual in the much-cited painting *Stars in the Sexes of Snails* (Fig. 3, [1925]).⁶⁰

According to Rosalind Krauss, and speaking in reference to Breton's and Philippe Soupault's work *Les Champs magnétiques* (Breton's first automatic text co-authored with Soupault 1919)⁶¹, this work produced a 'magnetic field' in relation to the conjunction of the two opposite poles represented by text [the verbal] and image [the visual]. (Krauss; Rowell, 1972, pp.11-38) The motifs in *Stars in the Sexes of Snails*, the bright red circle, the five-pointed black star and its trails (or are they emanations of black light?) The thin awkward black line drawn over the lower circle which attempts to somehow anchor, to hold down the active dispersal of the upper third of the canvas to the comparative void of the lower two thirds, the blue gray misty eddy spiraling like smoke in the top left hand corner of the painting, and the washed ghostly unifying background overlaid with faded black stains, shadows of unknown forms in random organic shapes also include words. This scrawled painted calligraphy reads downwards in a broken Z shape from the upper left-hand corner, '*étoiles en des sexes d'escargo*', 'stars in the sexes of snails', or in reverse, 'snails genitals in the form of stars'. (Krauss; Rowell, 1972, p.39) *Stars in the Sexes of Snails* functions as a calligram—a poem in which the words are arranged to look like objects, as in Guillaume Apollinaire's calligram 'My heart like an upside-down flame' (1925). Rosalind Krauss explains,

⁶⁰ A line in Paul Eluard's poem 'Life' emblemized this desirable state of dual consciousness, 'When she goes out she sleeps' (*Quand elle sort elle dort*). Such a synthesis of the conscious and the unconscious was considered to overcome opposites, Breton would call this a 'sublime point' (First and Second *Manifeste du surréalisme* respectively 1924 and 1929).

⁶¹ *Les champs magnétiques*, 1919, (trans.) D. Gascoyne, London, Atlas Press, 1985; this text first appeared in extract form in the magazine *Littérature, nouvelle série* that was published thirteen times until June 1924.

...Very simply, the *calligramme* is a poem which creates an image simultaneously in visual and verbal form. Michel Foucault observes of the *calligramme* that it takes the muteness of the line which bounds the drawn figure and makes it speak by filling it with words; and takes the special indifference of words written on a page and makes them bow to the law of simultaneous form which operates within the world of vision. (Krauss; Rowell, 1972, p.25)

Thus *Stars in the Sexes of Snails* says the same thing twice over, according to Katherine Conley (invoking Derrida), ‘...The eye sees the visual shooting star painted over faded amorphous black shapes that, while of indeterminate shape, suddenly resemble snail tracks on the canvas. Then the almost unconscious awareness of such a possible resemblance partly fades as the lines of handwriting become legible as the verbal signs of *écriture*...’ (Conley, Katharine; 2001, p. 110) Thus, one sign system comes forward as the other seems to fade, a reciprocal and anamorphic process that produces an interplay between the beholder, the producer and the ‘object’ or model of representation, they are read in, and through one another in the process of *l’un dans l’autre*. Further, ‘...The ambition of *Les Champs magnétiques* is given in the title of the first of its texts, ‘La Glace sans tain’. The mirror without silvering was the ‘language’ that could cut two ways. It was to reflect the speaker back to himself even as it was to be transparent, allowing the speaker’s subjectivity to flood past him and merge with the whole of the outside world’. (Krauss; Rowell, 1972, p. 13)

Rosalind Krauss sees Breton’s and Soupault’s text, and Miró’s painting, as both sharing, ‘...the problem of inventing a language which would simultaneously describe the world of objects and the opacity of the medium that renders them—whether that medium be line or words’. (p. 13) Michel Foucault’s ‘Ceci n’est pas une takes up the theme of the ‘space between’ but within another context, not that of transgressive

surreality but that of discursivity. [The text is accompanied by a drawing signed by René Magritte with the inscription ‘Ceci n'est pas une pipe’ which is to be the subject and object of Foucault’s analysis.⁶² (One should note that Magritte attracted the attention of Foucault in the 1960s and Derrida in the 1970s.⁶³)] I would like to give further consideration to this language, a language that functions at the frontier of the distinctions between the verbal and the visual. When I asked Professor Krauss about this moment of beginning she responded,

(R.E.K.) In answer to your question about *October*’s beginnings, the editor of *Artforum* (John Coplans) had become very hostile to ‘formalist’ art. He had promoted Max Kozloff and Lawrence Alloway to positions of editorial responsibility and their agenda was decidedly ‘political’. Annette Michelson and I felt that *Artforum* was no longer serving our own interests (hers were film and performance) and so we decided to leave and found an alternative. Specifically, I suggested to John that we translate and publish Foucault’s ‘Ceci n'est pas une pipe’; but he refused.

(P.M.) This is the first work to appear in the pages of the journal and obviously carries a weight of intent. What did this analysis signify to you and *October*’s larger project?

(R.E.K.) We at *October* were determined to remedy a situation that had developed at *Artforum* where John Coplans, refused to publish various important theoretical texts in translation from the French, a project to which Annette Michelson and I were committed. In particular I had found the Foucault text crucial to the catalogue I wrote for the Miró’ exhibition I had mounted for the Guggenheim (‘Magnetic Fields’). So, to celebrate our freedom from Coplans’ autocratic dictates, we decided to publish the essay in our first issue.⁶⁴

⁶² This drawing is one of a series of works by Magritte that explored the same thematic territory—these would include *Les trahison des images*, *Les deux mystères* and the highly sexualized (here seen in terms of auto-fellatio) *Untitled drawing* (1948). Most sources cite *Les trahison des images* as the first appearance of this pipe theme

⁶³ Derrida, Jaques, *Restitutions de la vérité en peinture*, [sic], Paris, Flammarison, 1978, pp. 291-436, published in English as *The Truth in Painting*, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

⁶⁴ Personal communication with Professor Rosalind Krauss, Meyer Shapiro Professor of Art, Columbia University, New York, Tuesday, 09 October, 2001.

Speaking in 1987 Craig Owens comments on the reciprocal relationship between artist and critic in the New York art scene of the '70s and '80s, '... We were writing not necessarily *about* these critical and oppositional practices but *alongside* them. There was an exchange there, and one's criticism was conducting the same work in a different arena'. (Owens, Craig, 1992, p. 63; emphasis in the original) This genre in visual theory, 'this work', was initially expressed in essays such as Rosalind Krauss' 'Notes on the Index, Seventies art in America' (*October* nos. 3 & 4, 1977), 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (*October* no. 8, 1979), 'The Originality of the Avant Garde, A Postmodernist Repetition' (*October* no. 18, 1981), Benjamin Buchloh's 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression' (*October* no. 16, 1981), Craig Owens' work 'The Allegorical Impulse, Toward a Theory of the Postmodern, Parts I & II' (*October* nos. 12 and 13, 1980), Annette Michelson's 'The Prospect Before Us' (*October* no. 16, 1981), and Douglas Crimp's 'Pictures' (*October* no. 8, 1979).⁶⁵ These articles began to develop the major themes and particular forms of language that would identify the new American visual theory, as Hal Foster notes, '...when theoretical production becomes as important as artistic production'. (Foster, Hal; 1996, p. xiv)

Foucault's self-referential essay can be seen as 'crucial' not only to Rosalind Krauss' intellectual development (*Magnet Fields* dates back to 1972) but also as emblematic of this debate on the relationship between text and image in which the journal would be

⁶⁵ Hal Foster, Douglas Crimp and Benjamin Buchloh were both former student of Krauss's, personal communication with Douglas Crimp (2002).

involved.⁶⁶ Tracing origins to Lessing (in Germany) and Diderot (in France) and invoking Roman Jakobson, Craig Owens notes that historically,

...poetry and all the discursive arts [were placed] along a dynamic axis of spatial simultaneity. Consequently the visual arts were denied access to discourse, which unfolds in time, except in the form of a literary text which, both exterior and anterior to the work, might supplement it. [Further] 'the linguistic origin of the principle which made distinctions between the arts, and thus modernism, possible *had to* remain unconscious; were the subordination of all the arts to language exposed, the visual arts would effectively be denied a proper territory, and the thesis that the arts are rigorously isolable and definable would be challenged'. (Owens, 1992, p.45)

Further, he describes this challenging process as 'the eruption of language into the aesthetic field', (p. 45) and referring to Derrida's 'The Parergon' (printed in English translation *October* 9, 1979), he notes that this narrativization represents '...the occupation of a nonverbal field by a conceptual force'. (p. 32) Rosalind Krauss describes the uneasy relationship between proponents of text and image initiated by developments in linguist theory,

...The messenger who came rushing into the art world, as into the discipline of art history, some thirty years ago, bringing news of the recent invasion of the 'textual' into the domain of the visual, could have saved his [*sic*] breath. The visual arts have always battled the onslaught of a verbal production—from *ekphrasis* to allegory; from *ut pictura poesis* to iconography—that modernist art managed, briefly, to stun but never totally to silence. (Krauss, 1996, p.83)

Such a literary (structural and semiotic based) understanding of representation enforced the central argument posited by the editors of *October*, that art, like any other sign

⁶⁶ This is a debate that can be located in the literary genre known as ekphrasis (the verbal representation of visual representation). If successful, this would allow visual representation to be understood as a semiotic surface functioning within a 'discursive field'. A field that contains signifying forces, discourse here being understood as the inscription of a specific knowledge in language that is intimately related to the transactions of power.

system, is a discursive site of power, which is both historically constituted and constituting.

October was founded, and its rhetoric developed, in the wake of a particular moment of bifurcation (the early to mid-1970s) in art historical development and practice in the United States, a moment—perhaps even a watershed— between modernism and postmodernism, that was seeing an upsurge of the social-historical project (i.e. variations of Historical Materialism), as well as containing the presence of nascent structuralism— both functioning in conjunction to the reanimation and realignment of the dominant mode of interpretation, iconography and connoisseurship. A special issue of *Yale French Studies* (no: 41, 1969), along with an associated essay, ‘The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints’ (1968) by A. J. Greimas and F. Rastier,⁶⁷ can be cited as the entrance of European structuralism into the English, French and Comparative Literature Departments of Yale University. From there, its critiques readily expanded to the following major universities, John Hopkins, Columbia, Cornell and Chicago.⁶⁸ The new debate went by a variety of names, ‘post-structuralism’, ‘deconstruction’ and ‘postmodernism’. This was not merely an attack or gloss on positivism,⁶⁹ but argued for the complete abandonment of its entire intellectual culture, a complete negation of this particular mode of consciousness.⁷⁰ Postmodernism emerged from a continuing crisis in Marxist thought in

⁶⁷ A.J. Greimas and F. Rastier, 1968 The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints. *Yale French Studies*, No. 41, pp. 86-105

⁶⁸ My thanks to Sara Stillman, Editor, Harvard Magazine, personal communication 2001.

⁶⁹ It is not within the scope of this work to define this form of consciousness, however, and in the most general terms, positivism can be projected by the following five tenets: Scientism or the unity of the scientific method, Empiricism, Value Freedom, and Instrumental knowledge. One should note that not all of these criteria were embodied in any one positivist philosophy or scientific practice.

⁷⁰ The central proposition to be considered within this context is the notion of the loss of the human subjects’ autonomous status, becoming instead, the unstable ‘effect’ of language. This conception of subjectivity— however

relation to advanced capitalism, particularly in regard to the aftermath of the social unrest in Europe (and the US) post 1968, when it became apparent that there was no real possibility of an historical challenge to capitalism (Caute, 1988 & Coward and Ellis, 1977).⁷¹

This kind of disenchantment had begun in the early '60s with various 'deformations' of idealistic Marxism by a number of communist parties, here outlined by Jean-Paul Sartre⁷² in the strongest terms, '...The open concepts of Marxism have closed in... They are no longer *keys*, interpretive schemata; they are posited for themselves as an already totalized knowledge...The heuristic principle—'to search for the whole in the parts'—has become the terrorist practice of 'liquidating the particularity'. (Sartre, 1960, pp. 27-28)⁷³ The Marxist project in the American visual theory is outlined by Donald Preziosi,

...The project for a 'Marxist art history' was mounted in response to the social movements and upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s and reflected a passionate desire by many academic art historians for a socially responsible disciplinary practice. It was also a reaction to a rediscovery of Marxist perspectives on art from the 1930s, forgotten or marginalized by the intellectual repressions accompanying the Cold War and McCarthyism. (Preziosi, 1989, p. 161)⁷⁴

problematic heuristically or historically: to speak of a fragmented subject presupposes a prior moment in which the subject was somehow whole or complete—relates directly to contemporary post-empiricist thought in the fields of art, linguistics, literary criticism, social sciences, political philosophy and psychoanalysis.

⁷¹ See David Caute, 1988 *Sixty-Eight: The Year of the Barricades*, London, Hamish Hamilton, also Rosalind Coward and John Ellis 1977 *Language and Materialism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London.

⁷² Sartre became a Communist and tried to combine the existentialism of Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus with Marxism, he contrasted existence with essence, and existentialism with essentialism.

⁷³ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Search for a Method*, Partheon Books, New York, 1968 (originally published in 1960, *The Critique of a Dialectical Reason*), pp. 27-28.

⁷⁴ Preziosi. Donald, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, Yale University Press, London 1989, p. 161.

By the 1970s, the Marxist critique (now a kind of self-critique) had, to a great extent, become institutionalized as a methodology in university departments throughout Europe and the United States. (Delanty, 1977, p. 76)⁷⁵ One can cite the migration of the critical theory (and many of its main protagonists) of the Frankfurt School as a causative vector—where Marxism had shifted both in location, from Europe to America (Max Horkheimer reestablished the Institute for Social Research at Columbia University in 1938), and in emphasis, from being a critique of political economy to a critique of ideology. Norman F. Cantor (1988) outlines the distribution of Marxist thought within American universities,

...There are three prominent history departments in the United States—the department at Princeton, Rochester and New York Universities—where Marxist scholars of similar persuasion are highly visible. There are also several sociology departments, particularly the department at the State University of New York at Binghamton, which are deeply committed to Marxism. The eminently prestigious Harvard Law School as well as the Harvard art history department have strong components of Marxists on their faculties. (Cantor, 1998, p. 78)⁷⁶

With its lineage firmly established in a reconstitution of Marxism, and with a debt to the formations of international structuralism, the new postmodern anti-debate developed and operated within four interdependent phases, these can be broadly described as follows: 1) the philosophy of French post-structuralism of the late '60s and '70s in association with Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida (and others), by the late 1970s this had had a major impact on literary criticism and the humanities in general; 2) the discovery of post-structuralism as a new discipline in cultural studies, this can be associated with the

⁷⁵ Delanty, Gerard, *Social Science: Beyond Constructivism and Realism*, The Open University Press, 1977, pp. 75- 76.

⁷⁶ Cantor, Norman F., *Twentieth Century Culture: Modernism to Deconstruction*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, Paris, 1988.

writings of Frederic Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard (and others); 3) a phase operative in the 1990s concerning a new cultural emancipation, and the sociology of globalization and postcolonialism; and 4) a contemporary stage associated with Foucault's historical studies of power. (Delanty, Gerard; 1997, pp. 95-109)⁷⁷

According to Rosalind Krauss,

...If, during that time [the 1970s and '80s in the United States], semiotics became the tool of choice for certain theorists and historians of art, it was more in the hopes of taking a naïve conception of the verbal and, by critiquing and exposing its unexamined assumptions about representation, of making it thereby a sophisticated means of analysis, than it was a switch in practice from a basis in image to a basis in text. (Krauss, 1996, p. 83)

Notwithstanding Krauss' retrospective disavowal of a 'switch in practice', perhaps in response to a charge often laid at their door, for example, Thomas Crow's recent assertion that '...the journal's component of explicit theorizing came largely from writers whose main commitment was the word' (Crow, Thomas; 1996, p.87): the editors of *October* openly appropriated semiology—a linguistic theory of meaning that identifies culture and its practices as a system of signs—for the analysis of the visual. Proponents of this theory usually structure their critique of traditional forms of aesthetics on the argument that the 'text' (here seen as any cultural work) has no fixed meaning, but that the beholder, with each act of perception, produces meaning. The subsequent transformation in American criticism was fueled by the introduction and translation of European critical theory, particularly the works of the Frankfurt School⁷⁸, by the writings

⁷⁷ From readings of Gerard Delanty's *Social Science: Beyond Constructivism and Realism*, pp. 95-109.

⁷⁸ The three leaders of the Frankfurt School (The Institute for Social Research, a free school designed to develop Marxist sociology outside the university) were Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. A younger member was Herbert Marcuse. In his famous essay, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' (1972[1937]), Horkheimer

of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and continental feminist theory and British film theory. This extensive body of critical and theoretical work, responding to the breakdown of modernist discourse in literary theory, psychoanalysis, and the social sciences, and shifted attention away from the notion of canonical masterworks towards the structures and operation of modernism itself, that is, from establishing homologous divisions within traditional culture to an interdisciplinary examination of the dynamics of its 'representations'.⁷⁹

outlines the basis of critical theory as a critique of positivism. Traditional theory refers to Cartesian rationalism and the instrumentalizing logic of modern positivism, while critical theory is a critical and dialectical theory that does not accept the existing order. This essay and the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1944), written by Adorno and Horkheimer, were the two most influential expressions of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* (1977[1944]) is also a major statement in critical theory. Horkheimer, Benjamin and Adorno were dispersed by the Nazis in 1933, and their school eliminated. Horkheimer found his way to the United States and with the assistance of Paul Lazarsfeld, reestablished the Institute of Social Research at Columbia University in 1938. (Adorno eventually followed Horkheimer; Benjamin fled to Paris and then to the Spanish border being in possession of an American visa, but with a refusal of passage into Spain killed himself at his hotel. In 1950, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to West Germany, Horkheimer became rector of Frankfurt University whilst Adorno held a senior chair of sociology and philosophy.

⁷⁹ Further to this, the groups of texts comprising Rosalind Krauss' *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (1984) can be seen to embody many of *October's* critical interventions and should be acknowledged. Those essays originally published in *October* are, 'Grids' *October* no. 9 Summer 1979, 'In the Name of Picasso', *October* no. 16 Spring 1981, 'Sincerely Yours', *October* no. 20 Spring 1982, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde', *October* no. 18 Fall 1981, 'The Photographic Condition of Surrealism', *October* no. 19 Winter, 1981, 'Notes on the Index', I & II *October* nos. 3 and 4 Spring and Fall, 1977, 'Le Witt in Progress', *October* no. 6 Fall 1978, and 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October* no. 8 Spring 1979. These essays are directly informed by developments in French structural theory with its later poststructural modifications, and are presented by Rosalind Krauss as part of a continuing project initiated in the mid-1970's. A reconsidering not only of what constitutes the avant-garde, in this context the 'myths' that sustained modernist practice— in particular the 'myth' of originality— but also criticism itself. In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Krauss' arguments are concerned less with institutions themselves than with the well-placed scholars and critics within them. At least half the essays reprinted in this book proceed as debates with the prominent practitioners of the discipline of art and literary history. These include, William Rubin, John Richardson, Linda Nochlin, Robert Rosenblum, Pierre Daix. 'In the Name of Picasso', William Rubin, 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', John Szarkowski and Peter Galassi, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', E. A. Carmean, Jr., 'reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly', Donald Kuspit, Suzi Gablik, Lucy Lippard, 'LeWitt in Progress', Morris Dickstein, 'Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary', also in 'Sincerely Yours', a bitter exchange with Albert Elsen over the posthumous casting of Rodin's *Gates of Hell*. Krauss's debates with her colleagues are not concerned with the value of the avant-garde works of art, which are in all cases presupposed. Despite her desire to detach criticism from evaluation, she continually speaks of the 'extraordinary contribution of collage' (p. 34) and the 'profound originality' of Giacometti's horizontal 'gameboard' sculptures (p. 73), as well as to characterize Gonzalez's work from the '30s as 'an almost unbroken chain of masterpieces' (p. 121.).

In light of the above, one can assert that the appropriation of the rhetoric and methodologies of structuralism and post-structuralism helped the *October* writers to formulate a coherent response to American modernism (itself paradoxically founded on a previous reading of a Franco-German literary heritage for example, Diderot, Riegl, Kant, and Wittgenstein). *October's* initial purpose being to unmask, to de-mystify, to account for the visual in terms of the quantifiable say as a text, the antithesis of modernist notions of visual purity, as the formalist art critic Clement Greenberg would have it, '...all paintings of quality ask to be looked at rather than read'. (Greenberg, Clement; 1958, p.6) 'Anti-formalism' as represented by the utopian discourse of constructivism, emancipatory surrealism, the critical writings of Walter Benjamin and Peter Bürger (and others notably Max Horkheimer), also the theoretical and methodological models offered by structuralism and post-structuralism combined with the semiotic and discursive analysis of the image, thus formed a critical vector.

The afore mentioned articles can be considered as the expression of a desire for relevance, being modelled around an array of critical disciplines emanating from French literary theory during the 1960s and the 1970s (a *lingua franca*, an appropriation of the critical methodologies of continental structuralism and post-structuralism) that engaged extensively in critiques of the visual. One can cite the following texts (among others) as being influential in this process, Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, *S/Z*, *A Lovers Discourse*, *Image-music-text*, *Barthes by Barthes*, his lecture 'Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure' and *Mythologies*; Michel Foucault's 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', 'Panopticism' and 'Las Meninas'; Jacques Derrida's, 'The Parergon', (*October* 9, 1979) and 'Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books'; Julia Kristeva's 'Motherhood

According to Giovanni Bellini'; Jacques Lacan's 'Of the Gaze as Object Petit A'; and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography* (these texts representing a publishing range between 1966-1982).⁸⁰

Professor Douglas Crimp, who edited *October* for some thirteen years,⁸¹ confirms the editorial desire to respond to the new European theory as well as frame the contemporary avant-grade in relation to politics,

...There was an interest in a new type of continental theory that basically, the art world had not been exposed to, for that matter the intellectual world in America had not been much exposed to. So there was an interest in trying to bring that to bear on the practices of the contemporary avant-garde. It was an interest in a particular notion of the modernist avant-garde, its constitution and practices in the present, in the work of let's say the minimalist generation of artists, of course from Annette's perspective in film—that sort of thing. So there was that group of people, Yvonne Rainer, Hollis Frampton who were certainly involved from the very beginning, not only as writers, they were themselves theoreticians. They [the editors] were also interested in the relation of the avant-garde to politics, hence the name *October*, you know, I don't know that anyone else will tell you this, but Michelson was born on November 7th the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. (Crimp, source the author, 2002)

⁸⁰ Barthes, Roland, 1977 *Image-music-text*. Glasgow, Fontana Books. (originally published in French in 1968; Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette, London, 1972.) *Barthes by Barthes*, originally published in 1975 English translation 1977; Michel Foucault, 'This Is Not a Pipe', translated by James Harkness Berkley, University of California Press, 1982; 'Las Meninas', from *the Order of Things*, originally published as *Les et les choses*, Paris, 1966, London 1970, pp. 3-16; Derrida, 'Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books', from *Architecture and Urbanism*, New York, 1977, pp. 95-101, Derrida's 'The Parergon', was published in English translation in *October* 9, 1979, pp. 3-41. (From, Derrida, Jacques, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod, Chicago University Press, p. 45.) Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', from *Desire in Language, A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 237-50, 266-9, originally published in French in *Peinture*, 1975; Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as Object Petit A', from *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Harmondsworth Press, pp. 80-90, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XI, 'Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse'*, Paris, 1973; Foucault, 'Panopticism', from *Discipline and Punishment, The Birth of the Prison*, Harmondsworth, 1991, pp. 195-209, originally published as *Surveiller et punir, Naissance de la prison*, Paris, 1975; Barthes, *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography*, London 1981, pp. 67-82, originally published as *La Chambre Claire*, Paris, 1980.

⁸¹ Douglas Crimp was Managing editor of *October* from 1977-83, executive editor from 1983-86, and then editor from '86-90.

Thus, one can assert with accuracy that *October's* act of self-conscious appropriation was facilitated, underpinned, and defined, by a complex cultural interchange, what can be considered a 'joint critical axis' between Europe and the United States. This interchange has a pre-existing lineage, for example, at an earlier moment the cold-war promotion, and to a greater or lesser degree, the acceptance of American formalism in France during the 1950s and '60s, validated by the rhetoric of the influential Parisian magazine *Tel quel* (also noted for its association with Barthes and Kristeva who used its platform to re-think structuralism and Semiology) and the review *Peinture, cashiers théoriques*. And as a mirror image of this moment, the present object of discussion; the subsequent dissolution of formalism in the 1970s initiated by an American re-reading of what might be considered a Franco-German visual and literary heritage.

In relation to this process of interchange, one should also take into account other international associations and alignments, for example, that the Milan based *Flash Art* (founded in 1967) merged with the German publication *Heute Kunst* in 1977 signalling further European cross-cultural linkages, and in England the journal *Block* was founded in 1979 in association with its seed-bed Middlesex Polytechnic, also the artist led publications *ZG* and *Bomb* beginning publication in 1980 and 1981 respectively, and in America the feminist journal *Heresies* was founded in 1976 and *Art Criticism* in 1979 by the State University of New York at Stony Brook.⁸² Again, and in terms of this linkage, one should also consider the importance of personal responses to individuals and circumstances; for example, Annette Michelson (one of the three founding editors) lived

⁸² Thanks are due to Tom Bickley, Head Librarian for The National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC. One should also note the support of the 'New Museums' for example The New Museum of Contemporary Art, directed by Marcia Tucker, and The Studio Museum in Harlem.

and worked in Paris before returning to the United States [1950-1966]. (Newman, 2000, pp. 79-83) According to Douglas Crimp, ‘...Annette of course had lived in Paris for a long time and knew these people [Foucault and Barthes], and of course she will tell you that *October* was partly modeled on *Tel Quel*, Annette was sort of in these circles.

(Crimp, source the author, 2002) Added to this, Rosalind Krauss had developed a close working relationship with Yve-Alain-Bois an editor of the Parisian journal *Macula*.

According to Professor Krauss,

...Yve-Alain-Bois is a very close friend of mine; he was already the editor of *Macula* as was another friend, Jean Clay. *Macula* was not really a model for *October*, but nevertheless that collegueship was very important in starting the magazine. Yve-Alain is now an editor of *October*... Yve-Alain was one of the new editors added to the magazine when we opened it up to Benjamin and Hal (see appendix 1). Yve-Alain is very important to the magazine because he brings a European perspective (being French) that is different from the more local perspectives. (Krauss, source the author, 2002)

A number of publications other than *October* supported and defended the same intellectual territory (the introduction of structural and post-structural theory into the United States), for example, the literary journals *Telos* and *Social Text* of New York, *Glyph* from John Hopkins University, *Sub-stance* from the University of Michigan, *Diacritics* from Cornell University, and *boundary 2* from the State University of New York at Binghamton. One should also note the extensive influence of the writers Martin Jay, Jonathan Culler and Michael Ryan at this time working at the University of California, also Paul Ricoeur of the University of Chicago, Frederic Jameson of Duke University, and the widely (if somewhat disparagingly) termed ‘Yale Mafia’, that is, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man and Harold Bloom who encouraged

Derrida's regular visits to Yale University⁸³ and, as Rosalind Krauss points out, a particular intellectual association with the Parisian critical journal *Macula* (1976-1982) under the stewardship of its editors Yve-Alain Bois and Jean Clay.

Under the rising star of such determinants, attacks on conventional art history intensified as the decade progressed, particularly as feminist art theory developed in scope and persuasiveness. Maurice Berger outlines the wider Political situation at the time.

...George McGovern's defeat in 1972 resulted in a very interesting paradoxical response. Liberal Democratic and the Democratic Left had never lost as badly in a certain way; at the same time there was a leftist rebound. The Left hated Nixon. There was a sense that the ideologies of the Cold War had come to their dramatic culmination in his overwhelming re-election in 1972. Just like during the Reagan years, we began to see an impressive flowering of political art in the United States. (Newman, 2000, p.405)

A widely known example of this politicized art criticism appeared in 1975 when Amy Goldin wrote, '...American art history [has been] called elitist, racist and sexist. The charge sticks'. According to Goldin, '...surely art can be considered a matter of social practice. Objects can be seen in terms other than what historians recognize as their artistic value...histories of Western European art...specialized and parochial, devoting little or no space to Islamic, African or pre-Columbian art...not to mention the art made by women, African Americans, Latinos, and other minorities'. (Goldin, Amy; 1975, p.48)

Rosalind Krauss tells us that '...Things were happening, art history was changing. Feminism was a major issue and Linda Nochlin's 'Why Have There Been No Great

⁸³ I am grateful for the assistance of Sara Stillman, editor of *Harvard Magazine*: personal communication, July 2000.

Women Artists?’ just had an incredible impact. Partly because the article itself was so art historically founded that students found it extremely exciting to work with, whatever one felt about its purely historical validity. There was a theses there that one could engage’.

(Newman, 2000, p. 429)

This transformation in American art criticism was highlighted at the end of 1975 when leading contributors to the arts magazine *Artforum* (the widely considered bastion of formalist criticism) rejected formalism and embraced a sociological approach to art history. (Sandler, Irving, 1996, pp. 333-335) Previously, ‘*Artforum*’s advocacy even as it shifted from Greenbergian formalism to encompass values antipathetic to Greenbergian formalism—away from the optical qualities that only a type of pared-down visual art can produce to the impure ‘theatrical’ qualities evoked and provoked by the process of creating a work *mise en scène*—was consistent in one important aspect. Art should provide an exclusively aesthetic experience and was to be thought about and appreciated in an historical, asocial way’ (Newman, 2000, p.429) Max Kozloff (*Artforum*’s new editor), with the support of John Coplans (its executive editor), introduced a series of articles dealing with the issue of institutional ‘power’.⁸⁴ As Coplans notes, ‘...It was in the air, so to speak. And if you had your antenna out, you couldn’t help but be affected by it, and I was affected by it. After all, the magazine is supposed to be about the art scene and

⁸⁴ John Coplans was Editor of *Artforum* between January 1972-February 1977 (Editor-Publisher October 1976-February 1977; Executive Editor September-November 1971; Associate Editor September 1962-June 1963; June 1967-1971; Editor at Large September 1963-1965; Contributing Editor October 1965-May 1967). Joseph Masheck edited the magazine between March 1977-January 1980 (Associate Editor September 1974-December 1975; Contributing Editor January 1973-June 1974, February 1980-June 1983). Annette Michelson, was Associate Editor between September 1972 December 1975 (Contributing Editor December 1966-June 1972), and Rosalind Krauss was Associate Editor of *Artforum* between February 1973-December 1975 (Contributing Editor November 1969-January 1973). Appendix, *Looking Critically, 21 Years of Artforum Magazine*, ed. Amy Baker Sandback, UMIT Research Press, 1984.

what was going on. There were issues, important issues to be discussed, which weren't being discussed. I felt it was necessary to deal with the infrastructure, as much as you were dealing with the art'. (Newman, 2000, p.365) Kozloff concluded that 'there was no escape from ideology, either in the creating or the interpreting of art'. (Kozloff, 1975, p.7) Peter Plagens, who began writing for *Artforum* in 1966, comments 'John always pushed. He was always very issue orientated...he's interested in intellectual power and influence...culture wars was what he was interested in'. (Newman, 2000, p.366) In response to this kind of 'politicization', the neo-conservative writer Hilton Kramer went on the offensive in the *New York Times*, accusing *Artforum* of '...a muddled Marxism, insistent upon a tendentious sociopolitical analysis of all artistic events and deeply suspicious of all aesthetic claim'. (Kramer, 1975, p.40) In a later article in the (leftist) weekly publication *Village Voice*, entitled 'Art is a Political Act', (1976) the two editors reaffirmed *Artforum's* 'move to sociopolitical analysis', and particularly its critical treatment of '...the market system and institutional structures of the artworld [and its] complacent, decaying agencies and shopworn myths...' (Coplans; Kozloff; 1976, p.71) However Kozloff and Coplans were not permitted to pursue this editorial stance for long. Charles Cowles the publishes of *Artforum*, pressured by advertisers about a decrease of articles promoting current art, did not renew Coplan's contract after December 1976, in the following month Max Kozloff resigned. According to Rosalind Krauss,

...John's policies in the last years of his editorship alienated every advertiser. He accepted Max's position and carried on in a way that had to do with becoming—I don't know—this *Novy*-left type, dumping on the art market, and writing all kinds of attacks on it, and running the magazine absolutely contrary to the interests of the dealers and the advertisers, to the point that the owner, Charles Cowles, simply sacked him. (Krauss, Malcolm, p. 50)

Further, Krauss describes *October's* view of commercially based art magazines, '... We were determined to get away from the commercial magazines—*Artforum* and *Art in America*— and the torture of the commercial magazine which is reviewing, the way they get advertising is from reviewing shows. I did reviewing for a while for *Artforum* and it's just a torture'. (Krauss, source the author, 2002)

Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson had resigned as editors of *Artforum* when Kozloff and Coplans took over its editorial direction, and in the spring of 1976 Krauss and Michelson, along with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe founded the journal *October*.⁸⁵ Annette Michelson outlines her take on the events,

...I was there [*Artforum*] for 10 years [1966-1976] as editor for film and performance. But when Coplans became editor it soon became apparent that I had to leave. Coplans didn't really like my writing anyway, he considered it somehow obscure. By the way, after I came back from Paris and started writing people here found me somewhat difficult to read, of course all of that relaxed once all the various factions began to influence the American academic scene. People became much more used to a certain kind of discourse, my writing by now is very easy, it's by no means— and purposely so—as turgid as I find academic discourse has become. In any case, I had to leave *Artforum*, Coplans made it very clear to me that I was not bringing in what he called the 'life blood' of the magazine, and of course the 'life blood' of the magazine was money. I was dealing with material that was neither essential nor central to the gallery scene, and although film and performance have by now a settled place in *Artforum*, it did take a very long time. Coplans cancelled a couple of projects, one in particular that I had already organized and committed artists and writers to— so I simply had to leave. You know, I think everybody wants his or her own journal at some time, intellectuals certainly do, and not only intellectuals, and so Rosalind and I were able to leave at the same time and *October* happened. (Michelson, source the author 2003)⁸⁶

With the contributions of Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson and those of Douglas Crimp (who became editorial associate and then managing editor before his break with

⁸⁵ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe resigned after the publication of three issues, he now lives and works in California.

⁸⁶ An interview with the author conducted in NYC, February 2003. [...] my additions.

the journal in 1990)⁸⁷, Craig Owens, Benjamin Buchloh, and others, *October* became the major art theoretical journal in the United States. [Craig Owens and Hal Foster who began to write for the journal in December 1981 and January 1982 respectively echoed its intellectual concerns in articles in *Art in America*.⁸⁸]

The larger international debate in which the *October* writers developed their particular rhetorical style was defined by the encounter of psychoanalysis and Marxism, on the ground of their common problem, language, an encounter that would produce a new poststructural interpretation of society and its subjects. The central proposition to be considered within this context being the notion of the loss of the human subject's autonomous status, becoming instead, the unstable 'effect' of language. Under these conditions *October's* writing developed a very different dialectic in relation to the status of the beholder of the artwork (per se) to that of its contemporaries— a mode of address mirrored by the discursive formations of Foucault text. The writers being concerned with preventing the concepts of structural linguistics proposed by Saussure (and its post-structural implications), from being incorporated into a prevailing theoretical discourse that was essentially perceptualist, materialist, or phenomenological in nature.

In 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' Foucault begins his dialogue by describing the 'first version, that of 1926', this is not illustrated in *October* however, Foucault's account corresponds to the pictorial arrangement of *Les trahison des images* (Fig. 4, [1929]), '...a pipe, carefully drawn; and underneath (in a regular, deliberate, artificial hand, the kind of schoolboy script you might find on the first line of an exercise book or remaining on the

⁸⁷ Personal communication with Professor Crimp August 2001.

⁸⁸ Thanks are due to Tom Bickley Head Librarian, The National Endowment for the Arts, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20506

blackboard after the teacher's demonstration), this sentence, 'This is not a pipe'.

(Foucault, 1976, p.7) 'The other version' referred to by Foucault, is the drawing provided with the *October* text; Foucault tells us that it,

...can be found in *Dawn at the Antipodes*. Same pipe, same statement, same script. But instead of being juxtaposed in an indifferent space with neither limit nor specification, text and figure are placed within a frame, itself resting on an easel which stands on very evident floorboards. Up above, a pipe just like the one drawn in the frame but much larger'. (p.8)

We are shown an image of simple pipe—one large (above) one small—precisely rendered in a naturalistic style (Fig. 5), the pipes are carefully modelled and highlighted, the smaller version is contained within a frame and accompanied by the forthright statement 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'. To emphasize the everyday frankness (and perhaps banality) of this image, Foucault tells us that there is '...Nothing easier to recognize than a pipe, drawn like this one—the French language has an expression which acknowledges the fact for us—'nom d'une pipe!' However, '...In the first version, only the simplicity is disconcerting. The second version multiplies the deliberate uncertainties'. (p.8) In relation to this composite text-image Foucault proceeds to elaborate a highly complex cycle of exchanges and substitutions between the written words and the visual motifs, an apparently endless and fascinating self-referential reflection upon reflections, a meditation on the nature of text, of image, and the status of the human subject as beholder.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Of particular note is a strange and complex seven-part chorus that reveals both the rhetorical structure of this interchange, and Foucault's acceptance of the metaphoric 'life' of pictures, they're 'talking and looking back at us'. (Mitchell, W. J. T., 1994 *Picture Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 57.) This consists of (1) the voice of the smaller pipe, 'What you see here, these lines which I form or which form me, all this is not what you doubtless think, but only a drawing, while the real pipe, resting in its essence far beyond and artificial gesture, floating in the element of its ideal truth, is up above', (2) the larger pipe, 'I am merely a similitude—not something like a pipe, but

If one could ascribe a theme to Foucault's essay, and by association to *October's* critical practice, then it would be the nature of the relationship between statements and pictures. But the actual effect of its metaphor, its operation, is like the traditional connotations of the pipe itself. That is, to produce a certain form of reverie, the establishment of metaphors, a musing, an introversion activated by these multiple voices of the image and the text as they speak both in concert and dissonance. An introversion that deploys itself through the complex mingling of identities to activate the beholder's own sense of subjectivity and self-knowledge by a redirection of the discursive flow, in this sense, both Foucault's essay and Magritte's picture are didactic. Further to this notion, the image in *Les deux mystères* shows essentially the same composition as featured in *Les trahison des images*, but the composition of *Les trahison des images* has now been transposed (as well as being doubled), framed and displayed as a blackboard mounted on what appears to be a classroom easel, thus it seems scholastic in intent 'its

that cloudy resemblance which, without referring to anything, traverses and unites certain texts like the one you can read and certain drawings like the one which is here, down below'. (3) The voice of the written statement itself, 'This is a graphic system which resembles only itself and which cannot be equivalent to what it is speaking about', (4) the combined voices of the smaller and larger pipes contesting 'the right of the written statement to call itself a pipe, since it is made of signs without resemblance to what they designate', (5) the voices of the text and the larger pipe above, 'unite to formulate the assertion that the pipe in the framed picture is not a pipe', (6) the combined statements of the smaller pipe and the text which, 'denounce the pipe up above and deny this apparition without references the right to call itself a pipe, and (7) an unlocalized voice speaking outside the rhetorical confines of the image, 'this anonymous being would say, None of all this is a pipe; but a text which resembles a text; a drawing of a pipe which resembles a drawing of a pipe; a pipe (drawn as not being a drawing) which resembles a pipe (drawn in the manner of a pipe which itself would be a drawing). According to Foucault, 'seven kinds of discourse in a single statement, but it requires no less to raze the fortress in which resemblance was a prisoner of affirmation'. Foucault tells us that Western painting from the 15th century to the 20th century can be defined by the interrelationship between two principles, *affirmation* (the separation of text and image, the verbal sign and the visual sign are never given at the same time), and *similarity* (the principle that a figure should resemble a thing and there should be a relation of analogy between) them marked by the statement as Foucault puts it, 'what you see is that'. In the work of Magritte (and others notably Klee and Kandisky), these principles are broken; similitude/similarity now refers to itself, rather than forming a direct indexical relationship with something other than itself; in turn, this self-reference inaugurates a play of self analysis which does not affirm or represent anything other than the establishment of metaphors, and the complex mingling of identities. Thus, according to Foucault, 'the fortress in which resemblance was a prisoner of affirmation' is razed. Foucault, 'This is not a pipe', (*October* 1, p. 6.)

function is as a pedagogical primer', (Mitchell, 1994, p.66) designed to appear in the school room rather than the gallery space. According to Foucault,

...The frame leaning against the easel and resting on wooden pegs suggests a painter's picture, a finished, exhibited work which bears, for a potential spectator, the statement commenting on or explaining it. And yet this naïve script which is in fact neither the work's title nor one of its pictorial elements, the absence of any other indication of the painter's presence, the simplicity of the groupings, the broad planks of the floor—all this suggests a blackboard in the classroom; perhaps a wipe of a rag will soon erase both drawing and text; or perhaps it will erase only one or the other in order to correct 'the mistake' (drawing something which will not really be a pipe, or writing a sentence affirming that this is indeed a pipe.) (p.7)

There is, perhaps, a lesson to be learned here, but this is a reversed lesson, the unlearning, the undoing of a set of values (visual and linguistic), or at least a profound questioning of those values and habits that have become somehow 'natural' by long and venerable usage—habits that have become second nature. (see Bryson, 1983) Such accepted customs of perception make the text 'this is not a pipe' at one and the same time literally true, and figuratively false, '...Moreover, insofar as the verbal figure is customary and conventional, it is no longer a figure at all, but a dead metaphor, like the leg of a table or the arm of a chair. The proposition which seems to deny the authority of the image winds up having its own authority called into question, not only by the picture, but by something internal to the conventions of language'. (Mitchell, 1994, p. 66) The collaboration of word and image in *Les deux mystères* engenders Foucault's version of a 'calligram', here reflecting Apollinaire's 'My heart like an upside-down flame' – a 'calligram secretly formed by Magritte and then carefully undone' (Foucault, 1976, p.9)—here seen as a composite text-image that, 'brings a text and a shape as close together as possible'. (pp.20-21) Certainly as close as possible, but not within the *same* semantic

space, rather it forms this curious transitional region between the word and the image, the region of the 'magnet field', the 'in between' of surreality, a region at once described by Foucault as a 'colourless neutral strip', or a form of sublime landscape 'an uncertain foggy region', or indeed a 'lacuna', the very 'absence of space'. (p.21) According to Foucault,

... We are not accustomed to pay attention to the narrow white space on the page of an illustrated book which runs above the words and under the drawings and which serves them as a common frontier for their incessant transactions, for it is here, on these few millimetres of whiteness; on the calm coast of the page, that all relationships of designation, nomination, description, classification are formed between words and shapes. The calligram has reabsorbed this interstice; but once it is reopened, the calligram does not restore it; the trap has been broken over the void, image and text fall apart. (Foucault, 1976, p.12)

Further, in his essay 'Las Meninas', Foucault describes this otherness as 'an essential 'void' an 'infinity of relationship' that retains the difference between visual and verbal forms. (Foucault, 1970) Thus, '...Magritte shows everything that can be shown, written words, a visible object. But his real aim is to show that which cannot be pictured or made readable, the fissure in representation itself, the bands, layers, and fault lines of discourse in modernism', the blank space between the text and image'. (Mitchell, 1994, p. 69)

Similarly, in the anamorphic image subjectivity is made both transparent and opaque. In such images Jacques Lacan's the 'origin of coordinates' (Lacan, 1973) is brought into question implying a structural interdependence between the subject and the object. For Lacan, the tain of the mirror is the objet petit *a*, a condition of its visibility and also its stain. Lacan reasoned that to enter the picture was to be projected there, a cast shadow

thrown onto the manifold of the world's image.⁹⁰ Thus, as in 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', customary ideas of perception, objects and texts are altered, disturbed and expanded, they are read in and through one another in the process of *l'un dans l'autre*, a reading and re-reading representing a questioning of the temporal and the atemporal, inside and outside, space and illusion. Such images can be interpreted as not just a technical curiosity; a puzzle-picture (*Vexierbild*) produced for entertainment, but also as a metaphor for uncertainty echoing Foucault's 'colourless neutral strip', the sublime landscape the 'uncertain foggy region', the 'lacuna', the very 'absence of space', signifying '...the shattering of signifying boundaries....to knock meaning off its pedestal'. (Krauss, 1994, p. 157) A game of hesitant allegories around what constitutes subjectivity; thus, anamorphism is the art of wonder, *Kunst-und-Wunderkammern*. Such images are disconcerting, a visual conundrum that takes on symbolic and metaphysical meaning.⁹¹ This re-forming mirror is a useful metaphor for the operation of the discursive sensibility itself. Accepted limits of perspective, vision and subjectivity are disturbed and altered, opened to questioning. As Rosalind Krauss (citing Lacan) comments, '...To enter the picture, Lacan reasoned, was to be projected there, a cast shadow thrown onto the manifold of the world's image'. (Krauss, 1994, p.184) Such works draw the viewer into active participation, this kind of demand on the beholder is emphasized by Jacques Lacan in his essay 'The Line of Sight' (1980) he notes the inversion of accepted visual regime and the consequent effects upon the human subject, '...the inverted use of perspective in the structure of anamorphosis...[as a]... geometrical dimension enables us to glimpse

⁹⁰ See Lacan, Jacques, material from *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Hogarth Press, pp. 80-90. Originally published in 1973 by Editions du Seuil; English translation by Alan Sheridan, published in 1977 by random House Books.

how the subject which concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision'. (Lacan, 1980) Or, as Michael Fried would have it, the 'theatrical' object that '...refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him'. (Fried, 1967, p.824)

Jacques Lacan, in his discussion of mimesis in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, sees *trompe l'oeil* (deceiving the eye) as the '...triumph of the gaze over the eye [*Triomphe, sur l'oeil, du regard*]'. (Lacan, 1979, p. 103)⁹² In his seminar on the gaze Lacan retells the Classical illustrative story of the *tromp-l'oeil* contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasios. Zeuxis paints grapes in such a figuratively convincing way that they lure birds, but Parrhasios paints an image of a veil that completely deceives the eye of Zeuxis who asks to see the painting that it hides, 'Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it', as a consequence, Zeuxis concedes the contest. According to Hal Foster,

...Verisimilitude may have little to do with either capture, what looks like grapes to one species may not to another; the important thing is the appropriate sign for each. More significant here, the animal is lured in relation to the surface, whereas the human is deceived in relation to what lies behind. And behind the picture, for Lacan, is the gaze, the object, the real.[that] cannot be represented; indeed, it is defined as such as the negative of the symbolic...a lost object (the little bit of the subject lost to the subject, the *objet a*). [See case study 1] As Lacan writes, '...This other thing [behind the picture and beyond the pleasure principle] is the petit a, around which there revolves a combat of *which trompe-l'oeil* is the soul'. (Foster 1996, p. 141)

⁹¹ Anamorphic images often appeared in a religious context, for example Emmanuel Maignan's optical distortion of St. Francis Paola in the cloister of S. Trinità dei Monti, Rome, 1642.

⁹² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 103.

Further, according to Lacan, the human subject is lured and captured by the image which is then transfigured by the gaze into a *memento-mori*, a *vanitas*, ‘...the figure of a death’s head’ (Lacan, 1979, p. 92), thus subverting the imperious eye of the beholder, ‘...the subject which concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision’. (p. 99) What this *trompe l’oeil*, this imitation reveals, ‘...is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind’. (p. 99) It shows the subject the abyss behind the veil, the abyssal or absent origin, of the subject’s desire—the lacuna, the parergonic function, inscribing ‘...something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field...lacking in something and it is *lacking from itself*. (Derrida, 1987p.56) ⁹³

Hans Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) ⁹⁴ is perhaps the most famous example of the use of anamorphism and the work is chosen by Lacan to demonstrate the simultaneous nature of possession and dispossession in the field of vision. In one interpretation, a work dominated by a symbol of nothingness, the void, the lacuna. ⁹⁵ In this image Holbein combines two visual orders in one space—one plane of vision—they spill and pour into one another thus subverting and de-centering the paradigm of the accepted visual regime. Creating, as André Breton puts it, ‘...fields of tension’ created in the imagination by the reconciliation of two different images [tensions that create] an infinite series of latent possibilities which are not particular [to the objects and] entail transformation...leading to evocative power’. (Breton, 1936, p.29) Such a reading and

⁹³ Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The Truth in Painting*. (Originally published in 1978 as *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris) Chicago University Press, USA. (Italics in original.)

⁹⁴ The National Gallery, London—the subjects Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, commissioned from Holbein by de Dinteville to hang in his family chateau at Polisy erected in the reign of François I.

⁹⁵ From phenomenology, *lacunae* are the ‘missing parts of the text that require the participation of the spectator/reader. They are key elements, also known as ‘spots of indeterminacy, in the active constitution of the text by the reader. Part of this process is ‘concretisation, the readers necessary act of completion.

rereading, directs our attention to the subjective, temporal and interpretative experience of vision as being the most paramount issue. As Lacan suggests,

...What is at issue in geometrical perspective is simply the mapping of space, not sight. The blind man may perfectly well conceive that the field of space that he knows, and which he knows as real, may be perceived at a distance, and as a simultaneous act. For him, it is a question of apprehending a temporal function, instantaneousness. (Lacan, 1980, p. 99)

The most astonishing aspect of the painting, notwithstanding its remarkable *trompe-l'oeil*, is the intrusion of an incongruous and unrecognizable foreground object projecting into the ordered clarity of its otherwise clear Cartesian space. An object rising obliquely, or being somehow suspended from the floor as a diagonal and spatially demanding abstraction, '...the singular object floating in the foreground, which is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would say, to catch it its trap, the observer, that is to say, us'. (p.99)

What is this entrapping object, and what is its significance?

In *The Ambassadors* two primary allegorical narratives are present within the same visual field, the allegory of temporal power, and the macabre allegory of atemporal transcendent authority.⁹⁶ The 'text' represented by the distorted skull, according to Lacan at first, and as a rather obvious initial interpretation '...the appearance of the phallic

⁹⁶ Other texts, the upper shelf is discord in the heavens, the disarray of the of the various astronomical mechanisms, the celestial globe, the dial, two quadrants, a sundial and a torquetum all misalign for use in a northerly latitude— emblematic of the heavens out of joint, The lute with a broken string, a symbol of celestial discord. The shelf below represents earthly discord. The celestial globe is replaced by the terrestrial, on which are inscribed 'Baris' (Paris) and 'Pritannia' (Brittany) the book below the globe is a text on practical mathematics Peter Apian's *New and Reliable Instruction Book of Calculations for Merchants*. Open at a most un-innocent page beginning with the word *Dividirt*, 'Let divisions be made'— a reference to the religious divisions tearing Europe in the 1530s. The book next to it is a hymnal text open at '*Veni Sanctus Spiritus*' a hymn to the Holy Spirit, traditionally invoked to force church unification. The crucifix—half hidden— in the top left corner is the counter narrative of the skull— the cross standing for resurrection, for God's eternal life for those with 'true' faith. (Graham-Dixon, Andrew, 'Holbein's Inner Game', *Ism*, 1997, pp. 26-29. Also Jurgis Baltrušaitis's 1977, *Anamorphic Art*, Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., pp. 91-114)

ghost?’ (Lacan, 1980, p. 98) And then on reconsideration, and more subtlety and covertly, ‘...We shall then see emerging on the basis of vision, not the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost, but the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function, as it is in this picture. This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze’. (p.98)⁹⁷

The trapped gaze becomes here a memento-mori, a hidden and subversive *vanitas* at the feet of the sumptuously attired figures of the ambassadors—a text of the vanity of a belief in the solidity of time and human reality. A vanity countered by the emblem of death, as noted by Lacan,

⁹⁷ In his essay ‘Obscene, Abject, Traumatic’ (1996) Hal Foster offers a discussion of Lacan’s complex understanding of the gaze, ‘...This gaze is not embodied in the subject, it is rather *in the world*, preexisting and enveloping the subject from all sides. The subject is not the master of this gaze and feels consequently threatened or castrated by it. Lacan visualizes the relation between this gaze and the position of the seeing subject as two superimposed cones, overlapping in what is called the image / screen. ...[T]he Lacanian subject is fixed in a double position, and this leads Lacan to superimpose on the usual cone of vision that emanates from the subject another cone that emanates *from the object*, at the point of light, which he calls the gaze. (Foster, Hal 1996, *Obscene, Abject, Traumatic*, October 78, fall, pp. 107-24). Not only is the world or the object beheld by the subject from its geometrical point of viewing, like in the familiar Renaissance model of perspective, ‘...Everything converges on to the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God, (Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, London, 1972, p. 16.) but in terms of the subject is also ‘...under the regard of the object, photographed by its light, pictured by its gaze’. (Foster, Hal 1996, *Obscene, Abject, Traumatic*, October 78, fall, pp. 107-24.) The two cones are superimposed so that the object is ‘...also at the point of the light (the gaze), the subject also at the point of the picture, and the image also in line with the screen’. (p. 139) Foster expands on Lacan’s well-known diagram, ‘...The first cone is familiar from the renaissance treatises on perspective: the object focused as an image for the subject at a geometrical point of viewing. But, Lacan adds immediately, ‘I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometric point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I, I am in the picture (Lacan, Jacques 1973, Seminar XI, *Editions du Seuil*, Paris, p. 96) That is, the subject is also under the regard of the object. Photographed (as it were) by its light, pictured by its gaze: thus the superimposition of the two cones, with the object also at the point of the light (now called the gaze), the subject also at the point of the picture (now called the subject of representation), and the image also in line with the screen. (Foster, 1996, p. 108) The ‘screen’ is crucial term for Foster, he understands it as ‘...the cultural reserve of which each image is one instance,’ or more precisely, it represents ‘...the conventions of art, the schemata of representation, the codes of visual culture, this screen mediates the object-gaze for the subject, but it also protects the subject from this object-gaze, for it captures the gaze’. (Foster 1996, p. 140) Foster, Hal 1996, *Obscene, Abject, Traumatic*, October 78, fall, pp. 107-24. This screen, according to Foster ‘tames’ the gaze, ‘...even as the gaze may trap the subject, the subject may tame the gaze’ (ibid, p. 109) and this taming is necessary, because ‘...to see without this screen would be to be blinded by the gaze or touched by the real’. (ibid p. 140.) In Lacan’s view all art functions as an arbitrator, an intermediary for the violent and threatening gaze, ‘...Indeed, Lacan imagines the gaze not only as maleficent but as violent, a force that can arrest, even kill’ (p. 109).

....the secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. It is a use, therefore, of the geometric dimension of vision in order to capture the subject...'. (p.89)

The atemporal and melancholic skull thus defaces the familiar narrative of subjective temporality; staining the clarity of enlightenment in the humanities with the contamination of the macabre— it points to the self's dissolution, fragmentation and dismemberment, to the powers of horror and the abject.⁹⁸ It indexes a sinister theme to be repeated and re-evaluated throughout the visual history of the West. Like the appearance of a text the skull penetrates the regime of pure Cartesian vision exemplifying the contraries in the way of seeing, meaning and being, '...To the intuition of an unstable and moving world, of multiple and inconstant life, hesitating between being and seeming...'. (Rousset, 1961, p.21) It is a signifier of *mise-en-abyme*, the mirror in the text, the mysterious and the marvellous. (see Dallenbach, 1989)

Following Althusser, and if one may extend an already free use of metaphor, such composite 'text-images' as these achieve the effect of '*interpelation*' in that they 'hail' the beholder who is then captured within their visual and ideological gravitational field. According to Althusser, '...ideology acts or functions in such a way that it recruits subjects among individuals...or transforms the individuals into subjects...by that precise operation I have called *interpelation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing, 'Hey, you there!!' (Althusser, 1971, p.162) Or as Michael Fried would have it, speaking of a different kind

⁹⁸ See: Kristeva, Julia 1982. *The Powers of Horror*, (trans.) Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York.

of ideological space, self-referential ‘absorption’. The essential self-reflexivity of Magritte’s picture (and others of the same *œuvre*) depends on its introduction of language within the frame of the visual, the indexical ‘this’ in ‘this is not a pipe’ refers, one imagines, to the illustrated pipe, however, it might also refer to itself, or even to the chain of words, or perhaps to the entire calligram—that is, to the ensemble of words and image. (Mitchell, 1994, p.67) As noted, its purpose is to refer not to pictures, but reflect on the relationship—the space between— between pictures and words in order to challenge the subjectivity of the beholder.

Thus, Magritte’s work— in *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*, *Les deux mystères* and *Les trahison des images*— addresses the viewer with two distinct and essentially contradictory messages simultaneously; the words, ‘this is not a pipe’; and the picture, ‘this is a pipe’. (Mitchell, 1994, pp.65-75) The resulting calligram can be interpreted (in a foucauldian sense) as a figure, a trope of knowledge as power, aiming at a possible ideal of representation in which ‘things’ are trapped within a ‘double cipher’, forming, as it were, an uneasy and transitory alliance between the shapes of things and the meaning of words, a ‘dialectic’, like that of *October*, that constantly shifts location in representational practice.⁹⁹ Foucault, words and images are like two hunters, ‘...pursuing its quarry on two paths...By its double function, it guarantees capture, as neither discourse alone nor a pure drawing could do’. (Foucault, 1976, p. 22.) According to Foucault,

The relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms, it is in vain that we say that we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt

⁹⁹ Materialist philosophy is considered to be able to provide a scientific analysis of both history and the subject, and ideology is conceived as the way in which a subject is produced in language, able to ‘represent’ his or herself, and therefore able to act in the social totality, the fixity of those representations being the function of ideology.

to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendor is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. (Foucault, 1972, p.337)

Foucault's strategy in 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (and in Lacan's 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*') might be seen as an opening of the gap between language and image '...the fissure in representation itself' (Mitchell, 1994, p.69) that allows representation to be seen as a 'dialectical field', a field containing unstable signifying forces, the incomplete fragmentation of the gaze rather than some determinate message or referential sign, thus forming 'La Glace sans tain, the mirror without silvering. As such it is a '...representation of the relation between discourse and representation, in short, it might be considered a picture about the gap between words and pictures'. (p.65.) As Foucault would have it, '...On the page of an illustrated book, we seldom pay attention to the small space running above the words and below the drawing, forever serving them as a common frontier. It is there, on these few millimetres of white, the calm sand of the page, that are established all the relations of designation, nomination, description, classification'. (Foucault, 1976, p.28) For Foucault, Magritte's drawing can be considered foundational for locating the structures of power/knowledge that are the theoretical 'object' of Foucault's histories.

W. J. T. Mitchell assigns the highest value to this small essay, '...I think it is no exaggeration to say that the little essay on Magritte, and the hypericon of 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', provides a picture of Foucault's way of writing and his whole theory of the stratification of knowledge and the relations of power in the dialectic of what is visible and what is sayable'. In support Mitchell cites Michel de Certeau in relation to Foucault's

‘optical style’, ‘...Actually, these images institute the text...Forgotten systems of reason stir in these mirrors. On the level of the paragraph or phrase, quotes function in the same way; each of them is embedded there like a fragment of a mirror, having the value not of proof but of an astonishment—a sparkle of other. The entire discourse in this fashion from vision to vision’. (de Certeau , 1986, p.196) Further Gilles Deleuze argues that this interplay between,

...seeing and speaking’, the ‘visible and the sayable’, is not merely a matter of style or rhetoric, a way to seduce the reader, but a constitutive feature of Foucault’s epistemology. Knowledge itself is a system of archaeological strata ‘made from things and words...from bands of visibility and bands of readability’. Foucault’s ‘visual style’ is built, then, upon the most venerable opposition of rhetoric and epistemology, the traditional interplay between *res* and *verba*, words and things, *les mots et les choses*, arguments and examples, discourse and image. (Deleuze, 1988, p.80)

As well as representing critical freedom for Michelson and Krauss, Magritte’s ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ can be interpreted as calling into question both the self-understanding and the social positioning of the autonomous and unified self. The picture, Foucault’s text, and by association poststructural visual criticism, can be seen as an attempt to destabilize self identity and dominant ideology by exploring the complex and circuitous transaction between the picture, the text and the observer— the internal shifting and metamorphosis of the figure and ground activates this process. In this way the text-image can be seen to engage the wider cultural field (the symbolic order) in which the picture operates with respect to discourses, institutions and disciplines. Thus, ‘...allowing the speaker’s subjectivity to flood past him and merge with the whole of the outside world’. (Krauss, 1972, p.13)

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault indicated the possibility of an ‘archaeology’ of human sexuality. He also suggested an archaeology of art in terms of the discursive formations involved. As Foucault notes,

...In analysing a painting, one can try to recapture the latent discourse of the painter; one can try to recapture the murmur of his intentions, which are not transcribed into words, but lines, surfaces, and colours; one can try to uncover the implicit philosophy that is supposed to form this view of the world. It is also possible to question science, or at least the opinion of the period, and to try to recognize to what extent they appear in the painter’s work. Archaeological analysis would have another aim, it would try to discover whether space, distance, depth, colour, light, proportion, volumes, and contours were not, at the period in question, considered, named, enunciated, and conceptualised in a discursive practice; and whether the knowledge that this discursive practice gives rise to was not embodied perhaps in theories and speculations, in forms of teaching and codes of practice, but also in process, techniques, and even in the very gesture of the painter. (Foucault, 1972, p.83)

So, according to Foucault, a painting and the subject—of art and the beholder—can be understood as both originating and functioning within a discursive field. Like *Stars in the Sexes of Snails*, Magritte’s ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ becomes a labyrinth of pictorial self-reference and self-reflexivity, representing such a discursive interplay. A structural liaison that allows representation to be seen to function within a dialectical field, further, it permits its practices to be defined as discursive. Rosalind Krauss summarizes the position in her essay ‘Sincerely Yours’, ‘...The notion of the painting as a function of the frame (and not the reverse) tends to shift our focus from being exclusively, singularly, riveted in the interior field. Our focus must begin to dilate, to spread’. (Krauss, 1982, p.191) The idea of a discursive formation functioning outside the normal frame of reference provided a theoretical base for the editors of *October* to avoid a reductionist (vulgar materialist) model of art since it posits a certain form of relativity, thus producing

a theory of aesthetic value which can be considered to be both internalist—in that it does not reduce aesthetic value to moral or Political value—and historicist, in that it recognizes the contingent nature of discourse. (Wolff, Janet; 1983, pp. 92-97)

October, as a critical force within the larger context of the social history and visual politics of America in the late 1970s, claimed to be challenging existing art institutions and aesthetic canons dominating American art and criticism. With this objective and model in mind, the editors went about a systematic subversion of the humanist aesthetic of late modernist visual theory in the United States; an aesthetic defined by Hilton Kramer as, ‘...the close, comparative study of art objects with a view to determining their relative levels of aesthetic quality’. (Kramer, 1989, pp.4-5) Attacking its touchstones of sublimity, universality, transcendence, authenticity, quality, originality, and particularly modernist notions of autonomy and form.¹⁰⁰ Focusing instead on, ‘...cultural production, the index, historical materialism, the critique of institutions, psychoanalysis, rhetoric, and the body’. (The editors, 1987, p. xii) Following the lead of theorists like Fredric Jameson, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer and Peter Bürger (and with a legacy of radicalism extending from the student uprising of 1968, Lukács and Marcuse), the editors of *October* wanted to distinguished themselves from modernist art theory which sought to establish, a unilinear and teleological life story for modernism, and an epistemological basis for art as knowledge, via, what is perhaps expediently termed formal analysis and innovations of critical theory. Innovations that seek to make knowledge relevant and transparent to the cultural and political circumstances in which it is formulated (*La Glace*

¹⁰⁰ According to Peter Bürger, ‘The category of artistic modernism *par excellence* is form, sub-categories such as artistic means, procedures and techniques converge in that category’. Bürger, Peter 1992 *The Decline of Modernism*. (trans.) Nicholas Walker, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 45.

sans tain), critical theory being understood as the confluence of debates emerging in the mid-'70s within feminist, semiotic deconstruction, psychoanalysis and post-structural theory. According to Mark Poster, '...It [critical theory] sustains an effort to theorize the present at a moment between the past and the future, thus holding up a historicizing mirror to society, one that compels a recognition of the transitory and fallible nature of society'. (Poster, 1989, p.3) If we take a moment to pursue this idea, knowledge producing through critical theory is therefore forever in a state of flux, representing, one could suggest, a possible agency for cultural, social, and political change, hence *October's* 'inscription', *Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics*. This is Horkheimer, speaking in his seminal work *Critical Theory, Selected Essays* of 1968 (translated and published in America 1972),

...The traditional idea of theory is based on scientific activity [referring here to a deductive chain of thought] as carried on within the division of labor at a particular stage in the latter's development. It corresponds to the activity of the scholar, which takes place alongside all the other activities of a society but in no immediately clear connection with them. In this view of theory, therefore, the real social functions of science is not made manifest; it speaks not of what theory means in human life, but only of what it means in the isolated sphere in which for historical reasons it comes into existence. (Horkheimer, Max, 1972, p. 197)

In the latter 1970's advocates of critical theory, including the writers associated with *October*, became thoroughly persuaded by the writings of Benjamin, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Lyotard, and Baudrillard, and began to declare intellectual and cultural war on modernism, modernist art and its supporting criticism. Critical theory was seen by *October* as one of a group of useful tool to disassemble its relationships of power and control, as Brian Wallis would have it (citing Louis Althusser somewhat ironically in retrospect considering the eventual transcendence of formations of critical theory).

‘...critical theory might provide a key to understanding and countering certain negative effects of representation...in social terms, representation stands for the interest of power....all institutionalised forms of representation certify corresponding institutional power’. (Wallis, 1984, p. xi) In such an intellectual climate, the very term ‘aesthetics’ was considered no longer useful in analytical terms, becoming, ‘...[a category] that contemporary practices had rendered suspect, useless, irrelevant’. (p. xi) Now the aesthetic ‘norms’ are replaced by the suspension of meaning— a suspension constructed by infinite signs without fixed referents.

The writers associated with *October* perceived an historical moment in the social and artistic dilemmas of the sixties. So much so that, ‘...We founded *October* as a forum for the presentation and theoretical elaboration of cultural work that continued the unfinished project of the 1960s’. (*October* editorial, 1987, p. xi) This decade was generally considered a time of dissolution and fragmentation in relation to late capitalism, a dissolution and fragmentation noted in particular by the writers Georg Lukács’ and Fredric Jameson. Jameson puts it this way,

In a first moment [that of structural linguistics and high modernism], reification ‘liberated’ the sign from its referent, but this is not a force to be released with impunity. Now, in a second moment [that of poststructural semiotics and postmodernism], it continues its work of dissolution, penetrating the interior of the sign itself and liberating the signifier from the signified, or from the meaning proper. This play, no longer of a realm of signs, but of pure or literal signifiers freed from the ballast of their signifieds, their former meanings, now generates a new kind of textuality in the arts. (Jameson, Fredric; 1984, p.200)

A similar viewpoint is represented in the essay ‘Semiotics and Art History’, (1991) by literary critics Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson. Here the authors argue that semiotics,

‘...challenges the positivist view of knowledge which is endemic in art history’ with what they describe as an ‘antirealist’ theory of the sign, ‘The basic tenet of semiotics, the theory of sign and sign-use, is antirealist’. (Bal; Bryson, 1991, p. 174) Further, they make a forthright case for an understanding of semiotics that is, in this case, openly ‘Political’, allowing questions of gender and power to become central to the study of the visual image. In relation to this, they describe semiotics as a neutral metalanguage, ‘...since semiotics is fundamentally a transdisciplinary theory, it helps avoid the privileging language that so often accompanies attempts to make disciplines interact’. (p.175) Here Bal and Bryson are referring to the problem associated with the ‘humanist’ comparative method, a method that argues for the existence of formal analogies that cross the arts and reveal structural homologies, homologies which tend to be united under dominant historical styles, styles that are seen to represent ‘master narratives’ functioning within specified periods. Such a method simply providing a ‘...confirmation and elaboration of the dominant historical and conceptual models that already prevail in the discipline, offering the sort of highly general, watered-down historicism that can be extracted to match up visual arts and literature’. (Mitchell, 1994, p. 87)

This kind of discursive formation can be contrasted with the aesthetic and moral purity of the position outlined in Michael Fried’s classic essay ‘Art and Objecthood’ (1967)¹⁰¹,

¹⁰¹ Fried’s ideas around objecthood and literalism are reinforced in the essay: ‘Representing Representation: On the Central Group in Courbet’s Studio’. (Fried, Michael, ‘Representing Representation: on the Central Group in Courbet’s Studio’, reproduced in *Allegory and Representation*, (ed.) S. J. Greenblatt, 1981, pp. 94-127). Digressing briefly from discussions on Courbet, Fried detects a movement away from theatricality emerging in French painting between the 1750s and the 1760s. According to Fried: ‘An attempt to detheatricalize the relationship between the artist and the beholder.’ (p.107) He describes this as *absorption*, figures ‘wholly absorbed’ in their activities and relationships without an implicit or explicit reference to an invitation to be viewed by the beholder. Fried sees this absorption as counteracting the influence of the object’s literalness (a theme in ‘Art and Objecthood’) which involves the spectator with the temporal context and thus the social narrative of the art object. According to Fried the literalist object: ‘refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.’ (art and Objecthood, p.163) Absorption according to Fried, contains: ‘above all else the desire to

which affirmed that postmodernist art (what Fried calls ‘Literalist’ art) achieves his notion of ‘theatricality’¹⁰² by a recourse to language, ‘...It seeks to declare and occupy a position—one which can be formulated in words, and in fact has been formulated by some of its leading practitioners...this distinguishes it from modernist painting and sculpture’. Words allow the painting to be ‘in a situation’ which ‘includes the beholder’, thus compromising the purity of the medium by reducing it to a form of rhetoric, which acts to deform the painting into mere ‘literal’ objects in a staged setting. (Fried, 1967, pp 822-834) Clement Greenberg confirms the view as he considers abstract painting, ‘...It was not realistic imitation in itself that did the damage [to visual purity] so much as realistic illusion in the service of...literature’. (Greenberg, 1940, p. 27) And as noted, speaking in *October* (1979) Craig Owens summarizes the developing situation as ‘...an eruption of language into the field of the visual arts’. (Owens, 1979, p. 126) The oppression of narrative, language and the literary by modernist aesthetics is realized in Rosalind Krauss’ essay ‘Grids’ (*October*, no 9, 1979),

establish the supreme fiction of the beholder’s nonexistence—the metaillusion that no one was really there, standing before the picture....’ (1981, p. 105) This implied atemporal and suspended position of the beholder is reiterated in his essay: ‘Thomas Coulture and the Theatricalization of Action in 19th Century French Painting.’ (Fried, Michael, ‘Thomas Coulture and the Theatricalization of Action in 19th Century French Paining’, *Artforum*, June 1970, pp. 36-46.) Fried considers this idea of absorption as a signifier of the self-containment and autonomy of the artwork—its Presentness—which in turn triggers the suspension of the spectator within an atemporal state of ‘grace’ within which he/she can fully experience the sublime transcendence of Art. In other words, these works contain the element of the suspension of time—duration—in relation to the spectator, so valued as part of Fried’s aesthetic gestalt. Such absorptive works thus outdistance the everyday and mundane draw of literalness which Fried asserts is everywhere. Fried defends modern art as ‘authentic’ that is, ‘compelling conviction’ (according to Fried a ‘Wittgensteinian Motif’), in that it suspends both objecthood and a sense of duration.

¹⁰² Fried’s text functions within a tradition dating back to the nineteenth century, a tradition that that sees art as essentially a form of moral statement (as examples one could site the works of Matthew Arnold or T. S. Eliot) which assumes a separation between the arts. ‘Theatre’ can be considered to represent a blurring of boundaries, a blending of the visual and the verbal codes necessary for a theatrical presentation, thus art is designated as ‘performance’, an act directed toward the social consciousness of the viewer.

...In the early part of this century there began to appear, first in France and then in Russia and in Holland, a structure that has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts ever since. Surfacing in pre-War cubist painting and subsequently becoming ever more stringent and manifest, the grid announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse. As such, the grid has done its job with striking efficiency. The barrier it has lowered between the arts and vision and those of language has been almost totally successful in walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and defending them against the intrusion of speech. (Krauss, 1979, p.9)

Thus, '...the linguistic signs which seemed excluded, which prowled at a distance around the image [have] reappeared; [introducing] into the plenitude of the image, a disorder', (Foucault, 1976, p.16) this disorder, this process of re-interpretation, attempted the undoing of the modernist visual stereotype, a stereotype that functioned under the dominant social metaphors of plenitude, autonomy and harmony, rather than the metaphors of fragmentation, instability and dispossession. In this way, the pre-existing values of modernist art were challenged by a postmodern recourse to language, 'to literature, to narrative, to discourse', this in favor of the established emblems of 'opticality' and 'purity'. According to Michael Fried, '...theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting...but with art as such...the concepts of quality and value—and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself—are meaningful or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theatre'. (Fried, 1967, p.830) In this way Michael Fried attempts to construct a barrier between the visual and the literary art, representing, as Krauss would have it, 'modern art's will to silence'.

Post script: 'transitions'

...But why *October*? our readers still inquire. Briefly *October* is named after Eisenstein's film celebrating the tenth anniversary of the revolution. More fully, *October* is emblematic for us of a specific historical moment in which artistic practices joined with critical theory in the project of social construction. It is this conjunction that we inscribe on our cover: Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics. (Editorial, 1976, p. xi)¹⁰³

According to the editors, '...we considered it [*October*] the necessary response to what was once again a consolidation of reactionary forces within both the political and cultural spheres'. (Editorial, 1987, p. ix)¹⁰⁴

Initially, the journal was concerned with Russian Constructivism¹⁰⁵ as a theoretical model for contemporary forms of neo-avant-garde practice, '...we wished to claim the

¹⁰³ The editors, *October the First Decade*, p. xi. *October's* personnel (2001-2002) Editors, Rosalind Krauss (*Founding Editor*), Annette Michelson (*Founding Editor*), Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Hal Foster, Denis Hollier, Mignon Nixon. Managing Editor Lisa Pasquariello. Advisory Board, Parveen Adams, Emily Apter, Carol Armstrong, Leo Bersani, Homi Bhabha, Susan Buck-Morss, Jonathan Crary, Thomas Crow, Manthia Diawara, Andreas Huyssen, Gertrud Koch, Miwon Kwon, Stuart Liebman, Mignon Nixon, Allan Sekula. According to Janet Fisher, Associate Director for Journal Publishing at the MIT press, *October's* circulation as of 23 May, 2001 stands at 3600, 800 of those being outside the U.S. *October's* production and design was undertaken by Charles Read, and type set in *Baskerville*, the journal measures 23 cm X 18cm and was initially published by The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, and distributed by Jaap Reitman (see appendix 1).

¹⁰⁴ The Editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October: The First Decade*, MIT Press, 1987, p. ix.

¹⁰⁵ More specifically, its *productivist* members working in the *Institute of Artistic Culture*, Moscow, who undertook a pervasive critique of culture. International Constructivism refers to the optimistic (utopian), abstract art that emerged in Europe in the 1920's. (reflecting 19th century optimism in the machine and technology) Constructivism was an invention of the Russian avant-garde that found adherents across the continent. Constructivism is generally considered to have been founded in about 1913 by Vladimir Tatlin. Tatlin was joined by Antoine Pevsner and Naum Gabo, who in 1920 published their *Realist Manifesto*, in which one of directives was 'to construct' art; it is from this that the name derives. Constructivism was neither meant to be an abstract style in art nor even an art, per se. At its core, it was first and foremost the expression of a deeply motivated conviction that the artist could contribute to enhance the physical and intellectual needs of the whole society by entering directly into a rapport with machine production, with architectural engineering and with graphic and photographic means of communication. To meet the material needs, to express the aspirations, to organize and systematize the feelings of the revolutionary proletariat—that was their aim: not political art as such, but the socialization of art. What these artists proposed was consistent with Marx's contention that the mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual processes of life. Constructivists believed that the essential conditions of the machine and the consciousness of man inevitably create an aesthetic, which reflect their time.

unfinished analytic project of Constructivism for a consideration of the aesthetics practices of our own time'. (p.ix)¹⁰⁶ As Benjamin H. D. Buchloh would have it, '...there was [in relation to Constructivism] the general awareness among artists and cultural theoreticians that they were participating in a final transformation of the modernist vanguard aesthetic, as they irrevocably changed those conditions of art production and reception inherited from bourgeois society and its institutions'. (Buchloh, 1984, p. 82.)¹⁰⁷ One could suggest that much of the writings of *October*, at least at this point of departure, represented a desire to reflect the Bolshevik artists' attempt to achieve the union of avant-garde art and notions of ideology and practice, a productivist fusion symbolically ending with Moholy-Nagy's arrival in Chicago (1937) to direct a new school of design, a 'Chicago Bauhaus'.

The editors inform us that *October* was named after Sergei Eisenstein's film OCTOBER (1927-28)¹⁰⁸, celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution, noting that they considered this film as being 'emblematic' of a particular historic moment, a moment representing a conjunction between diverse interdisciplinary artistic

¹⁰⁶ The editors, *October the First Decade*, p. ix

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh 1984, 'From Faktura to Factography', *October*, no. 30, p. 82. Constructivism was based on the Polish scholar Andrzej Turowski's model of linguistics. [...] my note.

¹⁰⁸ According to Eisenstein, '...After the drama, poem, ballad in film, OCTOBER presents a new form of cinema: a collection of essays on a series of themes which constitute OCTOBER. Assuming that in any film work, certain salient phrases are given importance, the form of a discursive film provides, apart from its unique renewal of strategies, their rationalization which takes these strategies into account. (Eisenstein Sergei, 'Notes for a Film of Capital', edited and translated by Maciej Aliwowski, Jay Leyda, and Annette Michelson, *October* no. 2, 1976, p. 3.) However, this discursive moment was, according to these writers unfinished, aborted by the consolidation of Stalinism and subsequently distorted by the recuperation of the Soviet avant-garde into Western mainstream idealist aesthetics. (see: *October: The First Decade*, MIT Press, 1987, p. ix.). A mainstream considered by many of these writers to be inexorably linked to the agenda of what came to be widely termed 'late capitalism', with its attendant reification of cultural signs. In the radical politics and artistic practices extending from the 1960s, the *October* group, under the stewardship of Rosalind Krauss, perceived a similar correlation between the contemporary arts. However, this proposed correlation was considered to lack a consolidation with the critical theory perceived within Russian Constructivism.

practice and discursive critical theory, ‘...in the project of social construction’. (p.ix)¹⁰⁹

In an interview with the author, Annette Michelson puts it in more graphic terms, ‘.. a kind of shotgun marriage between theory and practice’. (Michelson, 2003)¹¹⁰ The *October* group saw a transitional area in their own historical moment (the latter 1970s), a moment that might fulfill and complete the neo-avant-garde practices of the 1960s and the Constructivist project of 1917-1946. Notwithstanding this, the editors insert a Political disclaimer, ‘...Our aim is not to perpetuate the mythology or hagiography of Revolution. It is rather to reopen an inquiry into the relationships between the several arts which flourish in our culture at this time, and in so doing, to open discussions on their role at this highly problematic juncture’. (Editorial, 1976, p.3)¹¹¹

Speaking in their founding year (1976) the editors of *October* defined their intellectual relationship to art and art criticism in the United States and established the nature of journal’s project,

...The cultural life of this country, traditionally characterized by a fragmented parochialism, has been powerfully transformed over the past decade and a half by developing interrelationships between her most vital arts. Thus, innovations in the performing arts have been inflected by the achievements of painters and sculptors, those of film-makers have been shaped by poetic theory and practice. There exists,

¹⁰⁹ The Editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October: The First Decade*, MIT Press, 1987, p. ix. (In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault had already suggested that an ‘archaeology’ of art might be achieved in terms of the discursive formations involved. The notion of a discursive practice (discourse theory) can be used in an attempt to avoid a reductionist view of a sociology of art and culture, it posits relativity, by taking into account an ensemble of phenomena through which a society constitutes the production of meaning).

¹¹⁰ An interview with Annette Michelson conducted by the author in NYC 2003.

¹¹¹ The Editors, ‘About OCTOBER’, *October* 1, Spring 1976, p. 3. One should also note the Russian OCTOBER group formed in 1928, this short lived grouping rejected the early signs of what became Socialist Realism, members included: Rodchenko, Stepanova, Lissitsky, Klucis, Eisenstein, and Hannes Meyer.

however, no journal which attempts to assess and sustain these developments. American criticism continues to exist as a number of isolated and archaic enterprises. Largely predicated upon assumptions still operative in the literary academy. The best known of our intellectual journals- among them, *Partisan Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Salmagundi*- are staffed or administered by that academy and, more importantly, articulate its limits and contradictions. They have, in fact, sustained a division between critical discourse and significant artistic practice. More than this, they have, in their ostentatious disregard of innovation in both art and critical method, encouraged the growth of a new philistinism within the intellectual community. Readers wishing to inform themselves of developments in contemporary painting and sculpture, writers desiring to encourage consideration of new cinematic forms must seek out various overspecialized reviews (*The Drama Review*, *Artforum*, *Film Culture*), which are unable to provide forums for intensive critical discourse. For none of the latter publications provides a framework for critical exchange, for intertextuality within the larger context of theoretical discussion. *October* is planned as a quarterly that will be more than merely interdisciplinary: one that articulates with maximum directness the structural and social interrelationships of artistic practice in this country. Its major points of focus will be the visual arts, cinema, performance, music; it will consider literature in significant relation to these. *October* will publish critical and theoretical texts by scholars and critics, texts and statements by contemporary artists, texts and documents by artists of the past whose work has influenced contemporary practice. It will present texts of these kinds in translation from the foreign languages as well. Its emphasis on contemporaneity is designed to initiate a series of reexaminations of historical developments. *October's* structure and policy are predicated upon a dominant concern: the renewal and strengthening of critical discourse through intensive review of the methodological options now available. *October's* strong theoretical emphasis will be mediated by its consideration of present artistic practice. It is our conviction that this is possible only within a sustained awareness of the economic and social bases of that practice, of the material conditions of its origins and processes, and of their intensely problematic nature at this particular time. (Editorial, 1976, pp. 3-4)¹¹²

Hal Foster (citing Barthes and Baudrillard) maps significant 'interdevelopments' in art and criticism between 1971 and 1985,

...Has anything changed?' Roland Barthes asked in 1971 regarding his model of ideology (or 'myth') presented in *Mythologies* (1957). Not the social order he replies, nor its reliance on myth. 'No, what has changed these fifteen years is the *science of reading* under whose gaze myth, like an animal long since captured and

¹¹² The editors, 'About *October*', *October* 1, Spring 1976, pp. 3-4.

held in observation, does nevertheless become a different object'. In 1957 Barthes defined myth in a Marxian way as an inversion of a cultural, historical signified (of class, sex, race) into a natural, universal signifier; to counter this inversion, he argued, the ideological sign had to be righted or mythified one more time. This 'mythoclasm' became one operation of critical art (especially since pop) that has employed devices of 'appropriation and montage'. By 1971, however, Barthes feared that this demystification had ossified into denunciation (with its own mythical projection of centered subjects and scientific truth); it thus became necessary no longer simply 'to purify symbols' but 'to change the object', to dislocate the sign. This theoretical challenge to the symbolic is matched in contemporary art by an 'allegorical impulse', and the 'operational concepts' of (post)structuralist science of the signifier—'citation, reference, stereotype'—have become familiar devices of (post)modernist art... Has anything changed in the *last* fifteen years? Apart from a tilt to a notion of ideology as the 'interpellation' of the subjects in social institutions, and/or a model of its production in language, (post)structuralism has come under attack (especially in its deconstructionist aspect) as a philosophy of textual aestheticism. This critique holds for much (post)modernist art as well, for clearly any truly critical practice must transform rather than merely manipulate signification, (re)construct rather than simply disperse structures of subjectivity. Yet as (post)structuralism no less than (post)modernism develops as its own deconstruction, these subsequent positions tend to remain within its initial presuppositions. This is not the case however with feminist art and theory with its challenge to the tyranny of the (phallogocentric) signifier. Nor is it the case with the Baudrillardian critique of the political economy of the sign, which, no less than feminism, points to a significant change in the development of the cultural object and the possibility of its cognition in the last fifteen years. Essentially, what Barthes announced in 1971 as a 'science of the signifier' Baudrillard diagnosed in 1972 as a 'fetishism of the signifier'—a passion for the code not a critique of it... In a complex analysis he argued that (post) structuralism with its bracketing of the referent and the signified (to the point where they become mere effects of the signifier) is the very epitome of the political economy with its bracketing of use value (to the point where it becomes a mere projection of exchange value). For Baudrillard the differential structure of the sign is one with that of the commodity, and the (post) structuralist 'liberation' of the sign one with fragmentation. This fragmentation, manifested in many ways in recent art and architecture, may thus accord the logic of capital, which suggests that capital has now penetrated the sign thoroughly. These considerations are crucial to a grasp of the present effectivity of art, function of criticism and place of culture today. (Foster, 1982, pp. 6-7)¹¹³

¹¹³ Foster, Hall, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Townsend WA (USA), pp. 6-7. Barthes is quoted from 'Change the Object Itself', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill & Wang, New York, 1977, p. 166., Baudrillard is quoted from 'Fetishism and Ideology', in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Trans. Charles Levin, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1981, p.92.

It is issues such as these: of fragmentation, the division between critical discourse and significant artistic practice, the perceived growth of a 'new philistinism' in the United States, the articulation of the structural and social interrelationships of artistic practice, and an awareness of the material conditions of art practice, which are the objects of study in the following two case studies.

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Case study 2 **An act of Erasure: *October* and the *Index***

This case study discusses two related issues central to *October's* re-construction of the 'object' of criticism. The first being to provide the photographic with an art-theoretical rationale that could be used to disassemble the high modernist aesthetic and its modes of representation, its symbolic unities of thought. The second is associated with the journal's critique on the nature of the sign, a mediation that would include the frameworks that establish the social and aesthetic codes of perception that determine its pictorial nature: the sign being understood here not as a thing but an 'event', more like a radical differentiation acting in historical and socially specific locations. In particular, the editors highlight the semiotic order of the *index*, which they describe variously as being a useful tool, as being mute, as a trace or imprint rather than an (universalizing) ordering principle. Thus its structural logic, its *parergonic* function, here revealed in a perceived new specificity of the photographic, is set up in figurative opposition to modernist notions of medium and style. This can be seen as part of the journal's radical separation of semiotic criticism from the preexisting perceptualist (stylistic analysis), social art historic and phenomenological alternatives. This kind of theorizing claimed the ascendance of language in the visual arts (providing a theoretical rationale for conceptual art), it also asserted the primacy of the temporal over the spatial (establishing a basis for 'theatricality'). Art was now linked with the temporal unfolding of a literary text, a link that represented, according to writers associated with *October*, a return to a suppressed linguistic consciousness, thus '...transforming the object, the work of art, beyond recognition'. (Owens, Craig; 1992, p. 38)

...The *parergon* inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field...but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking *in* something and it is *lacking from itself*. (Derrida, 1987p.56)¹¹⁴

In 1953 Robert Rauschenberg obtained a drawing from the artist Willem de Kooning, and after informing him of his intention to make it the subject of a work of his own, erased the image. This act of erasure left vestiges of pencil graphite and the physical impress of the drawn lines to act as traces of memory. The 'drawing' was then enclosed within a gold frame and an engraved metal label attached identifying the drawing as an artwork by Rauschenberg entitled *Erased de Kooning drawing* and dated 1953.¹¹⁵ Speaking in his essay 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', (1982) Benjamin H. D. Buchloh informs us that, '...Rauschenberg's appropriation confronts two paradigms of drawing, that of de Kooning's denotative lines, and that of the indexical functions of the erasure'. (Buchloh, 1982, p.46)¹¹⁶ Further to this confrontation, this disciplinary act, one might suggest that when the preexisting perceptual data is removed from its original surface of display, the connotive gesture of that erasure can be interpreted as shifting the focus of the beholder's attention towards the conditions under which an artwork is understood, towards the devices of its 'framing', towards the wider

¹¹⁴ Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The Truth in Painting*. (Originally published in 1978 as *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris) Chicago University Press, USA. (Italics in original.)

¹¹⁵ In 1982 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh identifies this drawing as, 'one of the first examples of allegorization in post-New York School art'. This drawing can be recognised as such by its display of the paradigms defined by Buchloh, in its (1) appropriation, (2) the depletion of the confiscated image, (3) the superimposition of a second text, and (4) the shift in the viewers critical attention to the framing device. Buchloh, Benjamin H. D., 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum* September 1982, p. 46.

¹¹⁶ Buchloh, Benjamin H. D., 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum* September 1982, p. 46.

aesthetic forms and their interaction within disciplinary fields, to the relationship with narrative, towards institutional discourse and the spectator (a strategy to be explored by artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke and Louise Lawler). According to Rosalind Krauss (and speaking of Broodthaers), during the ‘...late ‘60s/early ‘70s moment, deconstruction began famously attacking what it derisively referred to as the ‘law or genre’, or the aesthetic autonomy supposedly ensured by the pictorial frame. From the theory of grammatology to that of the parergon, Jacques Derrida built demonstration after demonstration to show that the idea of an interior set apart from, or uncontaminated by, and exterior of the work of art was a chimera, a metaphysical fiction’. (Krauss, 1999, p. 32)¹¹⁷

The literary theorists Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, isolate the *index* as a principle that might expose such framing, ‘...the notion of the index suggests that we do not only account for images in terms of their provenance and making, but also of their functioning in relation to the viewer, their structure of address’. (Ball; Bryson, 1991. Pp. 190-191)¹¹⁸ Rosalind Krauss summarizes the position in her essay ‘Sincerely Yours’, ‘...The notion of the painting as a function of the frame (and not the reverse) tends to shift our focus from being exclusively, singularly, riveted in the interior field. Our focus must begin to dilate, to spread’. (Krauss, 1982, p. 191)¹¹⁹ Thus, one might say that the ambition of the Rauschenberg is, through the application of erasure, to force the presence of that shifting artistic sign to the surface. Further, as noted by Buchloh, under these new conditions the

¹¹⁷ Krauss, Rosalind, *A Voyage on the North Sea, Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, London 1999, p. 32.

¹¹⁸ ‘Semiotics and Art History’, *The Art Bulletin*, June 1991, Volume LXXII, number 2, pp. 190-91.

¹¹⁹ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Sincerely Yours’, *October* no 20, spring 1982, p. 191.

original sign can be considered to be reduced to a trace or index of meaning.¹²⁰ In order to reestablish artistic intelligibility, this new category of sign needs to be reconstituted, to be given a new object or referent; this is an imperative noted by Krauss in her two part essay 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America' (1977), '...This logic involves the reduction of the conventional sign to a trace, which then produces the need for a supplementary text'. (Krauss, 1977, part 2, p. 211)¹²¹ In this way, by reduction and addition (of a narrative, actual or implied), Rosalind Krauss sought to solve a fundamental problem that had occupied *October*: could visual images be dealt with as texts? She asserts the viability of this proposition, '... the successive parts of the work[s]...articulate into a kind of cinematic narrative, and that narrative in turn becomes an explanatory supplement of the work[s]. Thus the visual is linked with the verbal and the verbal with the visual, in short, the image becomes a form of text, and that text can be analysed in semiotic and social terms'. (Krauss, part 2, p. 219)¹²² Referring to Derrida's 'The Parergon' (printed in English translation *October* 9, 1979), Craig Owens describes

¹²⁰ In short, the original meaning of the object has been reduced to status of a functionless sign that in its own turn decontextualizes its own potential for representation. The kind of detextualization seen as being operational in *Erased de Kooning drawing* had been widely detected in the early work of Jasper Johns for example, the critic Max Kozloff asserted when viewing the first Johns' retrospective, at the Jewish Museum in 1963, specifically in relation to the painter's use of numbers, letters, targets, maps, and flags, that conventional 'subject matter' was missing from his work, and one could not easily differentiate 'between the visual medium and the thing referred to'. (Kozloff, Max, 'Jasper Johns', *The Nation*, December 1963, reprinted in *Renderings*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1968, p. 208.) This semiotic order of the index is a sign that functioned 'between the visual medium and the thing referred to'—provided the editors of *October*, in particularly Rosalind Krauss, with a device to refocus the art of the 1970s.

¹²¹ Krauss, Rosalind, 'Notes on the Index Part 2', *October* 4, 1977, reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 211.

¹²² Krauss, Rosalind, 'Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America Part 2', *October* 4, Fall 1977, reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 219.

this 'narrativisation' process as '...the occupation of a nonverbal field by a conceptual force'. (Owens, Craig, 1992, p.32)¹²³

Rosalind Krauss asserts that the semiotic order of the index is something that has shaped the sensibilities of many contemporary artists, '...whether they were conscious of it or not'. This characterizes what she sees as an epistemological malaise, a generalized '...flight from the terms of aesthetic convention'. (Krauss, 1977, p.219)¹²⁴ Speaking in 1996, Hal Foster considers the implications of the unconscious crisis in modes of representation,

...The shift to indexical marks of presence in this art was promoted by a crisis in representation. On the one hand, this crisis is local: after the serial objects of minimalism and the simulacral images of pop (not to mention the immaterial demonstrations of conceptual work), the move to reground art was urgent, almost necessary. But this crisis was also general, prompted by the reification and fragmentation of the sign to which indexical art is but one indirect response. Such is the political unconscious of the semiotic breakdown registered in indexical art, which, precisely because it was unconscious, could not be grasped in its own historical moment. (Foster, 1996, pp. pp. 83-84)¹²⁵

The following case study considers some of the implications of the index in terms of this 'crisis in representation' and in relation to *October's* re-construction of the object of criticism.

¹²³ Owens Craig, *Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power, and Culture*, University of California Press, 1992, p. 32. One should note that Derrida's 'The Parergon', was published in English translation in *October* 9, 1979, pp. 3-41. Further to this, Derrida tells us that without the concept of framing, no aesthetics can exist, We must know what we are talking about, what concerns the value of beauty intrinsically and what remains external to an immanent sense of beauty. This permanent demand—to distinguish between the internal or proper meaning and the circumstances of the object in question—organizes every philosophical discourse on art [for] It presupposes a discourse on the boundary between the inside and the outside of the art object, in this case a discourse on the frame. (Derrida, Jacques, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod, Chicago University Press, p. 45.) This also brings to mind Tony Smith's narrative (in Fried's 'Art and Objecthood') of a ride on an unfinished extension of the New Jersey Turnpike

¹²⁴ Krauss, Rosalind, 'Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America Part 2', *October* 4, Fall 1977, reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 219.

The editors considered the notion of the index, and Krauss' article so important, that they reprinted the first part in an anthology of essays that marked the journal's first decade of criticism, *October the First Decade, 1976-1986*.¹²⁶ The editors write in the introduction,

...Almost from the outset the index, for example, appeared to us a particularly useful tool. Its implications within the process of marking, its specific axis of relation between sign and referent, made of the index a concept that could work against the grain of familiar unities of thought, critical categories such as medium, historical categories such as style, categories that contemporary practices had rendered suspect, useless, irrelevant. In its status as trace [from Derrida] or imprint, the index cut across the rigidly separate artistic disciplines, linking painting with photography, sculpture and performance and cinematography. From the scrutiny of this process in its mute obduracy, its striking independence from categories of form, there seemed to emerge a critical language flexible enough to address the photographic, not photography as a specific medium but a particular mode of signifying that had come to affect all the arts during this historical juncture. (Editorial, 1987, p. xi)¹²⁷

Thus the Peircean index directs one's gaze both visually and critically, it marks, it points like an arrow, or a finger or a flood of light towards other possibilities.¹²⁸ Within this editorial statement one can detect two related issues central to the journal's project. The first being to provide the photograph, or rather the 'photographic', with an art-theoretical

¹²⁵ Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, an OCTOBER book, MIT Press, 1996, pp. 83-84.

¹²⁶ 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America' is a two part article, part 1 was published in *October* 3, Spring 1977, and part 2 was published in *October* 4, Fall 1977.

¹²⁷ The Editors, *October, The First Decade, 1976-1986*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1987, p. xi, [...] my note.

¹²⁸ Photographic images look like the thing, place or person being represented. This makes them *iconic* signs, the signifier-signified relationship being one of resemblance or likeness. A portrait is an obvious example of an iconic sign because the picture resembles the person. However, some signs go beyond the depiction of a person or thing and are used indexically to indicate further, additional meanings to the one immediately and obviously signified; an example would be the Empire State Building which indexes the idea of New York or the notion of 'America'. *Indexical* signs thus form existential linkages. The relationship between signifier and signified in some signs is arbitrary, based neither on an existential link nor a resemblance, this kind of sign is called a *symbol*, and relies on already established cultural interpretation. An example would be a rose, which has become, over time and usage, a symbol of love.

rationale that could be used to disassemble the high modernist aesthetic and its modes of representation, its ‘familiar unities of thought’.¹²⁹ The photographic signifying for *October* a moment upon which representation might turn, being seen [by Walter Benjamin] as ‘...neither art nor non-art [but technology], it is a new form of production that transforms the whole nature of art. (Mitchell, 1986, p. 183)¹³⁰ Such a moment of transition involves a *Beschriftung*, a kind of constructivist sloganing that makes the photograph a site of a contradiction between words and image, inducing a freezing of the ‘real’ in a ‘tiny flash of coincidence’. (Benjamin, 1927[1999], p. 385)¹³¹ In relation to this development, Douglas Crimp outlines the collegueship between those involved in formulating *October*’s take on this new aesthetic, ‘...Rosalind was teaching photography, we were all interested in it– Craig Owens was also one of her students. Actually, some of the stuff that we published in that issue [*October* issue no 5, 1978, A Special Issue on Photography], Craig’s and mine, were done as seminar papers initially for Rosalind’s classes’. (Source, the author)¹³² This creative situation is confirmed by Rosalind Krauss, ‘...Douglas was a student of mine at Hunter, and then he transferred to the Graduate Centre and did most of his work with me there...so Hal, and Benjamin and Douglas were all students of mine at the Graduate Centre’. (Source, the author)¹³³

The second issue brought forward by the editorial statement is associated with a critique on the nature of the sign, representing part of *October*’s ‘active mediation’ of the

¹²⁹ As Althusser notes, ideology is a practice of *representation*, a practice to produce a particular kind of articulation, that is, to produce certain meanings, which, of course, necessitate certain subjects as their supports.

¹³⁰ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Iconology, Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 183. [...] my notes.

¹³¹ Benjamin, Walter 1927-1934. *Gesammelte Schriften*, Selected Writings Volume II, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1999.

¹³² An Interview with Douglas Crimp conducted by the author NYC March 1st 2002.

¹³³ An interview with Rosalind Krauss conducted by the author NYC March 4th 2002.

post-structuralist debate (editorial, 1987, p. x),¹³⁴ a mediation that would include the frameworks that establish the social and aesthetic codes of perception that determine its pictorial nature:¹³⁵ the sign being understood here not as a thing but an ‘event’, more like a radical differentiation acting in historical and socially specific locations. This critique corresponds to Jan Mulkarovsky assertion that, ‘...Only the semiotic point of view allows theorists to recognize the autonomous existence and essential dynamism of artistic structure and to understand the evolution of art as an immanent process but one in constant relationship with other domains of culture’. (Mulkarovsky, 1976, p.8)¹³⁶

The editors present the index as a neutral methodological tool (‘the index cuts across the rigidly separate artistic disciplines’), as being mute, as a trace or imprint rather than an (universalizing) ordering principle: it ‘...intervene[s] in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking *in* something and it is *lacking from itself*. (Derrida, 1987p.56)¹³⁷ Thus its structural logic– ‘...[as] a particular mode of signifying’– is set up in figurative opposition to ideas associated with modernist notions of medium and style, this oppositional motif was to be repeated throughout the development of *October’s* reconstruction of representation and the ‘object’ of criticism.¹³⁸ According to Bal and

¹³⁴ The editors, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October the First Decade, 1976-1986*, MIT press, 1987, Introduction, p, x.

¹³⁵ Personal communication with Professor Rosalind Krauss, October 2001.

¹³⁶ Mukarovsky, Jan, ‘Art as Semiotic Fact’, (trans.) I. R. Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik, MIT Press, 1976, p.8.

¹³⁷ Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The Truth in Painting*. (Originally published in 1978 as *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris) Chicago University Press, USA. (Italics in original.)

¹³⁸ Rosalind Krauss sees a related turn in the indexical marking in the art of the 1970s. Bruce Nauman in his work *From Hand to Mouth* (1967) [Now at the *Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*, The Smithsonian Institute–originally exhibited in the exhibition ‘Eccentric Abstraction’ (1966) curated by Lucy Lippard and after her essay of the same name in *Art International X*, no. 9. November 1966. (The exhibition preceded the publication by one month, opening in late September and extending through October 1966)] casts the space between his mouth and right hand in resin, as if were giving literal identity to the commonplace expression. Thus the material captures his

Bryson, ‘...One category of indexical signs...refer to the maker of the image, ranging from the recognizable ‘hand’ of the artist, the will to be expressive as in expressionist painting, to the signature’. (Bal; Bryson, p. 109)¹³⁹ High modernism, in the aspect of Abstract Expressionism, can be considered the very apotheosis of the indexical sign (the all-over signature, the recognizable hand). It uses the semiotic order of the index to point back to the presence of the artist, thus tracing his or her physical and emotional presence in the production of the work. However, there is another use of the index, a use that reduces the humanist gesture to an absolute minimum; this use inaugurates another very different set of values and relationships, for example, the act of releasing the shutter of a camera, or positioning a ready-made art object within an institutional context. This second and Duchampian use of the index, reflects the failure of contemporary art ‘...to signify directly, to picture anything like an identifiable set of contents’ (Krauss, part 2 1977),¹⁴⁰ emerged in the mid-fifties (with the practices of the neo-avant-garde)¹⁴¹ as part

corporeality and documents a specific activity. Nauman’s search for a psychic identity or ontology came by way of the physical. (*Bruce Nauman, Work from 1965 to 1972*, Jane Livingston and Marcia Tucker, Praeger, New York, 1973, p.43.) One’s sense of physical reality was contingent upon knowing what was between the body and other things. Examples would include many other of his works from 1967, including *Device for the Left Arm and Six Inches of My Knee Extended to Six Feet*, They accurately assimilated the phenomenological aspect of the self– the perceptual body– into a work of art. He was interested in an anthropomorphic metaphor that could be transmitted from the biomechanics of the body and thus become its own sculptural form. Carolee Schneemann’s politics of eroticism, *Meat Joy* (1964), *Illinois Central* (1968) or the pivotal performance *Interior Scroll* (1975 at the Women Here and Now Festival, East Hampton), for example in Europe, Yves Klein and his exhibition *Anthropometries* between 1960 and 1961, Christian Boltanski or Gottfried Helwein’s subjects of innocence, weakness, defenselessness and abused objects beginning in the 1970s or cuts into derelict buildings and marginal spaces by Gordon Matta-Clark, and moldings of body parts, for example Marcel Duchamp’s *With My Tongue in Cheek* (1959), or Vito Acconci’s *Trademarks* (1970).

¹³⁹ ‘Semiotics and Art History’, p. 190.

¹⁴⁰ Krauss, Rosalind, *Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America*, p. 202.

¹⁴¹ The neo-avant-garde represented a loose grouping of North American and European artists of the ‘50s and ‘60s who reprised avant-garde visual devices of the 1910s and 1920s, such as performance, collage, assemblage, the readymade, the grid, and constructed sculpture; personages would include artists like, Rauschenberg, Johns, and Kaprow in the 1950s, Flavin, Andre, Judd and Morris in the early ‘60s and then Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, and Hans Haacke in the late ‘60s.

of the critique of expressionism. Artworks by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg acted as a critical and art historical site for this exploration.¹⁴² It is generally agreed that their work formed a bridge between the gestural attitudes of the abstract expressionists and the beginnings of Pop Art, signifying a ‘...new kind of textuality in all the arts’. (Jameson, Fredric, 1984, p. 200)¹⁴³

For the critical champions who defended formalist premises, such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, Pop Art was not considered to be, in any sense, an evolutionary development; these critics generally saw it as a trivial response based in ‘kitsch’¹⁴⁴ and supported by the contemporary media theories of Marshall McLuhan.¹⁴⁵ Michael Fried describes modernist painting’s intellectual and moral imperative as it withdraws itself from such diluting ‘concerns of society’,

¹⁴² Rosalind Krauss has written extensively about Duchamp’s preoccupation with the index, Rosalind, Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America’, *October*, 3, Spring 1977, pp. 68-81. Jasper Johns’ work in particular has been read and re-read as an exploration of differing modes of signification. For example, Johns’ self consciousness about representation was discussed by Barbara Rose in her article ‘Decoys and Doubles, Jasper Johns and the Modernist Mind’ (1975-76) where she refers to his interest in Duchamp, Magritte and Wittgenstein, one should note that this article reveal a certain degree of uncertainty about different modes of representation, in particular the possibility that the non-use of the image is likely to spill over into either indexical or symbolic signs. Barbara Rose, ‘Decoys and Doubles, Jasper Johns and the Modernist Mind’, *Arts Magazine*, vol. 50, 1975-6, pp. 68-73. And this is precisely what happens in Johns’ case. Johns’ use of prefigured conventional motifs such as flags, targets, numbers and letters of the alphabet—all ‘symbols’ in Charles Sanders Peirce’s sense—can be interpreted as dissembling the ‘originality’ of artistic form. His use of mass-produced objects, stencils and cast fragments of the body has the same kind of effect. Johns’ artistic practice can be construed as a negation of the artist’s privileged access to the touchstones of the humanities, depth, interiority and the forcing to the surface of ultimate truths. This is a critique of the role of the artist initially posited by Minimalism and then postminimalism. The artistic paradigms of sculpture and photography would carry forward this critique of representation and the artistic sign. I would like to consider the journal *October*’s contribution to the establishment of such paradigms.

¹⁴³ Jameson, Fredric, ‘Periodizing the ’60s’, in *The 60s Without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres et al., University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p.200.

¹⁴⁴ See Greenberg, Clement 1939, ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’, (first pub.), in *Partisan Review*, VI, no: 5, New York, fall, pp. 34-49.

¹⁴⁵ From readings of Robert C. Morgan, *The End of the Art World*, pp. 55-66. See Marshall McLuhan & Bruce R. Powers 1969, *The Global Village: Transfigurations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, New York. Also Marshall McLuhan 1964 *Understanding the Media*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London.

... While modernist painting has increasingly divorced itself from the concerns of society in which it precariously flourishes, the actual dialectic by which it is made has taken on more and more of the denseness, structure and complexity of moral experience—that is, of like itself, but like lived as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness . (Fried, 1965, p. 773)¹⁴⁶

For others, including the writers of *October*, Pop Art was the arousal of a new kind of societal consciousness, one in which the social formation of the image had come to replace metaphysics.¹⁴⁷ As Rosalind Krauss writes, ‘...The significance of the art that emerged in this country [the United States] in the early 1960s is that it staked everything on the accuracy of a model of meaning severed from the legitimizing claims of a private self’. (Krauss, 1977, p. 266)¹⁴⁸ Now the structural process replaced notions of the heroic and the sublime, impurity replaced purity, anti-form replaced form. Rosenberg refers to a resulting ‘anxiety’ toward the art object in his work the *De-definition of Art*, he notes, ‘...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 importantly, 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’. (Rosenberg, Harold; 1972, p.2)¹⁴⁹ For Clement Greenberg, the only criterion was the ‘quality’ of art itself, being defined by Derrida as, ‘...Quality [the disinterested character] is the very thing that determines the

¹⁴⁶ Fried, Michael. 1985. ‘Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella’, exhibition catalogue, Fogg Museum, Cambridge Mass, p. 773.

¹⁴⁷ Whilst challenging the apparent hegemony and spatial certainty represented by Formalism, the anti-formalist critics undermine their own status as a coherent anti-critique by revealing their dependence upon the precedent narrative. In order to deflect this kind of ‘binary’ accusation, the anti-formalist critics established their own form of academic certainty based on a rigorous post-structural anti-aesthetic. This could be considered as a defense against a possible fall into interdependence, inconsistency, and discontinuity.

¹⁴⁸ Krauss, Rosalind E., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, MIT Press, original publication 1977, here 12th edition, p. 266

¹⁴⁹ Rosenberg, Harold, *The De-Definition of Art*, Collier Books, New York, 1972, p. 2.

formality of the beautiful object; it must be pure of all attraction, of all seductive power, it must provoke no emotion, promise no enjoyment'. (Derrida, Jacques; 1987, P. 74)¹⁵⁰

For Greenberg, the traditions and the criteria used in determining the best forms of art had a clear linearity and teleology, '...Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. Art is, among many other things, continuity'. (Greenberg, Clement, 1968, p. 208)¹⁵¹

By 1966, a new model of representation based on the so-called 'dematerialization of the art object' began to emerge and become operative in American art (with distinct counterparts in England and Europe, for example *Block* and *Art & Language*.)¹⁵² In the United States, artists associated with this development included Robert Morris, Mel Bochner, Bruce Nauman and Joseph Kosuth (other artists included Sol LeWitt, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner and many others). These artists were concerned primarily with the language of art as opposed to its visual form, thus de-centering one of the fundamental tenets of modernism, that is, that the visual has preference over the verbal; these artists considered the 'concept' as the primary material upon which the physical or documentary aspect of the work depended.¹⁵³ According to Krauss,

...It was Kosuth's...contention that the definition of art, which works would now make, might merely take the form of statements and thus rarefy the physical object into the conceptual conditions of language. But these statements, though he saw them resonating with the logical finality of an analytical proposition, would

¹⁵⁰ Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The Truth in Painting*. (Originally published in 1978 as *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris) Chicago University Press, USA.

¹⁵¹ Greenberg, Clement, 'Modernist Painting' in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1968, p. 208. Greenberg's perception of modernism might be summarized as a self-purifying dialectical process valorized by opticality.

¹⁵² Lippard, Lucy, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International* X11, no. 2 February 1968, reprinted in Lippard's *Changing, Essays in Art Criticism*, Dutton Press, New York, 1971, pp. 255-76.

¹⁵³ From readings of Morgan, Robert C., 'A Methodology for American Conceptualism', in *Art conceptuel formes Conceptuelles*, ed. Christian Schlatter, Galerie 1900-2000, 1990, pp. 556-69.

nevertheless be art and not, say, philosophy. Their linguistic form would merely signal the transcendence of the particular, sensuous content of art, like painting or photography, and the subsumption of each by that higher aesthetic unity—Art itself—of which any one is only a partial embodiment. (Krauss, 1999, p. 10)¹⁵⁴

Thus, the art practices of the '60s and '70s offered suitable material for analysis using linguistic tropes; for example, C. S. Peirce's typology of the sign.¹⁵⁵ According to

Rosalind Krauss,

...Almost everyone is agreed about '70s art. It is diversified, split, fractionalized. Unlike the art of the last decades, its energy does not seem to flow through a single channel for which a synthetic term, like Abstract-Expressionism, or Minimalism, might be found. In defiance of the notion of collective effort that operates behind

¹⁵⁴ Krauss, Rosalind, *A Voyage on the North Sea, Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1999, p. 10.

¹⁵⁵ C. S. Peirce's theory of signs is based on a triadic typology formed between the icon, the index and the symbol. (Meyer Schapiro, 'On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art, Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs', *Semiotica*, vol.1 ed., Thomas Sebeok, The Hague 1969, pp.223-242.) Peirce's icon signifies by virtue of a similarity in qualities or a resemblance to its object. For example, a portrait iconically represents the sitter. 'The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object'. (Notes on the Index, Part 1', p. 203.) The index signifies by virtue of what might be considered an existential bond, in this aspect of the sign an actual causal connection is established between itself and the object. The often-quoted examples are a weathervane indexically signaling the direction of the wind, a footprint indexically pointing to someone's presence on a beach, or more pertinently the vestiges of Rauschenberg's erasure indexically pointing to the art historical paradigms of drawing. Krauss confirms her understanding of the index, 'By the index I mean that type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples'. ('Notes on the Index, Part 2', p. 211.) Peirce's symbol signifies by virtue of a contract or rule— it is the equivalent of Saussure's arbitrary linguistic sign. (Perhaps the best primary source for Peirce's theory of the sign is 'Logic as Semiotic, the Theory of Signs' in *The Philosophy of Peirce*, J. Buchler, ed. Secondary sources include D. Greenlee, *Peirce's Concept of the Sign*, The Hague 1973). Peirce writes about how symbols elude the individual will. 'You can write down the word star, but that does not make you the creator of the word, nor if you erase it have you destroyed the word. The word lives in the mind of those who use it'. (Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic, the Theory of Signs' in *The Philosophy of Peirce*, J. Buchler, ed. Secondary sources include D. Greenlee, *Peirce's Concept of the Sign*, The Hague 1973, P.114.) Since, for Peirce, the sign relation is triadic; each of these aspects bears a different relation to the interpretant as well as to the object. The rather tenuous conventional relationship between the sign-vehicle and object characteristic of the symbol relies upon an interpretant who knows the rule. To put this another way, there is an intrinsic dependence on the human mind for there to be any relation at all. The opposite is true of the index. Because the sign vehicle is physically connected to its object, the interpreting mind of the subject has nothing to do with that connection except in noticing that it exists. Thus, indexical signs do not depend on conventional codes to establish their meaning, they are *uncoded messages*. Peirce's notion of the icon would appear to have certain independence with respect to both object and interpretant. According to Peter Wollen, 'An icon is a representamen of what it represents and for the mind that interprets it as such, by virtue of its being an immediate image, that is to say by virtue of characters which belong to it in itself as a sensible object, and which it would possess just the same were there no object in nature that it resembled, and though it were never interpreted as a sign'. (Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London, (publisher unknown) 1969.)

the very idea of an artistic ‘movement’, ‘70s art is proud of its own dispersal. (Krauss, part 1, 1977, p. 32)¹⁵⁶

In ‘Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America’, Rosalind Krauss focuses on the ‘logic’ of the indexical art of the ‘70s; this is a limitation that allows her to define this logic within strict historical conditions— reflecting the imperative of critical theory which seeks to make knowledge relevant and transparent to the cultural and political circumstances in which it is formulated.¹⁵⁷ In this notion of the index, one can observe one of the many critical means by which the editors of *October* began the deconstruction of modernist form, perhaps the primary signifier of modernism in America, and according to Peter Bürger, ‘...The category of artistic modernism *par excellence* is form, sub-categories such as artistic means, procedures and techniques converge in that category’. (Bürger, Peter, 1992, p.45)¹⁵⁸ In place of internalized self-referential analysis the *October* writers installed an alternative set of operations, operations that are observable as functioning within the artwork, and yet, external too it (the catalytic operations of *parerga*). Such mechanisms are represented by terms like ‘...indices’ and, ‘shifters, empty signs (like the word *this*) that are filled with meaning only when physically juxtaposed with an external referent or object’. (Krauss, 1977, part 2 p. 216)¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America, Part One’ reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, MIT Press, Massachusetts and London, 1985, p. 196.

¹⁵⁷ Horkheimer, Max, ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’, *Critical Theory, Selected Essays*, (trans.) Matthew O’Connell, Continuum, New York, 1982, pp. 188-243. Also, Greenberg, Clement, ‘Complaints of an Art Critic’, *Artforum*, Oct 1967, p. 39.

¹⁵⁸ Bürger, Peter, *The Decline of Modernism*, (trans.), Nicholas Walker, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p.45.

¹⁵⁹ Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index, Part 2’, p. 216. Rosalind Krauss cites Roman Jakobson and Émile Benveniste as a point of origin for this linguistic notion that a sign is filled with potential signification only because it is empty. One might also consider Elisabeth Anscombe’s ‘The First Person’, in *Mind and Language*, (1975) (Jakobson, Roman.

Further, one can point to *October's* use of Derridian concepts like *supplément*, *différance*, the *parergon*, and *dissemination*, which can be seen as tools to undue/deconstruct the stable meanings actualized by classical Saussurian semiotic oppositions, what Roland Barthes (1971) described as, '...a euphoric dream of scientificity'.¹⁶⁰ (Barthes, Roland; 1971, p. 97.) The literary theorist Mieke Bal outlines the implication of dissemination in relation to the work of art,

'Shifters, verbal categories, and the Russian verb', Russian Language Project, Harvard University Press, 1957, also, Émile Benvenista, 'La nature des pronoms', in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966. Elisabeth Anscombe, *Mind and Language*, New York and Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 45-46.)

¹⁶⁰ The initial forms of structural linguistics (synchronic linguistics), and its related semiology, were not considered to be able to carry through any criticism of idealist thought (even though one could reasonably say that they provided the basis for doing so). This was because structuralism was widely viewed as failing in the production of a genuinely materialist theory of language, and (as previously noted), ultimately rested on idealist presuppositions. What Barthes, in 1971, described as: '...a euphoric dream of scientificity' (Barthes, Roland 1971, *Tel Quel*, nr. 47, p. 97.) Idealism—the euphoric dream of autonomy—depends on notions of a 'human essence' (essence preceded existence) which somehow transcends and operates (indeed, cause) the social system, and is not constructed within this system. This vision of the 'individual'—rather than the subject—mobilizes notions of mankind and the human as a specific language using entity, operating under innate/preordained identities that pre-exist the individual's entry into social relations. Idealism has, in other words, an idea of identity that is in complete opposition to the materialist tenet of the subject resulting from its own construction within the congress of society. These idealist assertions underlie the fundamental assumptions of what is widely termed 'bourgeois ideology' with its will to present society as consisting of free individuals. Individuals, whose social determination results from their pre-given essences, essences that produce subjects who are innately talented, creative, efficient, lazy, unintelligent, and so on. The conception of language as a transparent, neutral milieu: a conception that enables bourgeois ideology to construct such representations of essences was shaken by the extension of the materialist analysis of the subject to language itself. Theories of language steadily moved towards a materialist theory of how the individual appears as a subjected subject. But as we can see in the development of structuralism and semiology in France, it became evident that this theory was constantly inhibited from developing any real materialist understanding of language and ideology within the social process. The emergence of the so-called 'mechanistic tendencies' from structuralist analyses revealed its affinity with idealism. Roland Barthes' 'dream of scientificity' describes the structural project of drawing up models of each system, such that any possible verbal enunciation could be predicted by the operation of the models. This is the basic requirement of a science; that is, it is able to predict. However this 'scientificity' (here relating to one of the positivist tenets) can only operate in certain systems (that is, monological systems), and does not take into account social systems whose diverse practices are in a continual state of morphological change. The examination of the systemic nature of social signification was one major aspect of semiology. Significantly for the analysis of the image as 'text,' common in American 'anti-formalist' criticism exemplified by *October's* practice (The term anti-formalism was used by Clement Greenberg in 'Complaints of an Art Critic,' *Artforum*, Oct 1967, p. 39.) Roland Barthes chose another route—that of the forms of representation that bourgeois society gives itself. The recognition of this led Barthes, Julia Kristeva and others associated with the *Tel Quel* group (the Parisian magazine *Tel Quel* edited by Barthes), to rethink the foundations of structuralism and semiology. In doing so, they moved in a direction that was of vital importance for the future elaboration of the tenets of materialism and associated criticism.

...Dissemination is based on three tenets related to the interplay of contemporary semiotics and deconstruction that challenge art history's pursuit of origins, intertextuality, entailing the dispersal of origin; polysemy, entailing the undecidability of meaning; and the shifting location of meaning, entailing the dispersal of agency. Although commonplace in literary criticism, these tenets each have a different status in the practice of art history'. (Bal, Mieke; 2001, pp. 67-68)¹⁶¹

Craig Owens writes that such operations are responsible for, '...transforming the object, the work of art, beyond recognition', further, that '...such a transformation has no better point of departure than that which has always been excluded from the aesthetic field: the *parergon*'. (Owens, 1992, p. 38) Owens outlines the implications of Derrida's text,

...The permanent complicity of Western aesthetic with a certain theory of the sign is the major theme of Jacques Derrida's 'The Parergon', written primarily on Kant's Critique of Judgement. 'The Parergon' is not, however, a text about art; nor is it simply about aesthetics. Rather, it represents an attempt to unmask what Derrida calls 'discursivity within the structure of the beautiful', the occupation of a nonverbal field by a conceptual force. 'The Parergon' thus extends to the aesthetic domain Derrida's observations concerning the permanent authority invested by Western metaphysics in speech'. (Owens, 1992, p. 32.)

Thus, the alternative mechanism, the '...parergon, this supplement outside the work' (Derrida, 1987, p.55)¹⁶² offered by *October* is initiated through the intervention of language, by a text (actual or implied), the 'literary commonplace', revealing the necessity to '...add a surfeit of written information to the depleted power of the painted

¹⁶¹ Bal, Mieke, *Looking in, the art of viewing*, Gordon and Breach Publishing, Amsterdam, 2001, pp. 67-68. Bal is the founding director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, and Professor of literary theory at the University of Amsterdam.

¹⁶² Derrida, Jacques 1987, *The Truth in Painting*, University of Chicago Press, USA, originally published in 1978, Flammarion, Paris.

sign'. (Krauss, part 2, p.216)¹⁶³ Citing Walter Benjamin, Rosalind Krauss explains the functioning of this rationale in relation to the photograph,

...There are, however, other kinds of texts for photographs besides written ones, as Walter Benjamin points out when he speaks of the history of the relation of caption to photographic image. 'The directive which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines', he writes, 'soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones'. In film each image appears from within a succession that operates to internalize the caption, as narrative. (Krauss, part 2 p. 218)¹⁶⁴

In light of this analysis, the photographic can be seen as part of a complex of discursive practices, practices that, according to Krauss, are embedded in the *parergonic* functioning [its exclusion/its detachment from the work, '...the parergon stands out...the dagger...the necklace she wears...the exceptional, the strange, the outstanding (Derrida 1987, pp. 55-58)] of the index. Here the index, like the *parergon*, can be seen as representing the spaces and procedures by which the visual and the linguistic communicate. Walter Benjamin also seeks a photographic practice that would not '...paralyse the associative mechanisms of the beholder' (Benjamin, p. 17, 1978 [1931])¹⁶⁵, moving it out of '...the realm of aesthetic distinctions to social function', a practice that might transfigure photography into a form of literature. As Foucault writes, words and images are like two hunters, '...pursuing its quarry on two paths...By its double function, it guarantees

¹⁶³ Krauss, 'Notes on the Index, Part 2', p. 216.

¹⁶⁴ Krauss, 'Notes on the Index, Part 2', p. 218. Walter Benjamin is quoted from 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969. P. 226.

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin, Walter 1931. 'A Short History of Photography', reproduced in *Germany: The New Photography*, (ed.) David Mellor, The Arts Council of Great Britain, p. 17.

capture, as neither discourse alone nor a pure drawing could do'. (Foucault, 1976, p. 22.) In the first section of 'The Parergon', Derrida translates its meaning as the 'abyss' (Derrida, 1987, p.17) mirroring '...this curious transitional region between the word and the image, the region of the 'in between' ... a region at once described by Foucault as a 'colourless neutral strip', or a form of sublime landscape 'an uncertain foggy region', or indeed a 'lacuna',¹⁶⁶ the very 'absence of space'. (Foucault, 1976, p.21; Muir, 2002) For Krauss, these operations of the index, '...the discursivity that occupies a non verbal field', govern the Duchampian oeuvre in its photographic manifestations (she reads *The Large Glass* 'as a kind of photograph') as well as in its readymade manifestation, since, according to Krauss, the photograph as a 'sub-or pre-symbolic' trace is inherently indexical and the readymade is '...a sign which is inherently empty, its signification a function of only this one instance, guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object' (Krauss, part 1, p. 206)¹⁶⁷ Further, she isolates the index as a principle that might account for the pluralistic art of the decade. Immediately this 'mode of signifying' began to *disseminate*, to refocus practices such as body art and installation work, providing an 'indexical grounding' for art (shifting its sign, as in the Rauschenberg erasure) in a physical presence, on a body, in a site (referring to postminimalism) rather than in the virtuality of the modernist gestalt—a moment of understanding that provides, '...the opening, or clearing, onto meaning/being that 'Art and Objecthood' takes as the exalted possibility of art, art as it eschews presence and achieves that presentness which as its

¹⁶⁶ From phenomenology, *lacunae* are the 'missing parts of the text that require the participation of the spectator/reader. They are key elements, also known as 'spots of indeterminacy, in the active constitution of the text by the reader. Part of this process is 'concretisation, the readers necessary act of completion.

¹⁶⁷ 'Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America', p. 206.

author says, is grace'. (Krauss, 1991, p. 88)¹⁶⁸ Thus, '...any parergon [the indexical function] is only added on by virtue of an internal lack in the system to which it is added'. (Derrida, p.57)¹⁶⁹ The system, in this case, being the high modernist aesthetic as interpreted by Fried. According to this de-disciplinary viewpoint, the modernist historical narrative is thus 'infected' by discourse, by '...intertextuality, polysemy, the shifting of meaning's location by the dispersal of agency'. (Bal, Mieke; 2001, pp. 67-68)¹⁷⁰

Because of the ephemeral or inaccessible nature of much of the art practice of the 1970s, photodocumentation came to be thought of as a way to preserve its memory.¹⁷¹ In this way the photograph can be interpreted as a 'trace', or an 'index' of the real object or event, '...it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model'. (Bazin, André; 1976, p.203)¹⁷² However,

¹⁶⁸ Krauss, Rosalind, 'Using Language to do Business as Usual, reproduced in *Visual Theory*, (eds.) Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly & Keith Moxey, Polity Press, 1991, p. 88. According to Peirce, semiotics works through three positions, a perceptible (or virtually perceptible) item, that is the sign or *representamen* that stands for something else; the image in the mind, called the *interpretant*, that the recipient (the human subject) forms of the object; and the thing for which the sign stands, that is the *object* or *referent*. For a complete explanation see, *A Comprehensive Bibliography and Index of the Published Works of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Texas Research Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism, Greenwich, 1977.

¹⁶⁹ [...] my addition.

¹⁷⁰ Bal, Mieke, *Looking in, the art of viewing*, Gordon and Breach Publishing, Amsterdam, 2001, pp. 67-68. Bal is the founding director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, and Professor of literary theory at the University of Amsterdam.

¹⁷¹ Many postminimal objects present themselves as an attack on formalist notions of organizing space, hence the title of Robert Morris's essay 'Anti Form' (1968). The sculptor Robert Morris wrote extensively on minimalism, being himself an originator of minimal sculpture, his essay 'Notes on Sculpture' (1966) providing much of its theoretical base. However, Morris chose to reject the minimalist aesthetic, and subsequently articulated a post-minimal viewpoint in two articles 'Anti-Form' and 'Beyond Objects' (1969). Robert Morris and others, notably the artists Richard Serra and Robert Smithson, sought to disrupt the modernist signifier of form by producing art objects that defied its purist aesthetic. Many other artists working around 1968 were concerned with the process by which the art object was established. They began to allow the materials of their art to construct their own shape, their own random or intrinsic form. As Morris notes in 'Anti Form', the process of the work's 'making itself'. For example, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Eva Hesse, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, and Joseph Beuys) Hence the works of this period constructed through the disordering, accumulating or the 'piling up' of a variety of amorphous materials, so that its form (if it can be described as such), or at least its morphology, took on the appearance and metaphor of anti-form.

¹⁷² Bazin, André, *What Is Cinema*, trans. Hugh Gray, Berkley, University of California Press, 1967, p. 14, cited in Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index, Part One', *October* no 3, 1976, p. 203.

according to Krauss, ‘...it is not just the heightened presence [within the art of the ‘60s and ‘70s] of the photograph itself that is significant. Rather it is the photograph combined with the explicit terms of the index. For, everywhere one looks in ‘80s art, one finds instances of this connection’. (Krauss, Part 1, 1977 p. 77)¹⁷³

Yet, as Krauss notes, the shift in the indexical grounding of art was initiated by with the work of Marcel Duchamp who confronted ascendant cubism with the arbitrariness of the sign, ‘...It was as if cubism forced for Duchamp the issue of whether pictorial language could continue to signify directly, could picture anything like an identifiable set of contents’.¹⁷⁴ In response to such depletions of meaning, the inability of art to signify directly, she tells us that indexes are, ‘...marks or traces [of that] to which they refer, the object they signify... [into the category of the index] We would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms...Cast shadows could also serve as indexical signs of objects’—and above all photographs’. (Krauss, part 2, 1977, p. 66)¹⁷⁵

Krauss quotes C. S. Peirce in relation to establishing the ontology of the photograph, ‘...Photographs’, Peirce says, ‘...especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructional, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to

¹⁷³ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America’, *October* 3, Spring 1977, p. 77.

¹⁷⁴ Krauss, ‘The Originality of the Avant-garde’, p. 202. One should also note the continuation of these principles in the publication of essays like Georges Didi-Huberman’s ‘The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)’, and Denis Hollier’s ‘Surrealist Precipitates, Shadows Don’t Cast Shadows’.¹⁷⁴ Krauss refers to works such as Duchamp’s *Tu m’* 1918 (‘you’/‘me’) and *Elevage de Poussière* (Dust Breeding) 1920.

¹⁷⁵ At this time Rosalind Krauss was teaching photography at Hunter College Graduate center, NYC, her students included, Hal Foster, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Douglas Crimp. (source, the author, 2002) Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America’, Part 2, *October* 4, Fall 1977, p. 66. [...] my note.

nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs [indices], those by physical connection'. (Peirce, 1955, p. 106)¹⁷⁶ Krauss continued to say that to be understood, the photograph required a caption,

...A meaningless surrounds [the photograph] which can only be filled by the addition of a text. The supplemental caption related to the index to the conceptual field of art. Not only did the captioned photograph incorporate verbal texts into visual art more than ever before, but captioning so linked the visual with the verbal that the visual was turned into a text. (Krauss, part 1, 1977, p. 77)¹⁷⁷

In regard to this logic, it has been suggested that the relationship between the photographic and the linguistic is formed by two opposing propositions. The first places the emphasis on how the photograph differs from language; here it is characterized as a 'message without a code', that is, in its aspect as a purely objective transcription of reality. The second position either transforms the photographic into a language, or stresses its incorporation into language.¹⁷⁸ The proposition is outlined by Victor Burgin when he tells us that the photographic is, '...invaded by language in very moment it is looked at, in memory, in association, snatches of words and images continually intermingle and exchange one for the other'. (Burgin, Victor; 1996, p. 51)¹⁷⁹ In his essay 'The Photographic Message' Roland Barthes notes the uneasy and paradoxical relationship between language and photography, which he describes as, '...the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other

¹⁷⁶ Peirce, C. S., 'Logic as Semiotic, The Theory of Signs', *Philosophic Writings of Peirce*, New York, Dover Publications, 1955, p. 106. Reproduced in 'Notes on the Index, Part 2', p. 215.

¹⁷⁷ 'Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America', *October* 3, Spring 1977, p. 77.

¹⁷⁸ Mitchell, W. J. T. *Picture Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 281-2.

¹⁷⁹ Burgin, Victor, 'Seeing Sense', in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Post-Modernity*, Humanities Press, 1996, p.51.

with a code (the ‘writing’ or the rhetoric of the photograph)’. (Barthes, 1977, p. 19)¹⁸⁰

The most familiar opposition he applies to the photographic message is that of denotation and connotation, the former being associated with the nonverbal status of the photograph, and the latter with the readability of the photograph, but, as noted, the relationship is co-existent, fluid and reciprocal— W. J. T. Mitchell puts it this way, ‘...Connotation goes all the way down to the roots of the photograph, to the motives for its production, to the selection of its subject matter, to the choice of angles and lighting. Similarly, ‘pure denotation’ reaches all the way up to the most textually ‘readable’ features of the photograph, the photograph is ‘read’ as if it were the trace of an event, a ‘relic’ of an occasion laden [with] aura and mystery’ (Mitchell, 1994, p. 284-285)¹⁸¹

Although the text-image debate has never adequately been resolved, the art theoreticians aligned with *October* proceeded to treat visual imagery as if it was verbal (language), and thus an appropriate subject for the methodologies of post-structuralism and deconstruction. [One should note, that at this juncture *October*’s position was quite distinct in the American art world, this is confirmed by Craig Owens, ‘...The only people I knew who were talking about this [referring to the term postmodernism] in the visual arts in the early to mid-‘70s—were people associated with *October*’. (Owens, 1982, p. 299)¹⁸²] At one and the same time embracing the literal or implied text (language) and the photograph (image). According to Craig Owens, Rosalind Krauss considered photography to be *the* medium of postmodernism, she ‘...unifies postmodern art

¹⁸⁰ Barthes, Roland 1977, ‘The Photographic Message’, in *Image/Music/Text*, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ *Picture Theory*, pp. 284-5.

¹⁸² From an interview with Craig Owens, conducted by Anders Stephanson, 1982, ‘Representation, Appropriation, and Power’, *Beyond Recognition*, Representation, Power, and Culture, University of California Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 299.

according to the signifying conditions of a single medium, photography'. (Owens, Craig, 1987, p.299)¹⁸³ Krauss cites André Bazin in support of the fading status of the painted sign and the ascendance of the photographic,

...Painting is after all, an inferior way of making likenesses, an ersatz of the process of reproduction. Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation...The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model. (Krauss, part 1 1977, p.203)¹⁸⁴

Further to this ascendancy (in a special issue on photography, *October* 5, 1978),¹⁸⁵

Krauss and Annette Michelson write, '...only now...is photography truly 'discovered', and now it is that we must set to work, establishing an archaeology, uncovering a tradition, constituting an aesthetic'. (Editorial, 1978, pp. 3-5)¹⁸⁶ The editors considered the rehabilitation of photography part of a 'return of the repressed' signified by, '...the eruption of language into the aesthetic field' (Owens, 1992, p.45)¹⁸⁷ The mechanics of this return, this 'archaeology' (of modernisms suppressed linguistic unconscious), is expressed by Craig Owens, '...Obviously a lot of the practices went back to such moments as Duchamp and the readymades in 1913 or 1915, back to dada and surrealism.

¹⁸³ Owens, Craig, 'Review of Books, Analysis Logical and Ideological', p. 29.

¹⁸⁴ Bazin, André, *What Is Cinema*, trans. Hugh Gray, Berkley, University of California Press, 1967, p. 14, cited in Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index, Part One', *October* no 3, 1976, p. 203.

¹⁸⁵ According to Douglas Crimp this issues was initiated under his suggestion. 'I certainly proposed the idea of doing a special issue on photography (issue number 5)'. An interview conducted with Douglas Crimp by Peter Muir NYC March 1st 2002.

¹⁸⁶ The Editors, introduction to 'Photography, A Special Issue', *October* 5, Summer 1978, pp. 3-5.

¹⁸⁷ Owens, Craig, *Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power, and Culture*, University of California Press, 1992. 'Earthwords', p.45. Originally printed in *October* 10, Fall 1979, pp. 120-130.

These links were very clear; but in order to theorize them, to deal with contemporary production without evaluating it in terms of categories and criteria of High modernism as elaborated by Greenberg and Michael Fried, it seemed necessary to elaborate a counter discourse'. (Owens, 1982, p. 299)¹⁸⁸ Tracing origins to Lessing (in Germany) and Diderot (in France) and invoking Roman Jakobson, Craig Owens notes that,

...poetry and all the discursive arts [were placed] along a dynamic axis of spatial simultaneity. Consequently the visual arts were denied access to discourse, which unfolds in time, except in the form of a literary text which, both exterior and anterior to the work, might supplement it. [Further] 'the linguistic origin of the principle which made distinctions between the arts, and thus modernism, possible *had to remain unconscious*; were the subordination of all the arts to language exposed, the visual arts would effectively be denied a proper territory, and the thesis that the arts are rigorously isolable and definable would be challenged. (Owens, p.45)¹⁸⁹

In their thinking about photography and film—part of their developing 'counter discourse', the 'return of the repressed'—the contributors to *October* were greatly influenced by the implications of the 1936 essay 'Photography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', by Walter Benjamin. As Crimp states (1984), his '...classical essay on mechanical reproduction has become central to critical theories on contemporary visual culture'. (Crimp, 1984, p.56)¹⁹⁰ Crimp continues his valorization of photography almost a decade later,

...That photography has overturned the judgment-seat of art is a fact that found it necessary to repress, and so it seems that we may accurately say that postmodernism constitutes a return of the repressed. Postmodernism represents a

¹⁸⁸ From an interview with Craig Owens, conducted by Anders Stephanson, 1982, 'Representation. Appropriation, and Power', *Beyond Recognition*, Representation, Power, and Culture, University of California Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 299. [...] my note.

¹⁸⁹ Owens, Craig, *Beyond Recognition*, p. 45. [italics in original]

¹⁹⁰ Crimp, Douglas, 'The Art of Exhibition', *October* 30, Fall 1984, p. 56.

specific breach with modernism, with the institutions that are the preconditions for and shape the discourse of modernism. The institutions can be named at the outset, first, the museum; then, art history; and, finally, in a more complex sense, because modernism depends on its presence and absence, photography. (Crimp, 1993, p. 108)¹⁹¹

What made Benjamin so crucial to *October* was that he had focused on photography because it was an art of mechanical reproduction [representing technology], being the ‘...first image of the encounter between the person and the machine’ (Benjamin, 2000 [pre-1935])¹⁹², and hence, for Crimp and others a fitting medium of postmodern culture.

According to Esther Leslie,

...Mechanically reproductive technology operates such that it ruptures life’s continual flow of images, blasting a fragment that has become a representation out of incessant movement into stillness for an instant of consciousness reflection on its significance. In as much as they break beyond physical laws of spatiality and temporality photographs force open a gap for conscious reflection, depicting momentary relations—photographs as images of the anatural. (Leslie, 2000, p. 61)¹⁹³

Benjamin’s contribution was considered to be of such significance as to deserve a special issue of *October* (1985), comprising of an English translation of his ‘Moscow Diary’.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Crimp, Douglas, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, MIT Press, 1993, p. 108.

¹⁹² Benjamin, Walter pre- 1935. ‘Konvolut Y: die Photographie’, in the *Passagenwerk*, p. 382, reproduced in *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* by Esther Leslie, Pluto Press, 2000, p. 48.

¹⁹³ Leslie, Esther 2000. *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, Pluto Press, London.

¹⁹⁴ *October* 33, Special Issue, 1985. Benjamin believed that the modern age was distinguished by two developments, the rise of mass society and technological revolution, namely photomechanical reproduction. Both would radically effect the perception of art. He began with the premise that an original work had a ‘presence in time and space. [a] unique existence at the place where it happened to be’. Benjamin, Walter, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, reproduced in *Reading Images*, ed. Julia Thomas, Palgrave Press, London, 2000. pp. 62-75., p. 66. Its place and the ‘touch’ of the maker conferred on it an ‘aura’, a singular authenticity, and because of that, its authority. Reproduction made a work available at any place and in any time and no matter how perfect could not confer the notion of aura. Moreover, when there came into being a large (potentially infinite) number of copies, as in the age of mechanical reproduction, the aura withered away. *Art of the Postmodern Era*, p. 346. The proliferation of reproductions had depreciated and demystified the original work of art and deflated its aura. If art could no longer be original, it followed, according to this reading that the idea of the artist as an individual genius who makes singular works of art was obsolete. He concluded that the idea of creative genius and eternal value had become outmoded.

(One should also note Walter Benjamin's influence in *October's* debates around obsolescence 2002: see Appendix 1) His influence (here in terms of the de-centering of originality and expressionism) is made clear in a 1984 (*October* 31) article by Rosalind Krauss, she notes that the photograph had made a,

...travesty of the idea of originality, or subjective expressiveness, or formal singularity...By exposing the multiplicity, the facticity, the repetition and stereotypes at the heart of every aesthetic gesture, photography deconstructs the possibility of differentiating between the original and the copy, the first idea and its slavish imitators. [It] calls into question the whole concept of the uniqueness of the art object, the originality of its author, the coherence of the *œuvre* within which it was made, and the individuality of so-called self expression. (Krauss, 1984, pp. 59, 63)¹⁹⁵

As noted, Krauss characterizes the photograph as an 'index', an actual imprint of something tangible in the real world, as it were, a trace deposit of the 'real'. But to be understood, the photograph required a caption, a positioning, literal or implied. In its literal aspect, '...an overt use of captioning is nearly always to be found in that portion of contemporary art which employs photography directly. Story art, body art, some of conceptual art, certain types of earthworks, mount photographs as a type of evidence and join to this assembly a written text or caption'. However, '...[in] the abstract wing of this art of the index—we do not find a written text appended to the object-trace'.¹⁹⁶

These ideas did not go unchallenged. Benjamin's critics asserted the obvious example that a reproduction was not the original and the original continued to exist. His supporters tried various rebuttals. For example, the art critic Howard Singerman asserted, 'What is important is not that the work is the original, authentic body but that it is seen to be the image, public and multiple. And seen with this familiarity, seen again and again, even the original becomes only another instance, another copy of its image'. Singerman, Howard, 'In the TEXT', pp. 162-63. In actuality the opposite seemed to be the case. Reproductions of the Mona Lisa did not dissipate the aura of the original; instead reproductions enhanced the aura causing crowds of spectators who yearned to see the original work.

¹⁹⁵ Krauss, Rosalind, 'A Note on Photography and the Simulacral', *October* 31, Winter 1984, pp. 59, 63.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Nevertheless, the text is present, and that text is invoked by narrative succession, Krauss explains, ‘...In film each image appears from within a succession that operates to internalize the caption, as narrative’. (Krauss, part 2, p.218)¹⁹⁷ She supports this proposition in relation to the 1976 exhibition ‘Rooms’¹⁹⁸ presented at P.S. 1,

...the works I have been describing all utilize succession. Pozzi’s panels occur at various points along corridors and stairwells of the building. Stuart’s rubbings are relocated across the facing planes of a hallway. The Matta-Clark cut involves the viewer in a sequence of floors. The ‘text’ that accompanies the work is, then, the unfolding of the building’s space which the successive parts of the works in question articulate into a kind of cinematic narrative, and that narrative in turn becomes an explanatory supplement of the works. Thus the visual is linked with the verbal and the verbal with the visual, in short, the image becomes a form of text, and that text can be analysed in semiotic and social terms. (Krauss, part 2, p.219)¹⁹⁹

Here Krauss is describing a concern not so much with any manifest content present in such works, but with structural relationships of representation within a text, thus, it is not the actual content that determines meaning, but the relations between elements in some kind of system (from the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Saunders Pierce), in this case a linguistic system represented by a narrative unfolding through time.²⁰⁰ Further, she states that the 1970s faced a

¹⁹⁷ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America Part 2’, p. 218.

¹⁹⁸ P. S. 1. Was a public school building in Long Island City, which was leased to the Institute for Art and Urban Resources for the use as artists studios and exhibition spaces. The exhibition in question was called ‘Rooms’, being mounted in May 1976 as the inaugural show of the building.

¹⁹⁹ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America Part 2’, p. 219.

²⁰⁰ The production of meaning is grounded in conventions, codes and cultural agreement. Modern semiological analysis, as such, stems from the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Saunders Pierce. The communication process is regarded as signs organized in systems called codes. Codes are conventions or agreements that connect a sign with its meaning. There are all kinds of codes, cultural codes, ideological codes, representational codes, language codes and so on. Semiotic analysis is mainly descriptive. Sign systems, signification, representation and signifying practices are identified and subsequently interpreted, for example as ideological complexes. De Saussure (1966 [1915]) divided the ‘sign’ into two components; the ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’. The former is the sound image or visual image of the spoken or written word, while the latter is the object or concept it linguistically represents. Pierce distinguished three aspects of signs - iconic, indexical and symbolic. Iconic aspects comprised things that could be visibly seen. Indexical aspects comprised the recognition of

‘...tremendous arbitrariness with regard to meaning’, and that its response to that arbitrariness was to turn to ‘...the mute presence of an uncoded event’.²⁰¹ Such responses (*dispositif*), based as they are on Roland Barthes notion of the photograph as a ‘...message without a code’ (Barthes, 1977, pp. 32-51)²⁰² and representing what can be seen as a progressive erosion of specific artistic mediums (the emptying out of the modernist sign) can be seen, for example, in the above noted ‘reductive’ cuts into derelict buildings undertaken by the artist Gordon Matta-Clark (Fig. 6). Rosalind Krauss explains the genealogy and nature of the uncoded message,

...The phrase ‘*message sans code*’ is drawn from an essay in which Roland Barthes points to the fundamentally uncoded nature of the photographic image. ‘What this [photographic] message specifies’, he writes, ‘is, in effect, that the relation of the signified and signifier is quasi-tautological. Undoubtedly the photograph implies a certain of the scene (cropping, reduction, flattening), but this passage is not a *transformation* (as an encoding must be). Here there is a loss of equivalency (proper to true sign systems) and the imposition of a quasi-identity. Put another way, the sign of this message is no longer drawn from the institutional reserve; it is not coded. And one is dealing here with the paradox of a message without a code. Krauss, part2, p.211)²⁰³

relationships or causal connections between phenomena, such as links between symptoms and disease or between smoke and fire. Symbolic aspects of signs comprised learned meanings associated with linguistic forms (e.g. words). Semiology examines signs and the relations between them. In doing so, it separates content from form and concentrates on the system of signs that make up the text. In determining the meanings conveyed by signs, de Saussure introduced another critical notion, and that is that relations among signs tend to be oppositional in nature. If something is described as ‘hot’, its real meaning can only be established by making comparisons with things deemed to be ‘cold’. There can be no understanding of happiness unless there is also a concept of what it means to be sad. In interpreting the meanings conveyed by media content, therefore, the semiologist identifies the signified and signifier aspects of signs and the relationships that exist between these two aspects within that particular text. Signifiers can change meaning, however. Over time, new associations and new meanings can become attached to signifiers. In a semiological analysis, the main concern is to establish how meaning is created and communicated through stories or narratives. Berger, A.A., *Signs in Contemporary Culture, an Introduction to Semiotics*, Publishes Sheffield, New York and , 1990.

²⁰¹ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America, Part One’ p. 212.

²⁰² Barthes, Roland (1977), originally published as ‘Rhetorique de l’image’, *Communications*, no.4, 1964, p. 42.

²⁰³ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Part 2’, (October 4, 1977) reproduced in *The originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 1985, p. 211, Barthes is cited from ‘The Rhetoric of the Image’, *Communications*, no. 4, 1964, p. 42.

Such works as those above, deal with ‘...the jettisoning of convention, or more precisely the conversion of the pictorial and sculptural codes into that of the photographic message without a code’.²⁰⁴ In ‘Notes on the Index (Part 2)’, Krauss focuses on the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, Michelle Stuart, Marcia Hafif and Lucio Pozzi in relation to ‘Rooms’.²⁰⁵ This exhibition not only represented the narrative functions of the index but also her proposition that, ‘...in the ‘70s, over large stretches of abstract art that is being produced, the conditions of photography have an implacable hold’. (Krauss, part 2, p. 210)²⁰⁶

This kind of theorizing claimed the ascendance of the verbal in the visual arts, and thus provided a rationale for conceptual art. It also asserted the primacy of the temporal over the spatial, thus establishing a basis for ‘theatricality’; art was thus linked with the temporal unfolding of a literary/poetic text—the return of linguistic consciousness. According to Douglas Crimp, and referring to Fried’s anxieties about the possible connotations of minimalist sculpture, ‘...Fried’s fears were well founded. For if temporality was implicit in the way minimal sculpture was experienced, then it would be

²⁰⁴ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Seventies Art in America, Part One’ p. 212. Rosalind Krauss writes, ‘...I tried to develop the idea of a message without a code further in part 2 ‘Notes on the Index’. In what I’ve written on Marcel Duchamp, the matter of the index and the emptying out of the sign is also at issue’. Personal communication with Professor Krauss, October 25th, 2001.

²⁰⁵ One should also consider, Matta-Clark’s *Splitting*, 1974, and or the earlier moldings of body parts and marginal spaces produced by Bruce Nauman, for example, *Hand to Mouth*, 1967. Roland Barthes argues that the autonomous structure of the photographic image can be separated into the two areas, that when combined together, form what can be termed the *paradox* of the photograph. To expand; firstly, the photograph’s denotative capacity to imitate the world, common sense tells us that the photographic image is not reality, but it may be considered as an analogue, or *analogon*, or an index of reality; this is dependent on it’s ability to record precisely what is presented; its *denotation* is that which is objectively presented in a sign, a literal denotation, in other words, actuality. Photography, according to Barthes, carries a power of realist immediacy, by virtue of it’s *iconic* power, therefore photographs are not subject to interpretive reading; according to Barthes, they are ‘signs without a code’. Barthes, Roland, *Image-Music-Text*, essays selected and trans. Stephen Heath, Fontana, 1977. p. 17.

made thoroughly explicit—in fact the only possible manner of experience—for much of the art that followed’. (Crimp, 1979, p. 34)²⁰⁷

Making a metaphorical link with the *Erased de Kooning drawing*, what this kind of criticism does is detach the purity of the visual—with its sublime connotations—from the alleged continuity of time and history; thus decontextualizing (shifting the focus of the beholder to the ‘frame’, to the ‘context’) and recontextualizing the visual image as a ‘text’; the aim being the subversion, inversion or de-centering of the initial privileged term in an *entropic* sense.²⁰⁸ The purpose was to prove that the binary or marginal form (for example, semiotic critical analysis) is either more or equally significant (than say stylistic analysis), or at least to establish an unstable relationship between one term and the other,²⁰⁹ ‘...A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work

²⁰⁶ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index Part 2’, Reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p.210

²⁰⁷ Crimp, Douglas, ‘About Pictures’, *Flash Art*, (March-April), 1979, p. 34.

²⁰⁸ *Entropy* disorganizes order, seen as lying at the heart of modernism, for example in the work of Nauman, Oldenberg, and Smithson. See, Sedofsky, Lauren, ‘Down and Dirty, Lauren Sedofsky talks with Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois’, *Artforum*, Summer, 1996, p. 91. Also, Yve-Alain Bois, ‘Formless, A User’s Guide’, Excerpts, *October* 78, Fall 1996, p. 32.

²⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida (the author of the enormously influential books: *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*), points out how the history of the concept of structure can be seen as a series of substitutions of centre for centre. (Derrida, Jacques, in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Macksey and Donato, pp.247-65) According to Derrida, Western metaphysics has always organized itself around a central transcending signifier, but that signifier has changed constantly. The centre is given different names, such as the monad, essence, existence, transcendence, consciousness, purity, God, man, and so on. But although this appears as a centre, it is, according to this theory, a transcendent notion of being which supports the structure. It is, therefore, posited outside the structure and, in the final analysis, functions to operate it. According to Derrida, none of these constants actually exists apart from the system it helps to determine. In his work *Writing and Difference* (‘Structure, Sign and Play’) he outlines his position as follows. ‘... The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it. Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present being, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse... that is to say, a system in which the central signifier, the original or transcendental signifier, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and play of signification infinitely’. (Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago University press, 1978, p.280.) Thus Derrida

done [*fait*], the fact [*le fait*, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation from a certain outside'. (Derrida, 1987, p. 54)²¹⁰ One can see this process at work for example, in Craig Owens' essay 'Earthwords' (1979), a review of *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, in which he links a postmodern impulse in Smithson's work with post-structuralism in Derrida by means of the decentering at work in both practices.²¹¹ Another example would be originality versus copying, here one can cite Krauss' highly influential essay *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (and associated text published primarily in *October* between 1976 and 1984 as representing part of this continuing project initiated in the mid 1970's.)²¹² Thus, if originality for example, was deemed central to modernist art, then a deconstruction of originality would claim that the copy was at least equal or perhaps more important, hence the afore mentioned concerns with photography as a premiere deconstructive art form.²¹³

emphasizes the principal of structure against that of essence; the primary stress was now placed upon the system and the play of differences within it. In light of this 'de-centering' (one of the most effective strategy of the writers of *October*), all precedent and traditionally established presumptions could be inverted; for example, that in the visual arts the visual took precedence over the verbal, or the spatial over the temporal. Those who found themselves in agreement with Derrida, or at least expressed some solidarity with his proposition, would see a centered structure achieved by resorting to transcendence, as expressing the human will to find some kind of assurance in what otherwise appears as an endless process of structural causality: 'an infinite number of sign-substitutions'. The will of the idealist deformation of structuralism 'the return of traditional western values in every sphere of social and cultural life' can, in this context, be seen as the will of traditional bourgeois ideology (later to be reformed as American 'neo-conservatism' to which the editors of *October* made a collective response: to be considered in another section), that is, a will that seeks to reinstate idealism against materialism, the will towards the valorization of plenitude rather than instability. These 'political' positions were to be reflected in the intellectual, social, and political contexts of the United States.

²¹⁰ Italic in original.

²¹¹ Owens, Craig, *October* 10 Fall 1979, pp. 120-30.

²¹² Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids' *October*, no. 9, Summer 1979. 'In the Name of Picasso', *October*, no. 16, Spring 1981. 'Sincerely Yours', *October*, no. 20, spring 1982. 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde', *October*, no 18, Fall 1981. 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', *Art Journal* XLII, Winter, 1982. 'The Photographic Condition of Surrealism', *October*, no. 19, Winter, 1981. 'Notes on the Index', *October*, nos. 3 and 4, Spring and Fall, 1977. 'Le Witt in Progress', *October*, no. 6. Fall, 1978, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, no. 8. Spring, 1979.

²¹³ Rosalind Krauss tells us that aesthetics is about qualitative differentiation; one thing compared to another: good, bad, indifferent, worse than, and so on. The photographic image challenges this process of differentiation, that is,

In this de-disciplinary methodology all precedent and traditionally established presumptions could be radically inverted, for example, that in the visual arts the visual took precedence over the verbal, or the spatial over the temporal, leading to a position where ‘...the sign of this message is no longer drawn from the institutional reserve’ (Krauss, part 2, p.211),²¹⁴ thus ‘...the linguistic signs which seemed excluded, which prowled at a distance around the image [have] reappeared; [introducing] into the plenitude of the image, a disorder’, (Foucault, 1976, p.16)²¹⁵

knowledge as infinite referents; images are set adrift from their referents who’s reality has ceased to define any standard of truth, images now proceed their referents, reality is thus transformed into images; the photographic analogue in the postmodern sense challenges this aesthetic process of difference. It implies that which is nondifferential, therefore, the photographic process causes a disintegration of the possibility of aesthetic difference. It makes a travesty of the idea of that which is original, or contains subjective forms of expression, it makes the society a ‘spectacle of indifference’. In other words, photography and its analogues deconstruct any differentiation between what is the original, and what is the copy; it subverts the whole system of differences by exposing the stereotype which underlies any attempt at an aesthetic gesture. That is, in terms of the traditional means of expression exemplified in painting and sculpture, it exposes their essence as stereotype, for example, any painting is a stereotype of another painting, it has its origin in a stereotypical form only. In this sense, there is really no difference between an original personal expression and the stereotype of an original expression, thus the notion of aesthetics and originality is disavowed. This is what the image as spectacle and the new commodified image is about, the total implosion, or dissolution or deconstruction of the notion of originality and what is ‘true’ in terms of the positive. (Krauss, Rosalind, A Note on Photography and the Simulacral, *The Critical Image*, pp. 15-27.)

²¹⁴ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Notes on the Index, Part 2’, (*October* 4, 1977) reproduced in *The originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 1985, p. 211

²¹⁵ Historically, the study of language took two forms: first, there was an extensive development of *synchronic* (a moment in process) linguistics, whose object of study is language’s own laws of operation (language’s interior), that is dealing with language as a strictly formal object of study. [Julia Kristeva in *Mathematical Structures of Language, Interscience*, (London, 1969) undertook a detailed analysis of this aspect of structuralism, particularly in the works of Saussure, C. S. Pierce, The Prague circle: Jakobson, etc., the Copenhagen circle: Hjelmslev, etc., American structuralism, Z. S. Harris, Bloomfield, etc.] These considerations tended to concentrate on language syntax or mathematical structures, language being seen here as a systematic arrangement of parts. [Methodological analysis showed that language only uses a small amount of the potentially enormous number of possible combinations that would result from the basic elements being freely assembled. The restriction of these possible combinations gives shape to specific forms that vary according to the linguistic system. This is what is implied by the term ‘structure’: particular types of relationships articulating the units at certain levels. Each of the units in a system is defined by the relations which it maintains with the other units and the oppositions into which they enter. This ‘relational’ view of language is orientated towards language as structure, paradigm and synchrony, rather than as speech act, syntagm and diachrony. NB Syntagmatic analysis deals with the combination of elements that are articulated in the sentence, paradigmatic analysis reveals the set of codes to which the elements belong. If this is conceived spatially, the syntagmatic analysis deals with the horizontal axis of present elements: paradigmatic analysis deals with the vertical axis system, which renders it intelligible. The analysis of structural relations, the paradigm: ‘diachronic’ signifying chains that are produced over time, the syntagm.] This ‘scientific’– and one should note idealist form of knowledge as language, idealist in that it sees language as a logical synthesis ensuring communication and social interchange

Since the index has a fixed identity as a marker that captures a moment indexically- iconically and projects that moment into the future, it should, perhaps, be seen as a pointer to origins, it is an extended metaphor like ‘allegory’, based on similarity or contiguity, this is a property not inherent within the ‘wild signs’ suggested by Roland Barthes, which produce, ‘...a limitless process of equivalences’. A process often linked to the spread of market capitalism and subsequent reification, a field where ‘...signifier and signified revolve in an endless process...the signified can become the signifier’ (Barthes, Roland; 1974, p.40),²¹⁶ a process that produces the ‘spectacle’ and the

rather than a dynamic structural transformation—aspect was then extended to all social practices which (according to this theory), could also be studied as language, for example, structural anthropology. This second *diachronic* (a process of production and change) development is based on the assumption that all social practices can be understood as meanings, that is, as significations and circuits of interchange between subjects, ‘[Semiotics]...aim to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the context of ritual, convention or public entertainment.’ (Barthes, Roland, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, Beacon Press, MA, 1970, p.9.) It is this aspect of the study of language (particularly in relation to the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes [one should note that Barthes ‘work was initially disseminated in the united States by the critic Susan Sontag], Jacques Derrida, and Emile Benveniste) that was employed extensively by the American writers involved in *October*’s development. When envisioned in these terms, linguistics becomes a model for the elaboration of a systemic reality. As noted by Emile Benveniste, ‘Language is...the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity, and discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances’. (Benveniste, Emile, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, University of Miami Press, 1971, p. 227) Further, according to this perception, both of these aspects can render the notion of mankind a concept accessible to scientific analysis. The argument would go something like this: because all practices that make up a society take place in language, language—and the notion of discourse as a cultural form which interacts with other, legal, political, economic forms in the social world— becomes the place where the social individual is constructed. To put this in more dramatic terms, ‘man’ (seen as a language using entity) can be considered *as* language, representing the point of intersection of that which is social, historical and individual. (Umberto Eco points out in *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, pp. 9-14.) that the contemporary (1970s) field of study consists of zoology, olfactory signs, tactile communications, paralinguistics, medicine, kinesics and proxemics, musical codes, formalized languages, written languages, natural languages, visual communication, systems of objects, plot structures, text theory, cultural codes, aesthetic texts, mass communication and rhetoric.) Such notions as these were considered to demystify the humanist realm. In this way, the human subject can be analysed as a socially constructed process that plays a material role in society.

²¹⁶ Barthes, Roland, *S/Z*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1974, p. 40.

simulacra— a process and its consequences to be further explored by *October* in its deconstruction of the ‘painted sign’.²¹⁷

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²¹⁷ In a fundamental sense, the autonomic identities of text-image as represented by photography and language, two signifiers of *October*’s postmodernist practice, sought to dissolve the traditional art object, and traditional notions of vision itself into a textual field, where all things are of equal value and no object as such exists. What we have when perceiving what might be termed an art object is merely a condensation of one possible resolution to a series of textual issues that are not yet concluded. The development of the camera, and the processes of image reproduction, combined with the formation and development of semiotic analysis; acted to contribute to a growing crisis of vision beginning in the nineteenth century, which ramified into the present day; a condition now exacerbated by film, video and digital reproduction. This coincidence of semiotics and photography, represent a visual metaphor for the convergence of language and image. As noted by Crimp in his essay ‘Pictures’, this can be seen as *a new means of visual representation*, signifying an allegoric and textual field of interpretation; where the demarcations between text and image are formed and reformed, under the influence of textuality and allegoric interpretation. The implications of semiotic analysis and the new technologies of reproduction, and their relationship to visual identity, have caused profound implications to the critiques of what represents a visual image.

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Case study 3 Signs of a Beginning: *October* and the *Pictures* Exhibition

This case study considers *October's* promotion of the *Pictures* aesthetic as part of a sequential campaign it waged against formalism and modernism using the developing language of poststructuralist visual criticism. In particular, it focuses on *October's* investigation into the verbal and visual nature of narrative and the associated deconstruction of the 'painted sign'. At the beginning of the 1980s *October's* attention was directed towards providing the photographic with a new theoretical rationale in relation to contemporary issues of originality, appropriation, simulation, and repetition within a perceived *reification* of objects.²¹⁸ The resulting conflation of ideas about originality and appropriation became the vocabulary of a certain post-modern theory exemplified by *October*. The *Pictures* exhibition (1977), and Douglas Crimp's essay of the same name (1979), have become emblematic of this emerging critical language. Further to this, in the spring and summer of 1980, Craig Owens added another layer to Crimp's formulation of the meaning of the *Pictures* show, asserting that the artists involved in the exhibition (and by implication the late capitalist viewers) were under the fragmentary motivation of what he described as 'the allegorical impulse'. The *Pictures* exhibition that prepared the ground for art and criticism in the eighties being successful in launching a 'post-pop' attitude in representation by the deployment of appropriated/simulated images, a deployment that helped to ensure an environment for

²¹⁸ The literary critic Georg Lukács is perhaps, most remembered for his theory of reification, which remains a central concept in Marxist theory. Reification means the controlled domination of a culture's intellectual and artistic aspects by capitalism. According to this theory, capitalism objectifies, or *reifies*, all human relationships including culture and the arts. Such cultural products thus become instruments of capitalism.

artistic innovation that particularly emphasized the functioning of social signs (semiotics). Further, it helped to crystallize a change in artistic sensibility away from late formalism and minimalism to that of the post-modern. The case study is supported by extracts from an interview with Douglas Crimp, conducted by the author in March 2002.

...Postmodernism may be said to be founded upon this paradox, that it is photography's reevaluation as a modernist medium that signals the end of modernism. Postmodernism begins when photography comes to pervert modernism. (Crimp, Douglas; 1981, p. 37)²¹⁹

At the beginning of the 1980s *October's* attention was directed towards providing the 'photographic' with a new theoretical rationale in relation to contemporary issues of originality, appropriation, simulation, and repetition within a perceived *reification* of objects.²²⁰ This conflation of ideas about originality and appropriation became the vocabulary of a certain post-modern theory exemplified by *October*. The *Pictures* exhibition (1977), and Douglas Crimp's essay of the same name appearing in *October* no. 8 (1979), have become emblematic of this emerging critical language. Further to this, in the spring and summer of 1980 (*October* issues 12 & 13), Craig Owens added another layer to Crimp's formulation of the meaning of the show, asserting, via the critical writings of Walter Benjamin, that the artists involved in the exhibition (and by implication the late capitalist viewers) were under the fragmentary motivation of what he described as 'the allegorical impulse'. Such art, and its associated theory, based as it was

²¹⁹ Crimp, Douglas, 'The Museum's Old/The Library's New Subject', *Parachute*, no. 22, Spring 1981, p.37.

²²⁰ The literary critic Georg Lukács is perhaps, most remembered for his theory of reification, which remains a central concept in Marxist theory. Reification means the controlled domination of a culture's intellectual and artistic aspects by capitalism. According to this theory, capitalism objectifies, or *reifies*, all human relationships including culture and the arts. Such cultural products thus become instruments of capitalism.

on seriality, repetition, appropriation, simulation, intertextuality and an emptying out of 'originality', can be seen as conforming to the notion of *October's* development of a deconstructive and de-disciplinary critical practice. A practice that represented an alternative to what its writers perceived as a more popular but reactionary mode of postmodernist art; an art that tended to comprise of pastished montages of historical styles and decorative elements prevailing in the new architecture and neo-expressionist painting. Described by Hal Foster as, '...not only [the] loss of the real but also [the] morbid attempt to compensate for this loss via the resurrection of archaic images and forms'. (Foster, 1985, p.81)²²¹ As an integral part of their counter aesthetic, *October* asserted that images could be treated as narrative texts with open ended signifiers, thus reflecting Roland Barthes understanding of 'wild signs' producing, 'a limitless process of equivalences'. A process often linked to the spread of market capitalism and subsequent *reification*, a field where '...signifier and signified revolve in an endless process...the signified can become the signifier'. (Barthes, Roland; 1974, p.40)²²² Hal Foster describes his perception of the cultural conditions operative at this historical juncture,

...In 1972 [Baudrillard diagnosed] a 'fetishism of the signifier'—a passion for the code not a critique of it...In a complex analysis he argued that (post) structuralism with its bracketing of the referent and the signified (to the point where they become mere effects of the signifier) is the very epitome of the political economy with its bracketing of use value (to the point where it becomes a mere projection of exchange value). For Baudrillard the differential structure of the sign is one with that of the commodity, and the (post) structuralist 'liberation' of the sign one with fragmentation. This fragmentation, manifested in many ways in recent art and architecture, may thus accord the logic of capital, which suggests that capital has now penetrated the sign thoroughly. These considerations are crucial to a grasp of

²²¹ Foster, Hal, 'Contemporary Art and Spectacle', *Recordings, Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, 1985, p.81. Originally published in *Art in America* as 'Contemporary Art and Spectacle'. April 1983.

²²² Barthes, Roland, *S/Z*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1974, p. 40.

the present effectivity of art, function of criticism and place of culture today.
(Foster, Hal, 1985, pp. 6-7)²²³

Further, the editors of *October* record their perception of retrogressive tendencies in the art world of the 1980s, ‘...we watched in dismay as art institutions resurrected the claims of disinterestedness. Our attention was therefore redirected toward those institutions– the artist’s studio, the gallery and museum, the corporate patron, the discipline of art history’. (Editorial, 1987, p. xi)²²⁴

If the art of the 1980s could be characterized by any one oeuvre, one synecdoche (*pars pro toto*), then it would be that of appropriation. In December 1982, the exhibitions, *Image Scavengers, Painting and Image Scavengers, Photography*, opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia, these exhibitions surveyed the continuing

²²³ Foster, Hal 1985, *Recodings, Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Townsend WA (USA), pp. 6-7. Barthes is quoted from ‘Change the Object Itself’, in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill & Wang, New York, 1977, p. 166., Baudrillard is quoted from ‘Fetishism and Ideology’, in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Trans. Charles Levin, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1981, p.92.

²²⁴ In making a response to a perceived marginalization of alternative forms of art practice, *October*’s critical strategy was to accept the insights and methodologies of post-structuralism and denounce those of the retrogressive form of modernism, using deconstructive mechanisms to rebut its aesthetic. *October* at first tended to support those artists of the ‘60s generation who were associated with ABC art, literalist art, primary structures and minimalism, artists like Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, Larry Bell, Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin and others. Later, and under the sway of emerging writers like Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens, turning their attention to ‘...a younger generation of artists;’(Source, the author, 2002) artists who supported the use of photography as a means of representation. Thus photography was promoted as the most relevant postmodern art form. For example, in the works of Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo, Jack Goldstein and others, ‘...The peculiar presence of [whose] work is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original’. (Crimp, 1997, p.111) Painting was the artistic medium that exemplified the modernist signifiers of uniqueness, originality, authenticity and expressive subjectivity. The *October* writers insisted that painting should be shown up for what it is, a false conduit to the humanist notion of the subjective interior with all its implications of essences. For *October*, there was no justification in painting of any kind. Four exhibitions acted as sites for the critical attacks launched by *October*, *Documenta 7* (Kassel, Germany 1981), *American Painting: The Eighties* (The Grey Art Gallery, NYC, 1979) and *New Image Painting* (The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979), and *Eight Contemporary Artists* (MOMA in the fall of 1974), the invective was led by Rosalyn Deutshe, Clarea Gendel Ryan, Thomas Lawler, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens and Benjamin Buchloh. In his essay ‘The End of Painting’ (1981), Douglas Crimp writes, ‘...The rhetoric which accompanies this resurrection of painting is almost exclusively reactionary: it reacts specifically against all those art practices of the sixties and seventies which abandoned painting and coherently placed in question the ideological supports of painting, and the ideology which painting, in turn supports’. (Crimp, 1981, pp. 85-86)

cultural critique of appropriation, which had been embraced by a great number of artists and critics alike. This two-part exhibition emphasized art that was committed to the 'mediated' image as a kind of analogue of reality, being seen as somehow more contemporarily convincing than nature. An example of what Jean Baudrillard described as a loss of the real.²²⁵ The exhibition acknowledged the return of figuration in recent painting, focusing on one aspect of it, the one that appropriated from mass and popular culture. In the catalogue the artist and critic Thomas Lawson tell us, '...that the penetration of the mass media has made the possibility of the authentic experience difficult, if not impossible. Originality of action has lost its claim— it refers only to advertising, TV shows, the movies'. (Lawson, 1982, p6)²²⁶ Here Lawson is reflecting Guy Debord's notion of the society of the *spectacle*, '...In societies where the modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation'. (Debord, 1977, sec. 1)²²⁷ Among the painters included in *Image Scavengers* were Thomas Lawson, David Salle, Robert Longo and Walter Robinson. *Image Scavengers, Photography* focused on the same questions of the appropriation of imagery from media sources TV, films, newspapers and books; three of the photographers represented were Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman.²²⁸ The cultural critique of

²²⁵ Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacres et simulation*, Editions Galilée, Paris, 1981, pp. 69-76.

²²⁶ Lawson, Thomas, *Image Scavengers, Painting and Photography*, exhibition catalogue, 1982. (Thanks are due to Tom Bickley, Head Librarian, The National Endowment for the Arts, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20506.)

²²⁷ Debord, Guy, *Society of the Spectacle*, English translation by Black and Red in 1970, revised in 1977, Rebel Press/Dark Star, London 1977, sec. 1.

²²⁸ Other like-minded exhibitions with significant critical essays should be noted in relation to this developing aesthetic, *A Fatal Attraction, Art and the Media*, The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago (1982), *New Voices 2, 6 Photographers Concepts/Theatre/Fiction*, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio (1981), *The*

appropriation that distinguished the Philadelphia I.C.A. artists had been indicated in a 1977 *Artist's Space* exhibition entitled *Pictures*; this exhibition, and its associated critical rationale, would prove to be seminal in the development of a group of postmodern principles promoted by *October*.

The work of the artist Andy Warhol had already broached the subject of appropriation within a history marked by the works of, John Heartfield, Raoul Hausmann, Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. In an essay for *Artforum* (1982), Benjamin H. D. Buchloh defines a single work by Johns as representing a pivotal moment in the changing conditions of art's reception,

...Jasper Johns' *Flag*, 1955, not only indicated the beginning of Duchamp's reception in American art, and thus the beginning of Pop art, but more precisely the painting constituted the introduction of a pictorial method that had previously been unknown to New York School painting, the appropriation of an object/image whose structural, compositional, and chromatic aspects determined the decision-making process of the painter during the execution of the painting. The rigid iconic structure functions like a template or framing device which brackets two apparently exclusive discourses, high art and mass culture. (Buchloh, Benjamin H. D., 1982, p.46)²²⁹

Now there was more to say on the subject of appropriation. Marvin Hiefferman provides one viewpoint when he muses on possible artistic responses to the massive image

Stolen Image and its Uses, Light Works, Syracuse, New York (1983), and *Resource Materials, Appropriation in Recent Photography*, Proctor Art Center at Baird College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (1982). At the same historical moment other major exhibitions were taking place in Europe indicating the internationalism of 'neo-expressionist' ideas, for example, *Documenta 7* (Kassel, Germany 1981) this included works by Joseph Beuys, Warhol, Baldessari, Richter, Hans Haacke, Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, Kruger, Levine, Enzo Cucchi, Jenny Holzer, Francesco Clemente, Longo, Sherman, Salle and Haring. This shift back to painting was further accelerated by the Royal Academy's 1981 exhibition *The New Spirit in Painting*, (London) which included Baselitz, Kiefer, Richter, Schnabel and Warhol. In Berlin (1982) the exhibition *Zeitgeist* reunited curators and many of the artists from the London show.

²²⁹ Buchloh, Benjamin H. D., 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum*, September 1982, p.46.

overload of the late twentieth century, ‘...what is it like to perceive human experience through commercial images... [How do] artists respond to, deconstruct or reconstruct the material that makes up this environment. Artists have the same responses as everyone else. Its about being critical, ambivalent and awestruck’. (Ostrow, Saul, 1989, p.48, 52)²³⁰

A much more negative reading is given by Victor Burgin; to him the new appropriation was ‘...based on the most stupid protestations of amnesia. ‘I have no memory, I never knew this had been done before’. (Magnani, Gregorio, 1989, p.121)²³¹

The exhibition entitled *Pictures* (Crimp’s essay of the same name and subsequent critical glosses), curated by Douglas Crimp for the *New York Artists Space* in 1977²³² had a profound influence on the art discourse of the 1980s, acting as a showcase for this ‘technique’. In an interview with the author conducted in March 2002, Professor Crimp speaks of this exhibition and *October’s* influence on its reception,

...Did you know that it was reconstituted last summer? *Artist’s Space* redid the exhibition in so far as they were able to—of course they couldn’t fully reconstitute it. But some young curator decided to redo the show. It was on the cover of *Artforum*, there were two articles about it—actually they tried to reconstruct even the installation—of course it wasn’t even in the same space.²³³ It was weird, it was weird to go and see it, and some of the work held up well, some of it didn’t. You know it was a very modest little thing that I did, it just became one of those emblematic things where a lot of things happened and somehow everybody locates its origin in one place, which is nonsense. But I think that particularly the second version of the text (published in *October*) is partly a measure of *October’s* influence that the text became so influential. But you know, some of those artists went on to do very well like Cindy Sherman. And I suppose that I sort of invented a way of talking about a new kind of work. And so people keep, but once a myth is

²³⁰ Ostrow, Saul, ‘Marvin Heiferman’. *Bomb*, Fall 1989, pp. 48, 52.

²³¹ Magnani, Gregorio, ‘Victor Burgin’, *Flash Art*, November-December 1989, p. 121.

²³² Then under the direction of Helene Winter who shortly thereafter (1980) formed the gallery *Metro Pictures* together with Janelle Reiring from the Castelli Gallery. Thanks go to Carrie Lambert Managing Editor of *October* (2000).

²³³ *Artforum*, October 2001

put in place, like *Stonewall* or something, that everything happens in this one particular place. But it was actually, I have to say Rosalind's [Rosalind Krauss] idea, because the exhibition did generate a lot of interest and I wrote a small catalogue for it in which I attempted to theorize this work. Then some other things happened and Rosalind said— you know this text should be published in *October*. This is a year later and by then the text seemed somewhat naive to me. By then I'd read more of the kind of theory I was interested in and so I re-wrote the text. Actually it has the same title but it's a different text and different artists even, and by then I had a kind of better grasp of the work because more had happened and so on. It was really that text which then became particularly influential. And of course, because of those artists, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman and so on, it sort of took off. Then there was the founding of *Metro Pictures* after that in 1981 and then more and more people became interested in the notion of postmodernism. I talked about it, and then I went on to continue working and I published a lot of this material in *October*, and that was the stuff that became my book *On the Museum's Ruins*. And a lot of that initial work, the first several texts again were to do with this conflation of certain ideas about originality, and appropriation that got to be the vocabulary of a certain post-modern theory. (Source, the author, 2002)²³⁴

The way in which John Baldessari, Richard Prince, and the other artists associated with the *Pictures* show appropriated their images from other images, interested not only the theoreticians Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens, but also other art critics writing for *October*. Douglas Crimp outlines the situation,

...My interests, my contemporary art interests, were perhaps a bit younger, a little bit from Rosalind, and substantially from Annette, and quite early on, I came on [to *October*] with the fourth issue, the journal became regularized as a quarterly...I certainly proposed the idea of doing a special issue on photography (*October* issue number 5), so I was participating as an editor-editor as well as a managing editor. And Rosalind was teaching photography, we were all interested in it— Craig Owens was also one of her students as well. Actually some of the material that we published in that issue, Craig's and mine, were done as seminar papers initially for Rosalind's classes. But then, I suppose, some of my interests were towards a younger generation of artists, so in issue no. 8, I published, republished the text I did for this exhibition in 1977 called *Pictures*, and so the beginning of an idea of postmodernism and theorizing post-modernism was probably initially more Craig's

²³⁴ An interview conducted with Douglas Crimp NYC, 2002.

and mine because we were kind of interested in these younger artists. But it was complicated, we were all very much working together at the time; Rosalind was our professor, we were her friends, and we talked about what we were interested in together all the time—so it was very much a collective project. (Source, the author, 2002)²³⁵

In 1979 (*Flash Art*) Crimp elaborated on what the ‘new kind of representation’ signified. The intention of the works was not to transcribe the real, according to Crimp, they do ‘...not achieve signification in relation to what is represented [‘reality’], but only in relation to other representations [‘simulations’ of ‘reality’]...What these pictures...picture is only what is always already another picture. [These] artists are, for the most part, picture-users rather than picture makers. Their activity involves the selection and presentation of images from the culture at large’. (Crimp, 1979, p.34)²³⁶

Thus, high art and visual culture became virtually indistinguishable, an association acting to define what some would consider to be one of the basic signifiers of postmodernism (see Crimp, Appendix 1). But what exactly is represented by the word *simulation* within this historical and cultural context? In his essay ‘Plato and the Simulacrum’ (reproduced in *October 27*, trans. Rosalind Krauss), the philosopher Gilles Deleuze posits two ways in which the simulation can be distinguished from the copy: according to Deleuze, the copy is ‘...endowed with resemblance’, but the simulation (simulacrum) need not be, also the copy produces the model as original, whereas the simulation ‘...calls into question the very notion of the copy and the model’. (Deleuze, Gilles; 1983, p. 32)²³⁷ And according to Hal Foster, such a differentiation might,

²³⁵ An interview with Douglas Crimp conducted in NYC by Peter Muir March 1st 2002.

²³⁶ Crimp, Douglas, ‘About Pictures’, *Flash Art*, April-May 1979, p. 34.

²³⁷ Deleuze, Gilles 1983, Plato and the Simulacrum, trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October 27*.

...lead us to revise our basic accounts of postwar art...for example, pop art might appear less a return to representation after abstract expressionism than a return to simulation—to the serial production of images whose connection to originals, let alone resemblance to referents, is often attenuated (especially in the work of Andy Warhol). However, if simulation was thus released into art in the 1960s, it was not used reflexively there. This had to await the neo-pop appropriation art of Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Barbara Ess, and others in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which also marked less a return to representation (say, after the abstraction of postminimalism) than a troubling of representation through a turn to simulation. (Foster, 1996, p. 104)²³⁸

One should note that the sense of the conspiracy of simulation emblemized by *Pictures* was pre-figured in the exhibition *From the Picture Press* organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1973,²³⁹ and reached its public apogee in the *Image World, Art and Media Culture* exhibition organized at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989 (one should also take into account the sculptural simulations of Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach).

The Whitney show also dealt with the images from the wider culture, they emphasize in graphic terms the absolute ubiquity of the language of popular culture,

...This morning, 26,000 billboards will line the roads to work. This afternoon, 11,520 newspapers and 11,556 periodicals will be available for sale. And when the sun sets again, 21,689 theatres and 1,548 drive-ins will provide movies; 27,000 video outlets will rent tapes; 162 million television sets will each play 7 hours; and 41 million photographs will have been taken. Tomorrow there will be more. (Heiferman, 1989, p.17)²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Foster, Hal 1996, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, USA.

²³⁹ Curator John Szarkowski, assisted by Carole Kismaric and Diane Arbus. The exhibition consisted of selected photographs published in the *New York Daily News* displayed without accompanying captions or news stories.

²⁴⁰ Heiferman, Marvin, 'Everywhere, All the Time, for Everybody', in *Image World, Art and Media Culture*, New York Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989, p. 17.

The point of view of the *Pictures* exhibition can be seen as a mixture of detached irony and cynicism directed at the complete absence of originality in art. A position inspired in part by the often-quoted essay by Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936). According to Benjamin, what had replaced the 'aura' of originality in works of art is the apparent plethora of manufactured images in the world, initiated by the invention of the camera (see previous case study).

According to Crimp, '...I hoped to convey not only the work's most salient characteristic—recognizable images—but also and importantly the ambiguities it sustains'. (Crimp, 1979)²⁴¹ In order to explore these image ambiguities, Crimp selected the artists Cindy Sherman, Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Phillip Smith to appear in the exhibition because their work consisted of pictures whose images— or stylistic genres— were appropriated from other pictures. (Fig. 7)²⁴²

Speaking of a photograph by Cindy Sherman *Untitled Film-Still* (Fig. 8, [1978]) in his essay 'Pictures' (published in *October*, Spring 1979), and reflecting Baudrillard's 'fetishism of the signifier', Crimp tells us that such works are, '...fragments.... their fragmentation is not that of the natural continuum, but of a syntagmatic sequence, that is, of a conventional, segmented temporality...They are like quotations from the sequence of frames that constitutes the narrative flow of film.We should never take these photographs for being anything but staged'. (Crimp, 1979, p. 181)²⁴³ [This notion of

²⁴¹ Crimp, Douglas, 'Pictures', *October*, no. 8 Spring 1979, reproduced in *Art After Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, (ed. Brian Wallis), The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, p. 175.

²⁴² John Baldessari was missing because he was considered too well established for the space. Richard Price was not included. The following artists formed part of this generation, Tony Brauntuch, Sarah Charlesworth, Jack Goldstein, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Allan McCollum, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons and James Welling.

²⁴³ Crimp, Douglas, 'Pictures', *October*, no. 8, Spring 1979, pp. 75-88, reproduced in *Art After Modernism* p. 181.

fragmentation can be traced back to at least 1923 when Georg Lukács posited its dynamic as a fundamental in capitalist society. Writing in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), he examined the fragmentation of the object, especially in assembly line production.²⁴⁴] As noted, according to Crimp, much of contemporary artistic expression can be derived from this notion of ‘staged’ theatricality, ‘segmented temporality’,

...If many of these artists can be said to have been apprenticed in the field of performance as it issued from minimalism, they have nevertheless begun to reverse its priorities, making of the literal situation and duration of the performed event a tableau whose presence and temporality were utterly psychologized; performance becomes just one of a number of ways of ‘staging’ a picture. (Crimp, 1979, p.177)²⁴⁵

This position in directly contradicts Michael Fried’s normative aesthetic, speaking of his seminal essay ‘Art and Objecthood’ (1967),

...A final crux in *Art and Objecthood* concerns the issue of temporality...’ It is as though one’s experience of [modernist painting and sculpture] *has no duration*’,

²⁴⁴ In this work Lukács’ seeks to demonstrate a fragmentation of thought and experience under capitalism. He sought to show how society based on ‘commodity fetishism’ and the advanced division of labour produces a reified and fragmented vision for its subjects, subjects who are no longer in a position to comprehend the totality of their society of the real relations and structures on which it is based (a form of false consciousness, see section one). Thus the analysis contained in Marx’s *Capital* of the dominance of the commodity form is extended into a critique of consciousness. Lukács argued that it became impossible for those living under capitalism—of all social classes—to penetrate the phenomenal forms (*representations* of ideology, see section one) in order to grasp the economic process and determinants of that thought. (Wolff, Janet, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983, p.38) According to Lukács, the task for the ‘proletariat’ is to rediscover the lost totality since they have an objective interest in overcoming reified thought since commodity fetishism and fragmentation do not operate in its interests. (Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin Press, London, 1971, p. 149. Originally published as *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Malik Press, Berlin, 1923.) This notion of fragmentation was extended into structuralist terms. Writing in 1996 Hal Foster tells us that, ‘Today, in the midst of advanced capitalism based on serial consumption, we are witness to a further reification and fragmentation— of *the sign*. (Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, 1996, p. 72.) In order to maintain the desire to consume; the object of consumption must not become a stable product, if this occurred the self-renewing system would slow and possibly collapse. In other words, and if we look at this in Octobrist semiotic terms, capitalism needed to produce an infinite number of signifiers. Under this influence a new commodified ‘cultural object’ emerged, not the cultural object of the site of nineteenth positivism, but that of the object as *sign*; a *sign*, which was fluid, subject to manipulation, and forever transitory.

²⁴⁵ Crimp, Douglas, ‘Pictures’, *October*, no. 8, Spring 1979, p. 77, reproduced in *Art After Modernism*, Rethinking Representation, (ed.) Brian Wallis, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, p. 177.

...at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest.... amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it. (Fried, 1998, pp. 44-47)²⁴⁶

‘Art and Objecthood’ functions within a tradition dating back to the nineteenth century, a tradition that sees art as a moral statement (as examples one could cite the works of Matthew Arnold or T. S. Eliot) which assumes a separation between the arts. The central thesis of ‘Art and Objecthood’, is defined by Fried,

...I want to make a claim which I cannot hope to prove or substantiate but which nevertheless I believe to be true, viz., that theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such—and to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such...*The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre.* (Fried, p. 31)²⁴⁷

‘Art and Objecthood’ confirms a formalist position by asserting that the object being considered when viewing a work of art is *Art* itself, its *presentness*. This, according to Fried, is the only *object* that is present. Fried, like Clement Greenberg, takes art into a trans-personal and trans-societal realm. In short, art is presented as a universal and

²⁴⁶ Fried, Michael, (N.B.) from his recent Book *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, rather than the essay of the same title. An Introduction to My Art Criticism, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1998, p. 44-47. Put simply, Michael Fried’s essay ‘Art and Objecthood’ confirms the purist position of High modernism, by asserting that the object being considered when viewing a work of art is Art itself, its Presentness. This, according to Fried, is the only Object that is present. Fried, like the art critic Clement Greenberg, takes art and its objects into a trans-personal and trans-societal realm. In short, art is presented as a universal and autonomous language functioning beyond any constraints and discontinuities in time and history. Fried is unequivocal in his aesthetic position. Art, according to Michael Fried, is about certainty. Art is about producing a state of grace within the beholder, art is about essence preceding existence, an implicit denouncement of Sartre and Marxism, and a rejection of art as a social or narrative practice.

²⁴⁷ ‘Art and Objecthood’, italics in the original, p. 31.

autonomous language functioning beyond any constraints and discontinuities of context, time and history. Fried is unequivocal in his aesthetic position. Art, according to Michael Fried, is about certainty. Art is about producing a state of grace within the beholder and a rejection of art as a social or narrative practice. According to Fried, ‘...I meant the epigraph to be taken as a gloss on the concept of presentness...My point, I would say today, was that at every moment the *claim* on the viewer of the modernist painting or sculpture is renewed totally...A further feature of the epigraph is its obvious ‘sublimity’.

(Fried, pp. 44-47)²⁴⁸ In contrast to this position is Fried’s notion of the theatricalization of the art object that brings it into the social world and emphasizes its *Objecthood*, that is, its thingness. In other words, the object in the theatrical form does not act as a timeless conduit to another sensibility like the notion of the Kantian sublime, or the renewal of the beholder. The theatrical object simply is what it is, and establishes relationships around it, particularly with time, space and audience, this Fried describes as its literalness. This literalness, according to Fried, distances the viewer from the purity of *grace*. The literalist object, ‘...refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him’. (Fried, p. 163)²⁴⁹ Speaking in 1997 Fried confirms the validity of his position,

...Everything I stood out against went on to triumph, and everything I most believe in came to be regarded as invalid or marginal. But of course I continue to think that it’s history that’s wrong, not ‘Art and Objecthood’, by which I mean that I have found little to admire in the art that’s dominated the scene for the past twenty-five

²⁴⁸ Fried, Michael, *An Introduction to My Art Criticism*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1998, p. 44-47.

²⁴⁹ Fried, Michael, ‘Art and Objecthood’ p. 163. (*Art and Objecthood. Essays and Reviews.*)

years and that I continue to believe that the artists I once championed have done most of the work that really matters during that time. (Fried, 1997/2000, p. 379)²⁵⁰

Rosalind Krauss gives a comprehensive explanation of Michael Fried's aesthetic as outlined in 'Art and Objecthood', an aesthetic that would define much of the oppositional practices that followed,

... Within a series of oppositions that Fried develops in this text it is, of course, art that works in contradistinction to objecthood. And what this means is that art is ineluctably involved in the domain not of the literal but of the virtual: the seeming, and the as-if. Within high modernism the major form this virtuality took was to create the illusion that the physical existence of the work of art was entirely a function of the sensory experience to which it was addressed, so that if high modernism's drive was, in Clement Greenberg's words, 'to render substance entirely optical,' that was in order to create 'the illusion of modalities: namely, that matter is incorporeal, weightless, and exists only optically like a mirage'. If 'Art and Objecthood' quotes this passage from Greenberg with approval this is because it organizes the model of virtuality that Fried wants to contrast with literalness. And that model is that of the impossible suspension of the work in space as if it were nothing but pure optical glitter, without weight and without density, a condition that establishes the corresponding illusion that its viewer is similarly bodiless, hovering before it in a kind of decorporealized, optical unconscious [from Walter Benjamin]. And this in turn becomes the dimension within which a further illusion can occur, namely, that there can be an instantaneously but forever complete experience of knowing, within which this object and this subject can utterly transport to one another. This is the opening, or clearing, onto meaning/being that 'Art and Objecthood' takes as the exalted possibility of art: art as it eschews presence and achieves that presentness which the author says, 'is grace'. (Krauss, 1991, p. 88)²⁵¹

Rather than being held by Fried's instantaneous gestalt as it defeats theatre ('the viewer hovering before it in a kind of decorporealized, optical unconscious'), Douglas Crimp

²⁵⁰ An interview with Michael Fried (1997), in *Refracting Vision* 2000, eds. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts and Toni Ross. Sydney, Power Publications.

²⁵¹ Krauss, Rosalind, 'Using Language To Do Business As Usual', in *Visual Theory* 1991, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly & Keith Moxey, Cambridge, Polity Press. [...my note]

was struck by the immanence of 'theatre', the unguarded 'stage presence' of pictures of pictures because, as he wrote in the introduction of the *Pictures* catalogue,

...To an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema. Next to these pictures firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial. While it once seemed that pictures had the function of interpreting reality, it now seems that they have usurped it. Thuswe only experience reality through the pictures we make of it....Using photomechanical media as a storehouse of images and taking appropriated, secondary or simulated images as subjects, the *Pictures* artists had produced a new kind of representation. (Crimp, 1977, pp. 1-2)²⁵²

It is now generally accepted that Richard Prince was somewhat ahead of the other artists represented in the *Pictures* exhibition in using this radical method of appropriation, which was designated as *rephotography*,²⁵³ and that he played a particularly significant role in the development of the new oppositional practice.²⁵⁴ According to Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Prince's primary role was that of simulator,

...what is particularly interesting in Prince's methods are his efforts to match-to counter-the highly manipulated and often synthetically composed advertising image with a comparable degree of simulation of his own. In this regard, Kate Linker has suggested that the theoretical model for Prince's production can be located in Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, which surpasses a representation and reproduction and, instead, produces a synthetic 'hyperreality', a real without origin or reality. (Solomon-Godeau, Abigail; 1991, p. 96)²⁵⁵

As Hal Foster saw it, Richard Prince wanted to,

²⁵² Crimp, Douglas, 'Pictures', *Pictures*, New York, Artists Space, 1977, pp. 1-2.

²⁵³ Richard Prince Exhibition Catalog by Lisa Phillips, with essays by Rosetta Brooks et al., The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992, forward by David A. Ross (director), p.28

²⁵⁴ Notwithstanding this, one should note the precedent set by the photosilkscreen paintings of Warhol and Rauschenberg in the early '60s, as well as the photographic documentation of artists like Joseph Kosuth and Bruce Nauman.

...catch seduction in the act, to savor his own fascination with such images—even as they manipulate him via insinuated desire. His enterprise, then, is less a critique of the ‘false’ image than an exploration of simulation—of a serial world in which the old order of representation (of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ copies) is dissolved. In this spectacular society the self is reflected everywhere and nowhere—but is nonetheless strictly positioned by sexuality, class and race. And Prince shows us that there is no spectacle ‘out there’ that is not a subject-effect ‘in here’; that the projection of the one and the construction of the other are the same operation. (Foster, 1985, p.68)²⁵⁶

In a central two part article published in *October* during the spring and summer of 1980, (*October* 12 & 13), Craig Owens added another layer to Crimp’s formulation of the meaning of the *Pictures* exhibition, he asserted via the critical writings of Walter Benjamin (particularly, *The origins of German Tragic Drama*)²⁵⁷ that the artists involved in the show were under the motivation of what he described as ‘the allegorical impulse’.²⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin writes that,

...If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it, and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense. (Benjamin, 1977, pp. 183-184)²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, ‘Playing in the Fields of the Image’, (1982) reprinted in *Photography at the Dock*, Minneapolis University Press, 1991, p. 96.

²⁵⁶ Foster, Hall, ‘The Expressive Fallacy’, (1983) reprinted in *Recordings Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Townsend, Washington Bay Press, 1985, p. 68.

²⁵⁷ Benjamin writes of the Baroque, contrasting its allegorical consciousness with the certainties of the Renaissance. According to Benjamin, the artists of the Baroque had ‘... a deep rooted intuition of the problematic character of art’. (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 176.)

²⁵⁸ Allegory rests on the reciprocal nature between the visual and the verbal; where images are offered as a form of text, to be deciphered and interpreted by whatever methodological means; and words are transposed into visual images; meaning in this form is represented by analogy or metaphor.

²⁵⁹ Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (trans.) John Osborne, New Left Books, 1977, pp. 183-84

In 'The Allegorical Impulse, Towards a Theory of Postmodernism', Owens distinguished between the 'deconstructive impulse' characteristic of postmodern art and the, '...self-critical tendency of modernism...When the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim its autonomy, its self-sufficiency, its transcendence, rather, it is to narrate its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. [Its] thrust is aimed...against the symbolic, totalizing impulse which characterizes modernist art'. (Owens, Craig; 1980, pp. 79-80)²⁶⁰ The binary term of *symbol* (the symbol of modernist totality) is, according to Owens, *allegory*. One was modernist, the other postmodernist '...Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery. [The allegorist] adds another meaning to the image'. Owens added that, '...allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another; [that is] is *read through* another. [The] paradigm for the allegorical work is thus palimpsest'. Beneath every reading of every text there was always hidden or repressed, something that had to be unearthed, as Benjamin writes, '...Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else'. (Benjamin, Walter; [1928] 1977, p. 175)²⁶¹ Thus doubled meanings could be doubled-into infinity. In Owens' view (and that of Krauss), '...Sherrie Levine was the consummate appropriator'.²⁶² At the end of her seminal article 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde, A Postmodern Repetition', Krauss speculated on what an art of appropriation might look like (Figs. 9 & 10).

She concludes that,

²⁶⁰ Owens, Craig, 'The Allegorical Impulse, Towards a Theory of Postmodernism', (part 2), *October* 13, Summer 1980, pp. 79-80.

²⁶¹ Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (originally published in 1928), Verso, London, 1977p.175.

²⁶² Owens, Craig, 'The Allegorical Impulse, Towards a Theory of Postmodernism', (part 1), *October* 12, Spring 1980, pp. 68-69.

...it would look like a certain kind of play with the notions of photographic reproduction like the work of Sherrie Levine', Levine's medium is the pirated print, as in the series of photographs she made by taking images by Edward Weston of his young son Neil. [But] Weston's 'originals'...are already taken from models provided by others; they are given in that long series of Greek kouroi... Levine's act of theft...opens the print from behind to a series of models from which it, in turn, has stolen, of which it is itself the reproduction. (Krauss, 1981, p. 64)²⁶³

Krauss claimed that, '...Insofar as Levine's work explicitly deconstructs the modernist notion of origin, her effort cannot be seen as an extension of modernism. It is, like the discourse of the copy, postmodernist. Which means that it cannot be seen as avant-garde either'. (Krauss, p.66)²⁶⁴

In 'The Allegorical Impulse, Towards a Theory of Postmodernism', Craig Owens connects postmodern fragmentation in art to the notion of poststructural decentering, '...the confusion of the verbal and the visual'. The textuality of postmodern art is seen as disrupting the autonomy of modernism.²⁶⁵ He writes, '...Allegory is consistently attracted

²⁶³ Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde', *October*, no 18, Fall 1981.

²⁶⁴ 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde, A Postmodern Repetition', p. 66.

²⁶⁵ The notion of 'intertextuality', or the 'Textual', is in origin a literary principal, adopted by Barthes and others for example Kristeva, it is related to a process of demythologizing what might be termed 'classical' formations of the text— in this context the text being analogous to the image, particularly the modernist image— classical in terms of what was perceived as the discourse of capitalist economies, based on logical and positivist thought. Textuality is evoked in calculated inconsistency, within, and through the use of metaphors (one should note the development of Surrealism associated with this issue) deliberately designed to overturn the positivist commodification of the text which was apparent to writers and thinkers in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the 'classical' form of writing, associated with positivism, the world is metaphorically associated with solid forms, stable objects and reliability's, all associates of the positive; in the 'Textual' world, to use a metaphor in a textual kind of way, the landscape is different, its a kind of wandering the world. Roland Barthes provides a perfect metaphor for the nature of textuality, '....it is composed not of blocks [a metaphor for the 'classical' form of writing associated with the 'positive'] but of polyhedrons faceted by a word'... (Barthes Roland, *S/Z*, (trans.) Richard Miller, Hill & Wang, New York, 1974. p. 14. Reproduced in Roland Barthes, p.75.) That is, textual readings produce a multiplicity of planes and facets that can be read in multiple ways. Thus Barthes replaced the creative imagination of the individual with language. The novelist David Lodge summed it up from a deconstructive viewpoint, '....there is no such thing as an author; that is to say, one who originates a work of fiction *ab nihilo*. Every text is a product of intertextuality, a tissue of allusions to and citations of other texts. There are no origins, there is only production, and we produce our 'selves' in language'. (Lodge, David, *Nice Work, A Novel*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1988, p. 40.) Other theorists

to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete—an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which Benjamin identifies as the allegorical emblem par excellence. Here the works of man are reabsorbed into the landscape, ruins thus stand for history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay, a progressive distancing from origin'. (Owens, 1980, pp. 59-80)²⁶⁶ According to Owens, postmodern art is allegorical, not only in its stress on ruins and spaces (illustrated for example by ephemeral installations such as Robert Smithson's *Partly Buried Woodshed* (Fig. 11, [1970]), or Laurie Anderson's *Americans on the Move, parts 1 and 2* (1979), also fragmented images appropriated from art history and mass-media, for example, Andy Warhol's *White Burning Car III* (1963), Robert Rauschenberg's *Factum I and II* (1957) and *Centennial Certificate* (1969), or Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* of the late '70s and mid '80s), but more importantly, in its impulse to upset stylistic norms, to disassemble modernist form, to redefine conceptual categories, to undo visual stereotypes, in other words; to challenge the modernist ideal of symbolic totality, as Madan Sarup would have it, '...The advent of postmodernity signals a crisis in a narrative's legitimizing function, its ability to compel consensus'. (Sarup, Madan; 1993, p.145)²⁶⁷

would substitute literature for language history, or society. Criticism's function was no longer to decipher the Author or his/he intentions, but to interpret the text. The writers of *October* adopted this methodology rapidly and enthusiastically in their own deconstruction of the visual.

²⁶⁶ Owens, Craig, 'The Allegorical Impulse, Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October* no. 12, Spring 1980, pp. 59-80, p. 62.

²⁶⁷ Sarup, Madan, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, Harvest Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1993.

In short, the allegorical impulse is the impulse to somehow exploit the 'gap' between the signifier and the signified, referencing Derrida's notion of indeterminacy in the contested area beyond binary oppositions, '...throughout its history [allegory functioned] in the gap between a present and a past which, without allegorical reinterpretation, might have remained foreclosed'. (Owens, 1980, p. 67)²⁶⁸ Owens defines allegorical practices as, '...Appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, hybridization',²⁶⁹ Buchloh outlines them as '...confiscation, superimposition and fragmentation'. (Buchloh, 1982, p.43)²⁷⁰ Owens traces [as does Benjamin] the genealogy of the allegorical impulse and is led back to Charles Baudelaire via Walter Benjamin, that is, back to the beginning of modernist criticism itself. According to Baudelaire, speaking in 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), '...By modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable'. (Baudelaire, Charles; 1964, p. 13)²⁷¹ Walter Benjamin describes the allegorical attachment to this contingency, '...The allegorist's traffic with things is subject to a constant alternation of the involvement of saturation...the profound fascination of the sick man with the isolated and insignificant is succeeded by that disappointed

²⁶⁸ 'The Allegorical Impulse', *October* 12, p. 67.

²⁶⁹ Owens, Craig', 'The Allegorical Impulse, Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October* 12 and 13, (Spring and Summer 1980), reproduced in, *Art After Modernism, Rethinking Representation*. (eds.) Brian Wallis & Marcia Tucker, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, (pub.) David R. Godine, Massachusetts, pp. 204-205, this reference p. 209.

²⁷⁰ Buchloh, Benjamin, 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum*, Sep 1982, pp. 43.

²⁷¹ Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, (trans.) Jonathan Mayne, Phaidon, London, 1964, p. 13.

abandonment of the exhausted emblem'. (Benjamin, 1977, p. 185.)²⁷² Buchloh outlines his notion of montage and appropriation,

...The allegorical mind arbitrarily selects from the vast and disordered material that its knowledge has to offer. It tries to match one piece with another to figure out whether they can be combined. This meaning with that image, or that image with this meaning. The result is never predictable since there is no organic mediation between the two. (Buchloh, 1982, p. 46)²⁷³

For Walter Benjamin, whose texts were seminal in Owens' thesis and much of this aspect of *October's* aesthetic, the following schema results when attempting to analyze the components of allegory: the allegorist pulls one element out of the totality of the life context, isolating it, depriving it of its function, allegory is thus a technical means to force to the surface discontinuity, fragmentation and the catastrophic structure of history. In his essay 'Zentralpark' (1938) Benjamin writes that the, '...Majesty of allegorical intention [is the] destruction of the organic and living [the] extinguishing of semblance.'
(Benjamin, 1938, p. 671)²⁷⁴ Benjamin equates the allegorical method with the dialectical method.²⁷⁵ To write allegorically is to shatter false hegemonies, critique and emancipation are thus dialectically linked. In this way the allegorical intention disperses any, '...false semblance of totality' by its shattering into fragments [*Unmenschen*:

²⁷² Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (trans.) John Osborn, NLB, London, 1977, p. 185.

²⁷³ Benjamin, Walter, *Zentralpark*, p. 682. Reproduced in Buchloh's 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art, *Artforum* September 1982, p. 46.

²⁷⁴ Benjamin, Walter, *Zentralpark*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 671.

²⁷⁵ As a critique of society Marxist social theory breaks from the belief in ethical neutrality found in positivism and hermeneutics and elevates self-transformation rather than self-understanding to centre stage. Critique and emancipation are dialectically linked in the Marxist method– dialectic referring to the process by which contradictions in society are resolved through the raising of consciousness. The dialectical method involves the linking of theory with practice, and the ultimate test of its 'knowledge' is its transformative power in a historical process of emancipation.

destructive characters] (ibid)²⁷⁶. As noted above, allegory is fundamentally concerned with the fragment: ‘...In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is a fragment, a ruin....the false appearance (*Schein*) of totality is extinguished.’ (Benjamin, 1977, p. 176)²⁷⁷ Further, the allegorist joins the isolated reality fragments and thereby creates meaning; however, the new meaning does not derive from the original context of the fragments. Benjamin (as does Owens) interprets the activity of the allegorist as the expression of melancholy, the poetry of ruins and spaces, allegory is a fragment, its essence representing history as decline, ‘...in allegory, the observer is confronted with the ‘*facies hippocratica*’ (the deathmask) of history as a petrified primordial landscape’.²⁷⁸

However, as noted by Foster in reference to Owens’ essay, ‘...Not yet in view are the historical preconditions, the economic processes, and the political ramifications of modernism’. (Foster, 1996, p. 88)²⁷⁹ One could suggest that Foster’s point here is that the ‘allegoric impulse’ remains at the level of an historical critique of perception, rather than considering the socio-economic forces driving and fuelling that critique. This would tend to fit in with the thesis that the allegoric impulse falls into the first wave of *October*’s criticism; the second wave would return to the wider preconditions on postmodern practice. Positions represented for example in Joel Fineman’s essay ‘The Structure of Allegorical Desire’ in 1980,²⁸⁰ or in (the previously mentioned) 1982 by Benjamin H. D.

²⁷⁶ Benjamin, Walter, *Zentralpark*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 669

²⁷⁷ Benjamin. Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (trans.) John Osborn, NLB, London, 1977, p. 176.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 166.

²⁷⁹ Foster, Hall, *The Return of the Real*, An OCTOBER Book, MIT press, 1996, p. 88.

²⁸⁰ ‘The Structure of Allegorical Desire’, *October* no.12, pp. 46-66.

Buchloh in his essay for *Artforum*, 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art'. In this essay, the highly political Buchloh privileged the strategies of, '...appropriation and depletion of meaning, fragments and dialectical juxtaposition of fragments, and separation of signifier and signified' (Buchloh, 1982, p. 42), but positioned them in a different way, that is, reflecting on a critique of institutional art and commodification within contemporary culture. In this work Buchloh traces the allegorical method back to invention of montage by George Grosz and John Heartfield in 1916, to Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann, El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko, Duchamp, and Rauchenberg and Johns; he then numerates those contemporary artists dealing with the critique of the institution, Broodthaers, Daniel Burin, Jenny Holzer, Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Martha Rosner and Walker Evans;²⁸¹ '...The precision with which these artists analysed the place and function of esthetic practice within the institution had to be invented and attention paid to the ideological discourse outside the framework, which conditioned daily reality. This paradigmatic shift occurs in the late '70s...' (Buchloh, 1982, p. 49)²⁸²

In conclusion to his highly influential essay Owens depicts his own (facies hippocratica) passion of the sign from modernism to postmodernism,

...Modernist theory presupposes that mimeses, the adequation of image to the referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object itself can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent... For reasons that are beyond the scope of this essay, this fiction has become increasingly difficult to maintain.

²⁸¹ Buchloh, Benjamin, 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum*, Sep 1982, pp. 44-56.

²⁸² Buchloh, Benjamin, 'Allegorical Procedures, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum*, Sep 1982, p. 49.

Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works to problematize the activity of the reference. (Owens, 1980, p. 235)²⁸³

The *Pictures* exhibition was successful in launching a new 'post-pop' attitude in representation by the deployment of appropriated images, a deployment that further helped to ensure a milieu for artistic innovation which particularly emphasised the function of social signs (semiotics). It was an exhibition that, in many ways, set the stage for art and criticism in the eighties. Further, it helped to crystallize a change in sensibility from a rapidly weakening adherence to late formalism and minimalism to that of the post-modern. It is also significant that the five artists featured in *Pictures* Troy Brauntuch, Jack Cold, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith, went on to become highly significant art world figures of the decade.

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²⁸³ Owens, Craig', 'The Allegorical Impulse, Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', p. 235.

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Conclusion: *October's* proposition

...It is instructive to glance at the case of art history, which, never having really broken with the tradition of the amateur gives free rein to celebrating contemplation and finds in the sacred character of its objects every pretext for a hagiographic hermeneutics superbly indifferent to the question of the social conditions in which works are produced and circulate. (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 1-2)²⁸⁴

October's project is defined by Rosalind Krauss as, '... bring[ing] European theory into the purview of American art practice (Krauss, 2002), its argument being founded on the semiotic interplay between seeing and speaking, the visible and the sayable (See case study 1 '*October, La Glace sans tain*', case study 2, '*An Act of Erasure: October and the Index*', and case study 3, '*Signs of a Beginning: October and the Pictures Exhibition*'), a dialectic built on '...the most venerable oppositions of rhetoric and epistemology, the traditional interplay between *res* and *verba*, words and things, *les mots et les choses*, arguments and examples, discourse and image'. (Mitchell, 1994, p. 71)²⁸⁵ One can see why the ideas put forward by semiotic poststructuralism— a paradigm of the relationship between *res* and *verba*— were so contentious in relation to literary criticism, art criticism, art history and the Humanities in general. Within the context of this historical moment— this site of conflict— these new ideas immediately began to undermine the more accepted ways of conceptualising the dominant 'representations' of society. As a consequence, producing the kind of reactions noted by Gerald Gaff, '....assumptions that were once agreed on became controversial... [We] no longer *share* the tacit agreement we once did about basic words—literature, culture, meaning, value, tradition, you name it'. (Gaff.

²⁸⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (trans.) Richard Nice. Cambridge, pp. 1-2.

²⁸⁵ Mitchell, W.J.T. 1994. *Picture Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, London, p. 71.

1988, p. 21)²⁸⁶ The semiotic perspective emphasizes the term (and cultural metaphor) ‘sign’ rather than the term ‘perception’, as we have already seen in the three preceding case studies, a number of important consequences flow from this fundamental differentiation, perhaps the most important of which, is the relocation of the visual image within a field or network of power. The literary critic Norman Bryson describes the operation of power within this context (referring here to painting),

...If power is thought of as vast, centralized, as a juggernaut, as panoply, then it will not be seen that power can also be microscopic and discrete, a matter of local moments of change, and that such change may take place whenever an image meets the existing discourses, and moves them over; or finds its viewer, and changes him or her. The power of painting is there, in the thousands of gazes caught by its surface, and the resultant turning, and the shifting, the redirecting of the discursive flow. Power not as a monolith, but as a swarm of points traversing social stratifications and individual persons. (Bryson, 2001 [1991], p. 99)²⁸⁷

In place of the transcendental congress between the image and the viewer/holder, a process occurring in a private interior space activated by the formal relations of the pictorial surface, achieving instantaneous ‘presentness’, and ‘...elevating the viewer to a condition of disinterested [or rather, interest without ulterior purpose] self-sufficiency ...an enterprise inspired by moral and intellectual passion (Fried, 1971, p.10),²⁸⁸ stood the socially generated codes of recognition. In place of the link extending through space and time, the perceptual conduit between artist and beholder, the ‘aesthetic intention’, stood the larger forum of inter-social recognition. For those who held these

²⁸⁶ Graff, Gerald, ‘Where Do We Go from Here?’, *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1988, p.21. [...] my addition.

²⁸⁷ Bryson, Norman, ‘Semiology and Visual Interpretation’, 1991, reproduced in *Reading Images*, (ed.) Julia Thomas. Palgrave Press, 2001, p.99.

²⁸⁸ Fried, Michael, *Morris Louis*, New York, Abrams Press, 1971, p. 10. [my addition]

(semiotic/institutional/historical narrative) views, including the *October* writers, the fundamental point is that the ability to recognise an image does not involve, nor makes necessary inference towards, the perceptual field of the image's creator, '...art is not a timeless manifestations of human spirit but the product of a specific set of temporal and topical, social and political conditions'. (Editorial, 1979, pp. 3-4)²⁸⁹ It is, rather, the socially constructed codes of recognition that hold preeminent value.²⁹⁰ According to Ernesto Laclau, '...By 'discursive' I do not mean that which refers to 'text' narrowly defined, but to the ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production takes place, an ensemble which constitutes a society as such'. (Laclau, 1980, p. 87)²⁹¹ This discursivity, where 'an image meets the existing discourses', 'the ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production takes place', is perhaps, the crucial determining condition in the initial phase of *October's* critical practice (see case study 1). According to the editors,

...The cultural life of this country, traditionally characterized by a fragmented parochialism, has been powerfully transformed over the past decade and a half by developing interrelationships between her most vital arts. Thus, innovations in the performing arts have been inflected by the achievements of painters and sculptors, those of film-makers have been shaped by poetic theory and practice...[*October*] provides a framework for critical exchange, for intertextuality within the larger context of theoretical discussion. (Editorial, 1976, pp. 3-4)²⁹²

²⁸⁹ 'Editorial', *October* 10 Fall 1979, pp. 3-4.

²⁹⁰ See Muir, Peter 2002, 'October, La Glace sans tain', *Cultural Values: Journal For Cultural Research*, Routledge, Dec/Jan, pp. 419-441.

²⁹¹ Laclau, Ernesto, 'Populist rupture and discourse', *Screen Education*, no. 34. 1980, p.87.

²⁹² The editors, 'About *October*', *October* 1, Spring 1976, pp. 3-4.

A criticism that might be leveled at art theory and artistic production that attempts to make issues of institutions, race, class or gender relevant to art history and art criticism, for example, *October*'s three 'overlapping areas of theoretical endeavor': the critiques on the structure of the sign; the constitution of the human subject; and critiques on the 'siting' of the institution (Editorial, 1987, p. xi, see the introduction to this thesis),²⁹³ is that they are ideological. (Althusser, 1971, p. 162)²⁹⁴ By defining them as ideological, opposing 'humanist' critics and art historians both implicitly and explicitly contrast them to the historical and critical discourse that is considered to be somehow ideology free (Preziosi, 1989, pp. 7-9), for example, the implications of Michael Fried's 'Presentness is Grace'. (Fried, 1996[1967], p. 832)²⁹⁵ The suggestion is that poststructuralism (as a cultural critique), with its attachment to the cultural motifs of difference (for example, notions of the overthrow of originality, the deconstruction of historical narrative, and the subversion or inversion of artistic form), attempts to give knowledge a political prejudice (gloss, overlay) that can be regarded as somehow subversive to notions of the empirical 'truth'.²⁹⁶ The argument would go something like this: that unlike art historical knowledge of the past, say, for example, Ernst Gombrich's, Heinrich Wölfflin's or Panofsky's approach, that was carried out through ordered empirical research; the disordered, pluralistic and diverse 'isms' that define the ascendant critical practices of the '70s and '80s (usually Marxism and Feminism, but including gender studies) are said to

²⁹³ The editors, Annette Mitchelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec, *October the First Decade. 1976-1986*, MIT press, 1987, Introduction p. xi.

²⁹⁴ Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus,' reproduced in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (trans.) Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, p. 162.

²⁹⁵ Fried, Michael, 'Art and Objecthood', reproduced in *Art in Theory. 1900-1990, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Eds.) Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford, 1996, pp. 822-834. (First published in *Artforum*, summer, 1967.) p. 832.

impose a predetermined social and political agenda on the past in such a way that it distorts and mediates our perception and understanding of it. The contrasting 'unmediated' position is based on the autonomy, universality and continuity of artistic forms, and according to Peter Bürger, '...The category of artistic modernism *par excellence* is form, sub-categories such as artistic means, procedures and techniques converge in that category'. (Bürger, 1992, p.45)²⁹⁷ To put this another way, the autonomous language of form is the key to the universality of art. The sociologist Janet Wolff demonstrates this viewpoint in relation to the function of criticism,

...It may be argued that although both the concept of 'art' and the discourse of criticism are historical and contingent, nevertheless those works of art generally positively assessed by the discipline of criticism do in fact manifest certain universal or transcendental qualities, which explain their persistence through time and their appeal beyond the confines of their own social and geographical origin. Other artifacts, defined as 'non-art' by the processes and discourses referred to, do not have these qualities. On this view, the verdict of criticism, though situated and partial, is in fact right, or objective. (Wolff, 1983, p. 17)²⁹⁸

The notion that the history of art and the humanities in general is a record of the ways in which the artistic production of different ages may be distinguished and rationalised on the basis of form, is ultimately based on an idealist Kantian view of aesthetic value. (Moxey, 1994, p. 67)²⁹⁹ Thus, leading towards what Hal Foster, in conversation with Rosalind Krauss (and others 1994), describes as '...a heroic history of form-givers'. (

²⁹⁶ For an authoritative analysis see Preziosi, Donald, *Rethinking Art History, Meditations on a Coy Science*, Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 21-52.

²⁹⁷ Bürger, Peter, *The Decline of Modernism*, (trans.), Nicholas Walker, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 45.

²⁹⁸ Wolff, Janet, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983, p. 17.

²⁹⁹ Moxey, Keith 1994. *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History*, Cornell University Press, 1994. Also see: Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, (trans.) James Meredith, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952.

Foster, 1994, p. 5)³⁰⁰ The essentialist or universalist, for example, and with an acknowledged simplification; Erwin Panofsky, Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, Wilhelm Worringer, Heinrich Wölfflin, Henri Focillon, Hegel, and Alois Riegal, claims that works of art should command the same response from all individuals regardless of their location in time and space (atemporality and trans-historicism), this places crucial emphasis on the allegedly eternal harmonies of form rather than the unreliable and changing contingencies of the culturally specific meaning of politicized subject matter, ‘...Every work of art has form, is an organism. Its most essential feature is the character of inevitability—that nothing could be changed or moved from its place, but that all must be as it is’. (Wölfflin, 1950, p. 124)³⁰¹ The English Modernist Clive Bell outlines the ‘significance of form’ in the artwork,

...These relations and combinations of lines and colors, these aesthetically moving forms, I call ‘significant form’; and ‘significant form’ is the quality common to all works of visual art.... For a discussion of aesthetics, it need be agreed only that forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws do move us in a particular way, and that it is the business of the artist so to combine and arrange them that they shall move us. (Bell, 1982[1932], p. 68)³⁰²

So, the essential quality of a work of art as Bell would have it, is the mystery of ‘significant form’. If one asks the question, significant of what? Bell’s answer would probably be that significant form is that which engenders the aesthetic experience, what he calls ‘aesthetic emotion’, being ultimately significant of the hidden reality of things, of ‘...that which gives to all things their individual significance, the thing in itself, the

³⁰⁰ ‘The Politics of the Signifier II, A Conversation of the Informe and the Abject’, *October*, 67, winter, 1994, p.5.

³⁰¹ Wölfflin, Heinrich, *Principles of Art History, The Problem of Style in Later Art*, originally published in English by G. Bell and Sons. Ltd., New York 1932, here quoted from Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p. 124.

ultimate reality'. (Bell, 1927, p. 6.)³⁰³ Further, Herbert Read tells us that, '...Form, as Heidegger has recognized, belongs to the very essence of being. Being (*Sein*) is that which achieves a limit for itself'. (Read, 1965, p. 79)³⁰⁴ In other words, art as an intuitive knowledge of some higher ordering by which the humanist (or Cartesian) self can journey into rational subjectivity (Greenberg and Fried), representing Alois Riegl's widely known idea of the 'will to art', *Kunstwollen*. This kind of attitude negates the consequence of social and political interpretation, as outlined in Hilton Kramer's well known article 'Studying the arts and humanities, What can be done?',

...The defense of what I wish to call *art*—a word I shall use here to represent what it is that the creators of high culture in every field achieve in all the arts and the humanities—the defense of what I am calling art can never be successful on any terms worth fighting for if it is completely and irreversibly subordinated to politics, even our own politics. Art, as I wish to understand it—and this includes scholarship, too— must be defended and pursued and relished not for any political program it might be thought to serve but for what it *is*, in and of itself, as a mode of knowledge, as a source of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment, as a special form of pleasure and moral elevation, and as a spur to the highest reaches of human aspiration. Art must be savored and preserved and transmitted as the very medium in which our civilization either lives and prospers— prospers intellectually and spiritually—or withers and dies. To subordinate art to politics—even, as I say, to *our* politics—is not only to diminish its power to shape our civilization at its highest levels of aspiration but to condemn it to a role that amounts to little more than social engineering. (Kramer, 1989)³⁰⁵

³⁰² Bell, C. 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis', *Modern Art and Modernism. A Critical Anthology*, (eds.) Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, Harper & Row Ltd., London, 1982. p. 68

³⁰³ Bell, Clive. 1914. *Art*, (publisher unknown) Oxford University Press, London, 1927, p. 6.

³⁰⁴ Read, Herbert, *The Origins of Form in Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1965, p. 79. What Read is talking about is not just form as a morphology, that is, how something is shaped in the real world. For example the elements of an art object— the way a picture is organized— but form as a metaphysical notion of that, which is, in some sense *ordering*, the coming into being of the pure artistic expression and spatial essence of a culture.

³⁰⁵ Kramer, Hilton, *The New Criterion* Vol. 7, No. 6, February 1989. (New Criterion web site)

Culturally aligned significance, here represented by Kramer's emblematic label 'politics', is thus eschewed in the interests of defining universal aesthetic values; as the art historian Griselda Pollock notes, creating '...an ideological, 'pure' space for something called 'art', sealed off from and impenetrable to any attempt to locate art practice within a history of production and social relations'. (Pollock, 1980, p. 57)³⁰⁶ The argument against this differentiation, for example, as outlined by Edward Said in his article 'The Politics of Knowledge' (1992), is that such a position is representative of an ethnocentric epistemology in an age of imperialism and colonization. (Said, 1992, pp. 172-89)³⁰⁷ What can be seen to be evolving here, is a reprise of the historical and irresolvable *pas de deux* between 'art for the sake of art' and politically committed art. In other words, the binary opposition between the ideal and the material; one of a group of oppositions that characterise the period under review and act as cultural motifs. For example, sublimation against de-sublimation, order against disorder, connoisseurship and iconography against textuality, form against anti-form, Authorship against his/her death, masculinity against femininity, centrality against marginality, idealism against materialism, and so on. (see Leroi-Gourham, 1958, pp. 515-527)³⁰⁸ In this essentially deconstructive oeuvre all

³⁰⁶ Pollock, Griselda, 'Artists, mythologies and media—genius, madness and art history', *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1980, p. 57.

³⁰⁷ From readings of, Said, Edward, 'The Politics of Knowledge,' in *Debating P.C. The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, (ed.) Paul Berman, Dell Publications, New York, 1992, pp. 172-89.

³⁰⁸ With an acknowledgement to the prehistorian André Leroi-Gourham, this cultural surface of symbolic codes and iconographic concerns takes on a more complex multidimensional network within the wider Humanities, literature, the built environment, sociology, psychology, architecture and so on. Within, this context of differentiation certain ideas have become commonplace in the humanities and have had powerful and lasting cultural effects extending to the present day. For example, the materialist proposition that any form of cultural practice, say art, art criticism, or art history, cannot be adequately formulated outside the 'frame' of historical circumstances, or that art theory or practice is inherently and intrinsically attached to those same historical conditions. (A. Leroi-Gourham, 'Répartition et groupement des animaux dans l'art pariétal paléolithique,' *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française* 55, 1958, pp. 515-27.) One should note that the 1986 summer issue of *October* was devoted, in part, to the writings of the prehistorian Leroi-Gourham who served as a director of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris in addition to a professorship at the Collège de France. In this issue— which commemorated his death earlier in the year— Annette Michelson makes a number of analogies between his methodological analysis of Paeleolithic cave art, which he

precedent and traditionally established presumptions could be so inverted; for example, that in the visual arts the visual took precedence over the verbal or the spatial over the temporal (see case studies 1, 2 and 3). And according to Craig Owens, ‘... The only people I knew who were talking about this [referring to the term postmodernism] in the visual arts in the early to mid-‘70s—were people associated with *October*’. (Owens, 1982, p. 299)³⁰⁹

The Vietnam War protests and the cultural legacies of the student uprisings of 1968 certainly provoked a radical turn in the thinking of many young American intellectuals (see case study 1).³¹⁰ As the literary critic Morris Dickstein observes, ‘...[these events]...provided much of the impetus as well as the footsoldiers for the explosion of

perceived as programmatic in the sense that a medieval church exhibits an iconographic system, and various aspects of structuralism, in particular the notion of the rotation of the axis of inquiry, from the traditional vertical axis as it were producing a stratigraphy of the past, to a more horizontal or planographic analysis. (Michelson, Annette, ‘Leroi-Gourhan, In Praise of Horizontality,’ *October* 37, Summer 1986, p. 4.) In my understanding, Leroi-Gourhan’s cultural perspective in a similar way to poststructuralism and *October*’s practice, shifted attention from the isolated masterwork (Paleolithic works in this case) towards a more contextual approach, thus bypassing an entirely iconographic (modernist) perspective— and notions of authoritative canonical work— to a more structural framework. He suggested that cave texts were organized according to the principle of binary opposition, between male and female, animals and figures, centrality versus marginality opposition and contrast, within a multidimensional network of gendered animals positioned across the surface of the cave gallery. From this kind of perspective an entire system of relationships could be read within the gallery text. Leroi-Gourhan work rested on an intensive study of scores of individual caves together with statistical surveys of the occurrences of particular motifs.

³⁰⁹ From an interview with Craig Owens, conducted by Anders Stephanson, 1987, ‘Representation, Appropriation, and Power’, *Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power, and Culture*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1982, p. 299. [...] my note.

³¹⁰ David Cate summarizes the violent responses of some groups in the United States, ‘...Between August 1969 and March 1970 seven major companies were bombed in New York. ‘Revolutionary Force 9’ claimed credit for the simultaneous explosions at *GE*, *Mobil* and *IBM* on 12 March. At one point 30,000 people were evacuated from buildings in Central Manhattan, with threats coming in at a rate of one every six minutes. All Washington schools were evacuated after explosions in the capital and Pittsburgh. *ROTC* [Reserve Officer’s Training Corps] buildings from Oregon to Texas were attacked. On 6 March a Weatherman group blew itself up while manufacturing bombs in a town house on 11th Street, New York. Two women escaped naked, were given cloths by unsuspecting neighbors, and vanished. Three others, one woman died in the explosion. From January 1969 to April 1970, bomb blasts caused forty-three deaths (mainly novice saboteurs) and caused \$21.8 million of damage’. Cate, David, *Sixty-Eight. The Year of the Barricades*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, pp. 389-90.

literary theory in the 1970s. Now the strategies of confronting that had failed in the streets succeeded on the page'. (Dickstein, 1985, p. 19)³¹¹ Annette Michelson outlines her perception of this moment and her intellectual and emotional relationship towards it,

...The '60s was a time of *extraordinary* euphoria. I remember when I went out to California in 1965 there was a museum opening up every ten miles... Remember the phrase 'the cultural explosion?' Well, we were part of that cultural explosion, and we took it very seriously because we were very serious people and we were intelligent and we were young and we were approaching our maturity...we probably had the feeling that Rosalind [Krauss] and I had when we founded *October*. We founded *October* for something, but we also founded it *against* something. (Michelson, 2000, p. 436)³¹²

Unable to influence the structures of state power, poststructuralism (understood as a cultural critique), personified in this context by critics and writers such as Michelson, Buchloh, Owens, Foster, Crimp and Krauss (et al.), found it possible to subvert the structure of its language.³¹³ A cultural position condemned by Hilton Kramer as, '....the strategy of a pampered elite making claim to the political status and moral imperatives of a woefully exploited underclass'. (Kramer, 1973, p. 224)³¹⁴ The means chosen in the

³¹¹ Dickstein, Morris, 'Where Do We Go from Here?' *Village Voice*, 1985, p. 19.

³¹² Newman, Amy 2000. *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974*, Soho Press Inc., New York, p. 436. [...my note]

³¹³ Radical challenges to the view that language is somehow a transparent tool have become commonplace in poststructuralist theory. Critical theory has, by enlarge subscribed to Ferdinand de Saussure's view of language functioning by means of a set of internal distinctions rather than any direct relationship with its referent. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Roy Harris, La Salle., Open Court, 1986 (first French edition, 1915). Poststructural theory claims that there is nothing 'natural' about the way in which a particular word can be used to invoke a particular object and that the relationship is arbitrary and depends entirely on convection for its force. Language is not a value free instrument with which human beings manipulate the world, but rather a cultural representation that has a kind of materiality of its own. If one takes this view 'pure' description is impossible, for the language used to describe objects is itself pervaded by the values of its authors. Ever description must necessarily imposes a layer of value, so that it is just as interpretive as any other form of historical interpretation.

³¹⁴ Kramer, Hilton, *The Age of the Avant-Garde. An Art Chronicle of 1956-1972*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. New York, 1973, pp. 524.

American art world, was a revisiting of Constructivist and Dadaist strategies within the New York 'neo-avant-garde' (see introduction and case study 1).³¹⁵

Thus, the critical debates in the humanities during the '70s and '80s divide into two conflicting positions: the first, often labeled 'neoconservative' and aligned with normative examination (pre-existing), the second associated with adaptations of (Leftist/Liberal) post-Structuralist theory and attached to the literary methodologies of 'functional analysis' (critical theory- see case study 1). Hal Foster outlines the fundamental difference between these two critiques, '...normative examination is replaced by functional analysis, the object of whose investigation would be social effect (function) of a work and a sociologically definable public within an already existing institutional frame'. (Foster, 1996, p. 57)³¹⁶ The editors of *October* felt that they were in the same situation as the new literary theorists aligning themselves with Roland Barthes understanding of 'the real' constructed within language, '...Realism, cannot be the copy of things, but the knowledge of language; the most 'realistic' work will not be the one which 'paints' reality, but which, using the world as content (this content itself, moreover, is alien to its structure, i.e., to its being), will explore as profoundly as possible the *unreal reality* of language. (Barthes, 1972, p. 160)³¹⁷

In a 1981 editorial Annette Michelson writes that, '...the journal [*October*] was taking shape [in] a difficult transitional moment in which the modernist canon, the forms and categories which had defined it, the practices for which it provided a framework of

³¹⁵ A term first made current by Peter Bürger.

³¹⁶ Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, An OCTOBER Book, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 57.

³¹⁷ Barthes, Roland. (1972) *Critical Essays*. (trans.) Richard Howard, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 160.

intelligibility, were everywhere in question'. (Michelson, 1981, p. 119)³¹⁸ Further, '... We did not see, at that time, any major reviews in the field of visual studies that were really concerned with a fusion of theory and practice, and we thought that it was very important to initiate some kind of intervention in the direction of that fusion'. (Michelson, source the author, 2003)³¹⁹ Basic aesthetic terms such as quality, originality, authenticity and transcendence became problematic as never before. Michelson calls for the critical analysis of postmodernism and the support of theoretically significant contemporary art practice. (Sandler, 1996, pp. 332-336)³²⁰ Hal Foster describes his relationship to the political positions developing during this period and notes the ironic end result,

...Yet not long ago there was a sense of a loose alliance, even a common project, particularly in opposition to rightist positions, which ranged from old attacks on modernism in toto as the source of all evil in our hedonistic society to new defense of particular modernisms that had become official, indeed traditional, the modernisms of the museum and the academy. For this position postmodernism was 'the revenge of the philistines' (the happy phrase of Hilton Kramer), the vulgar kitsch of media hucksters, lower classes, and inferior people, a new barbarism to be shunned, like multiculturalism, at all costs. I supported a postmodernism that contested this reactionary cultural politics and advocated artistic practices not only critical of institutional modernism but suggestive of alternative forms— of new ways to practice culture and politics. And we did not loose. In a sense a worse thing happened, treated as a fashion, postmodernism became *démodé*. (Foster, 1996, pp. 205-206)³²¹

Notwithstanding this future outcome, and as a way of establishing these 'alternative forms', the *October* critics rejected the traditional aesthetic paradigms of form and

³¹⁸ Michelson, 'The Prospect Before Us,' *October* 16, Spring 1981, p. 119.p. 119.

³¹⁹ An interview with the author in NYC February 2003.

³²⁰ Sandler, Irving 1996. *Art of the Postmodern Era* New York, Harper Collins, pp. 332-336.

³²¹ Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 205-206. [emphasis in original]

formalism, the aesthetic components of the individual art work and interpretations of quality (the signifiers of previous cultural memory, the language of a previous generation) that had been the established art theory and which, they believed, had become overworked to the point of redundancy by continual interpretive glosses. Rosalind Krauss, Michelson, and the other writers associated with the journal, discovered alternative ideas with the intellectual rigor that formalism had once possessed, namely the critiques of postmodernism and the methodologies of semiotic poststructuralism. (see case study 1)³²² In place of Greenbergian and Friedian versions of formalism and aesthetic theory, the writers of *October* installed French theoreticians, especially Derrida and Roland Barthes, who had analyzed the ideological assumptions and implications of signs, language, literature, literary theory and criticism (see case studies 1, 2 and 3). According to Thomas Crow,

...Its [*October's*] implicit diagnosis of the impasse that had defeated the old *Artforum* was that serious art writing could only go on as before if it could call in sufficient reinforcements. Paris, for some time secondary in the practice of art, would come to the rescue on the plane of theory, the amalgam of semiotics, psychoanalysis, and deconstructive skepticism that went under the name of poststructuralism. (Crow, 1996, p. 87)³²³

For literary critics who turned to poststructural theory ‘....assumptions that were once agreed on became controversial... [We] no longer share the tacit agreement we once did about basic words—’literature,’ ‘culture,’ ‘meaning,’ ‘value,’ ‘tradition,’....you name it’.³²⁴ In contrast, and as a reaction to such deconstructive evaluations, the editorial staff

³²² Mascheck, Joseph, in ‘Editing Artforum,’ *Art Monthly*, Dec. 1977, p.11.

³²³ Crow, Thomas, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, Yale University Press, 1996, p. 87.

³²⁴ Graff, Gerald, ‘Where Do We Go from Here?’, *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1988, p.21.

of the magazine *The New Criterion* outline their positions on these issues, positions that defends the value and integrity of Eurocentric cultural memory where such terms still carried cultural meaning,

...*The New Criterion*, founded in 1982 by the art critic Hilton Kramer and the pianist and music critic Samuel Lipman, is a monthly review of the arts and intellectual life. Written with great verve, clarity, and wit, *The New Criterion* has emerged as America's foremost voice of critical dissent in the culture wars now raging throughout the Western world. A staunch defender of the values of high culture, *The New Criterion* is also an articulate scourge of artistic mediocrity and intellectual mendacity wherever they are found, in the universities, the art galleries, the media, the concert halls, the theater, and elsewhere. (Editorial, 1999)³²⁵

Hilton Kramer grounded the thinking of the *October* group in the counterculture of the late 1960's, he considers the perpetuation of these dissident attitudes responsible for what he sees as the dissolute state of American culture ('the revenge of the philistines'). In his introductory statement to the first issue of the *New Criterion* he writes that,

...[Culture] has almost everywhere degenerated into one or another forms of ideology or publicity or some pernicious combination of the two. As a result, the very notion of an independent high culture and the distinctions that separate it from popular culture and commercial entertainment have been radically eroded...A very large part of the reason for this sad state of affairs is, frankly, political. We are living in the aftermath of the insidious assault on the mind that was one of the most repulsive features of the radical movement of the Sixties. The cultural consequences of this leftward turn in our political life have been far graver than is commonly supposed. In everything from the writing of textbooks to the reviewing of trade books, from the introduction of kitsch into the museums to the decline of literacy in the schools to the corruption of scholarly research, the effect on the life of culture has been ongoing and catastrophic. (Kramer, 1986, pp. 1-2)³²⁶

³²⁵ The Editors, *The New Criterion*, www.newcriterion.com / home page October 1999.

³²⁶ Kramer, Hilton, 'A Note on the *New Criterion*,' *New Criterion*, September 1986, pp. 1-2. (thanks to editorial staff)

As Kramer sees it, the contributors to *October* and their intellectual and artistic allies reject modernism's,

...claims of high culture and [aligning themselves with the destruction of] the privileged status it enjoys in the cultural life of bourgeois democracies... [noting that] there has been from the beginning of the modernist movement a *révolte* element...it was the aesthetic component—not the politics—which proved to be enduring, and which came to play a role in shaping the sensibility of high culture in bourgeois society. (Kramer, 1986, pp. 4-7)³²⁷

When faced with the difficulty of postmodern artworks, perhaps it is not surprising that a return to 'the aesthetic component', to cultural memory and its humanistic themes should enjoy considerable support³²⁸, providing '...a spur to the highest reaches of human aspiration'. (1989)³²⁹ Kramer, described by the British art historians Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock after his attack on their essay 'Les Données Bretonnantes, La Prairie de Représentation' as representing 'anti-intellectualism', possessing a 'paranoid style', and

³²⁷ Ibid. pp. 4-7 [...] my note.

³²⁸ Four exhibitions acted as sites for the critical attacks on painting (neo-expressionism) launched by *October*, *Documenta 7* (Kassel, Germany 1981), *American Painting: The Eighties* (The Grey Art Gallery, NYC, 1979) and *New Image Painting* (The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979), and *Eight Contemporary Artists* (MOMA in the fall of 1974), the invective was led by Rosalyn Deutshe, Clarea Gendel Ryan, Thomas Lawler, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens and Benjamin Buchloh.

³²⁹ The lack of what might be considered a common style in American art since the 1970s has generally been explained as a function of the neo-avant-garde's confused diversity, its willful and accepting eclecticism—in short, its pluralism. One could suggest that the elements of 'Friedian performance' that exist in all such avant-garde practice has shifted the site of art's presence from the object to the audience, thus deliberately undermining any claim to formalist notions of artistic autonomy. The consequence being (1) the opening of art to a multiplicity of interpretation, (2) the valorizing of popular art over high art, and (3) the emergence of ever more politically orientated work. Such an art, finally, has profound implications for criticism itself, transforming the critic from a mere interpreter of an autonomous object to an active participant in the ongoing history of the work of art itself.

displaying plain ‘wrong-headedness’,³³⁰ describes the importance of ‘return’ in the defense of cultural memory,

...To speak specifically of the two fields I am myself closest to—the study of art history, and the study of literature—the approach I am advocating will entail a return to the very disciplines that have been so much under attack in recent years—so much under attack that in many of our leading academic institutions they have all but disappeared. In art history, it means the revival of training in connoisseurship—the close, comparative study of art objects with a view to determining their relative levels of aesthetic quality. This is a field in which our country could once boast of great achievements. From Bernard Berenson to Alfred Barr to Sydney Freedberg, we have indeed produced some of the greatest connoisseurs of Western art the world has seen, and their achievements and influence have greatly enriched our institutions and our lives—enriched them, I hasten to add, with aesthetic intelligence of the highest order. But these great names represent a dying intellectual enterprise. It isn’t dead yet, but the prognosis is grave. In this respect, Sydney Freedberg’s departure from Harvard earlier in this decade was for many of us a symbolic event, for it marked something more than the exit of a single individual from the institution that had virtually created the concept of connoisseurship in American cultural life. It represented the collapse of a tradition and the takeover of that institution by minds determined to transform the study of art into a form of social science. Which meant nothing less than the annexation of art history to the political service of the radical Left. (Kramer, 1989, pp. 4-5)³³¹

Speaking in *October* Clara Weyergraf asserts the contrary position, ‘...humanist aesthetics ‘appeals to ‘man’ as the center of the aesthetic experience, as the pretext of the art’s making, the subtext of its meaning, the context of its reception. We are moved by this description of ourselves as the audience of the work of art as we are consoled by its implicit sense of universal status of our *humanity*. But this de-historicized audience is in fact a fiction’. (Weyergraf, 1981, p.23)³³²

³³⁰ *Avant-gardes and Partisans Reviewed*, Fred Orton & Griselda Pollock, Manchester University Press, 1996, p. xvi.

³³¹ Kramer, Hilton, ‘Studying the Arts and Humanities, What can be done?’ *The New Criterion* Vol. 7, No. 6, February 1989, pp.4-5. Based on a lecture given at 92nd Street YMHA in New York in a program, jointly sponsored by the New Criterion, called ‘The Humanities and Education Today, A New Barbarism?’ The other speaker of the evening was Lynne V. Cheney, Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

³³² Weyergraf, Clara, ‘The Holy Alliance: Populism and Feminism,’ *October* 16 Spring 1981, p. 23.

Universalizing arguments about the ‘truly human’ and its links to cultural memory have, to a great extent, become displaced by manifestations of the critical theory arising during the ‘70s that claim to understand the human subject as constituted in difference, that is, the subject understood from a variety of contingent, historical and social determinants (the subject as an ‘effect of language’), as noted by Douglas Crimp in an interview with the author,

...[the] post-modern project, the direction that postmodernist theory embraced, was in part, one that embraced issues of difference, and became the most important point of where post-modern theory went. That, plus an interest in globalization, in which a whole range of things which take difference to a further point, or take the discussion of difference in a different direction. But nevertheless, identity and difference are essential to the post-modern project. (Crimp, 2002)

October as a cultural enterprise can be seen as a representative of such new authorities. Notwithstanding subsequent intellectual disputes within the journal (see Appendix 1), during the initial period of critical endeavor (roughly between 1976-1981) the artists and writers associated with *October* valorized the primacy of the verbal in the visual arts, as well the ascendancy of the temporal over the spatial, thus, establishing a theoretical rationale for ‘theatricality’ in the arts (see case studies 1, 2 and 3); and according to Michael Fried, ‘...Theatre is the common denominator that binds together a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts’. (Fried, 1999, p. 163)³³³ The wider cultural disputes occurring in America in the ‘70s and ‘80s, should be seen within the

³³³ Fried, Michael, ‘Art and Objecthood’, in *Art and Objecthood. Essays and Reviews*, 1999, p. 163.

context of this more de-limited cultural surface.³³⁴ Speaking with the author (2002), Rosalind Krauss outlines the practical implications for *October* (and her personally) of these ‘culture wars’. Under intense polarization, *October* is ironically associated with the cultural elitism previously reserved for high modernist writers and neo-conservative publications,

...It seemed to me that what was happening in this country was that the public sphere was contracting and that more and more vehicles were there for neo-conservative positions, but for liberal and left wing there were less and less, and *October* therefore, was incredibly important and we shouldn't let it die. And at a certain point I became very depressed about this and very determined. I remember I went to Washington for the opening of the Mondrain exhibition (maybe Malevich I'm not sure), and I saw there Henry Mellon who was Dean for the *Centre of Advanced Studies in the Arts* of the National Gallery and also Neil Rudenstine who was vice president for the *Mellon Foundation*, and I went into this long song and dance to both of them about how this is so important, and we can't let *October* die, you have to help me. And Neil said that the Mellon Foundation doesn't give grants to magazines, but what I can suggest is that I turn over my assistant to you. His assistant was Rachel Bellows, Saul Bellows' daughter, and she was absolutely wonderful. She said she could get me into the door of every foundation there is and I could go in there and put my case. And it's true, with Mellon backing the doors all opened. And it was the most depressing six months of my life. Going into those foundations and being told, one after the other, that *October* was too elitist and that they weren't going to fund us. They were all into identity politics. At one point I had this interview with a funding officer— a very elegant Japanese woman— and I said, what do you fund? And she told me about an outreach programme at the New Los Angeles Museum (the one downtown) and they send out little busses with exhibitions to disadvantaged communities, communities that wouldn't think of going to a museum so the museum goes to them, and that's what this place funded. She also said to me where is your black editor, and where is your Puerto Rican editor? So I considered this to be absurd and pointed out that on the advisory board— that's why we have an advisory board— we have Manthia Diawara who is black, we don't have a Puerto Rican but you know, what can we do? So finally she said, what you need is a million-dollar endowment, so I said thanks a lot, I can't even get sixty grand a year together. (Krauss, 2002)

³³⁴ See, Bürger, Peter, 1984. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester University Press, University of Minnesota University Press. (trans.) Michael Shaw, 1984, p. 87. (from the second edition of *Theorie der Avantgarde*, 1980, first published in 1974)

As in the notion of the ‘crisis in the humanities’, art historians and critics writing during this period of intense cultural change often speak of a ‘crisis in visual representation’. According to Donald Kuspit,

...the outcry ‘Crisis!’ like crying wolf, has occurred too often in contemporary thinking... And of course it need not be heeded by those who think that art, like a child, should be seen but not heard. To satisfy them there is an abundance of art that exists only to be seen, that does not want to be heard from because it has nothing to say. However, for those who practice criticism, which can be defined as the effort to listen to as well as look at art—to tune into it the way, putting one’s ear to the earth, one tunes into distant yet impinging forces—the crisis is real if typical. In fact, its typicality confirms that it involves long-standing, unresolved issues indicating an enduring problematic of art—embarrassing perhaps to those who take it for granted yet the sign of genuine vitality. In this sense, awareness of crisis indicates renewal of the ground of critical understanding, the reassertion of criticality itself as the theme of art and criticism, the spirit that is at stake in both. (Kuspit, 2000, p. 53)³³⁵

This sensibility, ‘this awareness of crisis’, reveals above all a crucial interest in differentiation, an interest (and recurrent theme within this thesis) which acts to define and redefine the nature of art itself, its ‘enduring problematic’. Further to Kuspit’s notion of ‘renewal’, one might suggest that this is not an actually crisis in visual representation, but more a reaction to a profound redevelopment and reorientation of the notion of ‘art’ as the central cultural motif within the dominating context and practices of contemporary visual culture (see case study 3)³³⁶. Under these aesthetic, political and social determinates, the project and critical activism of *October* becomes much more than the ‘... bring[ing] of European theory into the purview of American art practice’ (Krauss,

³³⁵ Kuspit, Donald 2000. *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries*, Allworth Press, Canada, p. 53.

³³⁶ Guy Debord and Michel Foucault described two different ways of criticizing visual culture in terms of what is widely called ‘the scopic regime’. Foucault focused on the normalizing effect of being the object of the *gaze*, and Debord and the Situationists emphasised the dangers of being the subject of that *gaze*. For the Situationist, the seductive political manipulation of images was far more pernicious than Foucault’s concept of uncanny *surveillance*.

2002) and the ‘fusion of theory and practice’ (Michelson, 2003), it gradually unfolds into a search for a new aesthetic agenda that can replace the precedent late modernist sensibility, and which, nevertheless, maintains the central status of art within the dissolving effects of omnipresent visual culture and the rapid ascendancy of identity politics (see Appendix 1, an interview with Douglas Crimp). At this crucial historical moment of conflict and transition, even theory supposedly untouched by the critical language of late Modernism speaks to the reader of emotion, feeling and experience, as noted by Rosalind Krauss,

...it is precisely in that mute, still space that separates the viewer from the work of art, a space transversed only by his gaze.... the extension of the viewer’s aloneness as he confronts the work, a solicitude that throws into sharpest relief the nature of his aesthetic demands: what he expects a work of art to satisfy; what arouses his interest and fixes his attention; what his attitudes are about the relation between art and seriousness, art and taste, art and pleasure. (Krauss, 1982, pp. 1-2)³³⁷

Post-script

During the course of this research it has been necessary to consider the related fields of photography, cultural studies, art history and critical theory. The thesis has attempted to respond to gaps in each of these literatures and act as a bridge between them. The pedagogical purpose of this work is to present a review of the literature and new material in an accessible and engaging format that is suitable as a reference for senior undergraduates, post-graduates, lecturers and professionals. The thesis is directed to several audiences at once. First, it is intended for a general audience regularly exposed to images of the contemporary art world through the media but often without the benefit of

³³⁷ Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Richard Serra, A Translation’, *Richard Serra*, Paris, Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1982, p. 1-2.

analysis or understanding. At the same time it is directed to art professionals for whom the issues addressed are essential parts of their work. These include critics and writers, museum professionals, dealers, and teachers of art history and aesthetics, all of who support and contribute to the critical dialogue. And, of course, this writing is intended for artists who today, more than ever, are knowledgeable, informed, and articulate, and increasingly participate in this critical exchange. Finally, the thesis is intended for all students who are interested in the pleasure and provocation of thinking not only about what the art of our time is, but also about what it means.

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Appendix 1

Transcript of an interview with Professor Rosalind E. Krauss conducted by the author
March 4th, 02 NYC

PEM

Could you characterise *October's* project?

REK

From the very beginning the project has been to bring European theory into the purview of American art practice. In the first issue we published Foucault's 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' in translation, Richard Howard did the translation, and so that was partly the project. The other part of the project was to deal with art practice in complex enough and developed enough articles to characterize new departures, so that again, in the very first issue I wrote 'Video, the Aesthetics of Narcissism', trying here to capture the essence of the new specificity of video art. I don't think it was a particularly successful essay but that's what the attempt was, and all this had to do with the fact that we felt that *Artforum* had failed as a vehicle for that sort of work.³³⁸

PEM

Did the project change?

REK

It's been very much the same. But now were concerned with the fact that we've become rather old in the game, so to deal with this we've added a group of younger theorists and critics to the editorial board. This has nearly doubled the size of the editorial board. We added Malcolm Turvey, Mignon Nixon, George Baker who is very very brilliant, and Leah Dickerman whose speciality is Dada. We added people who had a different focus from our original one and who are younger and with more energy.

PEM

Could you tell me about *October's* 100th issue?

REK

It's a special issue on obsolescence. For me obsolescence is a very important phenomenon because I'm interested in the way that the mediums have been attacked by

³³⁸ Foucault's 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' is the first essay in the first issue of *October*, *October* 1, Spring 1976, pp. 6-21. The text was originally published in *Les Cashiers du chemin*, no. 2, January 1968, pp. 79-105. The *October* version is accompanied by two letters from René Magritte to Michel Foucault dated May 23 and June 4 respectively (1966); the latter includes an illustration, a drawing by Magritte itemizing and annotating the internal structural features of a pipe—find attached a diagram/drawing of a pipe'. 'Video, the Aesthetics of Narcissism', pp. 51-64.

say conceptual art, installation art and lots of newer practices that want to claim that the idea of medium specificity is finished. Also I think there are new technologies like digital imaging which are undermining the specificity, let's say of film practice, of drawing and various earlier practices. In relation to this, I'm extremely interested in the kind of analysis that Walter Benjamin makes of obsolescence and what happens to certain technologies, like photography, when they are outstripped by technological innovation. And *October*, as it reaches its 100th issue, is now wondering whether art criticism is outmoded. Whether our project is now obsolete. So we decided that we should take this up. One of the things I think about, is that cultural studies— which is not a phenomenon that I'm not particularly in love with— has tried to get a purchase on consumption by seeing consumption itself as a form of resistance. That's a direction that cultural studies has taken. In her analysis of *Harlequin Romances* Janis Radway sees a form of resistance for the women who read those books. I'm thinking that we can also conceive of obsolescence as a form of resistance, a way of getting outside what seems to be the totalising space of the technological and getting some form of leverage on it. That's the project for issue 100.

PEM

When is it being published?

REK

At the end of April, and we've asked a lot of artists what they think about the problem.

PEM

Can you isolate a particular artist who is confronting this issue?

REK

One of the things that you see in William Kentridge's work is the use of '40s telephones and all kinds of equipment, which have long since been thrown on the junk heap of history. So he is someone who traffics in this. He folds that within his visual field, the sense of the obsolescence of the artefacts of our lives, like Bakelite telephones.

PEM

Could you tell me about your relationship with Douglas Crimp and his leaving the journal?

REK

Douglas was a student of mine at Hunter, and then he transferred to the Graduate Centre and did most of his work with me there. Hal and Benjamin and Douglas were all students of mine at the Graduate Centre. I was a very close friend of Douglas' and it really saddens me that we had this break. I feel very very sad about it, but we had a breach. I think that Act Up had an almost cult quality, perhaps this is not fair, but as he got more and more involved with Act Up I think he got more and more hostile to his friends who aren't gay. He broke with Benjamin Buchloh, they were very close friends, he broke with Abigail Solomon-Godeau and they had been friends for years, that's how I got to know Abigail, through Douglas, and then eventually I felt his friendship with me going very

sour. Some identification with AIDS and the terrible things that were happening to the gay community made him very angry with those among his friends who weren't affected by this. It makes me sad. And then we had a terrible fight over the AIDS issue (*October* 43). He wanted to publish what I considered to be pornography, and I thought, should *October* be doing this? So we sent out those disputed texts to those of our advisory board who are gay, like Leo Bersani, to ask them what they thought; and Leo agreed with us, he didn't think that this material was at any theoretical level that was interesting and he could see why we wouldn't want to publish it. It was just an endless recitation of homosexual acts, and I thought why are we doing this? Should we be publishing this? I didn't understand it, so we refused to do it and he walked out, he was furious and he gave it to *The Bay Press* to publish, he was determined to publish it. I think he was very angry with us for a long time there was a lot of animosity, and there were a lot of people who sided with Douglas and who made it very difficult for us to continue. One of the reasons we had the identity conference was to show those people who thought that we were reactionary that we were in fact willing to deal with such issues. Various people including Judith Butler sided with Douglas, and she has given us a hard time ever since.

PEM

Can you tell me about the financing of the magazine?

REK

The finances of the magazine are incredibly precarious. We started out with the help of the *National Endowment for the Arts* and at some point we turned to a friend of mine Peter Eisenman who is an architect. At the time Peter was running the *Institute of Architectural and Urban Studies*, a very active institute for architectural theory. He is someone who is a genius at raising money, and so (it was at the time that we were publishing the Alfred Barr diaries) he helped arrange things for us. But the first way we financed the magazine was through this wonderful book dealer called Jaap Reitman and he simply bought, I forget how many now, perhaps twenty five hundred copies of the first issue, for which we got twenty five hundred dollars in order to pay the printer's bill. That's how we financed the first three issues. Then when we got to issue number four he said I'm sorry, I can't do it anymore. So we then turned to Peter and Peter turned to Celeste and Armand Bartos. Armand is an architect and Celeste is the trustee of the *Pinewood Foundation*. As an aside, one of their major charitable interests is the *New York Public Library*; there is a *Bartos Forum*. But to return to financing, they gave us thirteen thousand dollars per year and the *National Endowment* gave us twenty five thousand dollars per year, and that's how we managed to keep going. Then at a certain point— actually after thirteen years— Celeste Bartos said that thirteen years was enough so that funding ended. Added to this the NEA changed and in consequence their financial help ended; they simply stopped supporting publications generally. I should also mention that we were in receipt of thirteen thousand dollars a year from NYSCA (*The New York State Council on the Arts*) and that stopped. The outcome was that we suddenly had no financial support for the magazine and we didn't know what to do. So I had a meeting with Sherrie Levine (the artist) and I explained that I considered the magazine to be essentially over, and she responded by saying, no it can't be, it can't be. Sherrie suggested that we start making portfolios. She said that she and Cindy Sherman, as well

as a group of other artists would be happy to present *October* with a number of photographs, these could then be published and sold as portfolios, which is how we managed to continue. We made two portfolios and we sold them all. The second portfolio had photographs by Rauschenberg, Gerhard Richter, Ed Rucha and Sol Le Witt. It was through these portfolios that we were able to continue with our work; without them it would have been impossible. I'm looking for another Celeste Bartos; I need to find a wealthy patron for whom funding *October* would be exciting. In fact we don't need a great deal of money, we can run the magazine for sixty thousand dollars a year; its not huge. We need to pay for the managing editor, for without the managing editor we couldn't do it, we have to pay for the rent for the office and we pay our writers, not very much but I think you have to, and of course we need rights and reproductions.

Did you know that were going on line through MIT? I don't think the whole thing is accessible but people will be able to subscribe online, the magazine is also designed on line now, with *Quark*.

PEM

If you were in my position how would you go about putting this history together?

REK

I suppose you could do it comparatively, and talk about the difference between the commercial magazines *Artforum* and *Art in America* or *Art News* because we were determined to get away from the commercial magazines and the torture of the commercial magazine which is reviewing, the way they get advertising is from reviewing shows. I did reviewing for a while for *Artforum* and it's just a torture. I suppose that it makes us very lazy that we don't do reviewing and it sort of distances us from contemporary cutting edge practice, that's why we took on younger people. One other thing about the evolution of the magazine was that after Douglas left it was really impossible, we kind of floundered for a while because the whole business of carrying on had fallen to me and I couldn't do it any more. I then said to Annette, this has got to end. She was very resistant to that, but I insisted that we bring in new people to become editors of the magazine. Her resistance was based on the fact that the editors own the magazine legally, but I said either we do this or I'm out, so she relented, and that's when we brought in Hal and Benjamin and John Rajchman also Denis (Denis Hollier my husband). This changed the direction that's why I'm bringing it up. I think that Benjamin's interests are very different from mine, more about conceptual art and Hans Haacke, and Hal's interests are very different also, all those things changed the direction of the magazine, I suppose that you could trace the evolution of these things. Added to this, Hilton Kramer started *New Criterion* (1982). It seemed to me that what was happening in this country was that the public sphere was contracting and that more and more vehicles were there for neo-conservative positions, but for liberal and left wing there were less and less, and *October* therefore, was incredibly important and we shouldn't let it die. And at a certain point I became very depressed about this and very determined. I remember I went to Washington for the opening of the Mondrain exhibition (maybe Malevich I'm not sure), and I saw there Henry Mellon who was Dean for the *Centre of Advanced Studies in the Arts* of the National Gallery and also Neil Rudenstine

who was vice president for the *Mellon Foundation*, and I went into this long song and dance to both of them about how this is so important, and we can't let *October* die, you have to help me. And Neil said that the Mellon Foundation doesn't give grants to magazines, but what I can suggest is that I turn over my assistant to you. His assistant was Rachel Bellows, Saul Bellows' daughter, and she was absolutely wonderful. She said she could get me into the door of every foundation there is and I could go in there and put my case. And it's true, with Mellon backing the doors all opened. And it was the most depressing six months of my life. Going into those foundations and being told, one after the other, that *October* was too elitist and that they weren't going to fund us. They were all into identity politics. At one point I had this interview with a funding officer— a very elegant Japanese woman— and I said, what do you fund? And she told me about an outreach programme at the New Los Angeles Museum (the one downtown) and they send out little busses with exhibitions to disadvantaged communities, communities that wouldn't think of going to a museum so the museum goes to them, and that's what this place funded. She also said to me where is your black editor, and where is your Puerto Rican editor? So I considered this to be absurd and pointed out that on the advisory board— that's why we have an advisory board— we have Manthia Diawara who is black, we don't have a Puerto Rican but you know, what can we do? So finally she said, what you need is a million-dollar endowment, so I said thanks a lot, I can't even get sixty grand a year together. So that was what it was like, it was a terrible six months; I made absolutely no headway.

PEM

Could you tell me about Yve-Alain-Bois and Harvard?

REK

Yve-Alain-Bois is a very close friend of mine; he was already the editor of *Macula* as was another friend, Jean Clay. *Macula* was not really a model for *October*, but nevertheless that collegueship was very important in starting the magazine. Yve-Alain is now an editor of *October*. I'm very committed to Harvard, I got my degree from Harvard and I admire it enormously. I thought that Yve-Alain would be a wonderful person to teach modern there and he has been, he is just a brilliant modernist. Yve-Alain was one of the new editors added to the magazine when we opened it up to Benjamin and Hal. Yve-Alain is very important to the magazine because he brings a European perspective (being French) that is different from the more local perspectives.

Transcript of an interview with Professor Douglas Crimp
 Conducted by the author March 1st, 02 NYC

PEM

How would you characterise *October's* project?

DC

I wasn't there at the very beginning, but I could tell you how I came onto it, maybe that would help. Initially, I had been writing and teaching in an art school, and when I first came to New York I was a curator at the Guggenheim, so from the late 60s to the mid 70s I did that. And then I decided to go to graduate school at the City University and Rosalind [Krauss] was teaching there. Rosalind and Annette [Michelson] and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe had founded *October* in 76 and they had published three issues, it wasn't regularized at that point. And I knew Rosalind slightly (personally); I don't know that I knew Annette, and Jeremy was out of the picture before I became involved. Anyway, I went to graduate school in the fall of 76 and by the end of the first year (this is the spring of 77) they had made an arrangement with MIT to publish the journal: at which point it became regularized as a quarterly and they hired me as the managing editor. There was a minimal salary, it all had to do with this arrangement with MIT, and so I came on as essentially the person who did the nuts and bolts aspect of the journal, although pretty much from the very beginning I was interested in this project in terms of structuralist and poststructuralist theory being brought to bare on contemporary art. I think that we had very similar commitments to a particular community of artists, but I was younger, a little bit from Rosalind and substantially from Annette, and because of this my contemporary art interests were also a bit younger. I came on with the fourth issue and certainly proposed the idea of doing a special issue on photography [*October* issue number 5], so I was participating as an editor-editor as well as a managing editor, and Rosalind was teaching photography, we were all interested in it, Craig [Owens] was also one of her students. Actually, some of the stuff that we published in that issue, Craig's and mine, were done as seminar papers, initially for Rosalind's classes.

As I was saying, some of my interests were towards a younger generation of artists, so in issue number eight [*October* no. 8, Spring 1979] I published—republished—the text I did for this exhibition in 1977 called *Pictures*, and so the beginning of an idea of postmodernism and theorizing post-modernism was probably initially more Craig's and mine because we were kind of interested in these younger artists. But it was complicated; we were all very much working together at the time. Rosalind was our professor, we were her friends, and we talked about what we were interested in together all the time: so it was very much a collective project.

I think that in some ways the perception of *October* was that it was probably the journal that was most central in theorizing postmodernism in the visual arts. That wasn't what its project was initially of course, postmodernism came into the picture a little bit later. Rosalind and Annette could tell you more about why they founded it— I mean they were at *Artforum* and I wasn't. And they had problems. I know that in the first issue [of *October*] they published Foucault's piece on Magritte: they had proposed it to *Artforum*

and the editors of *Artforum* said they were not interested in this kind of thing, so that was the point at which they decided that it was time to go.

I have to say that before I got involved with these people I was also reading Foucault and Barthes and so forth. And when I saw the first issue of *October* I have to say, you know; that's a journal I could see myself working for.

PEM

You said that the magazine's project changed; what was *October's* original project?

DC

I think it's clear in the editorial texts. It was an interest in a particular notion of the modernist avant-garde, its constitution and practices in the present in the work of let's say the minimalist generation of artists; of course from Annette's perspective in film, that sort of thing. So there was that group of people, for example, Yvonne Rainer and Hollis Frampton who were certainly involved from the very beginning, and not only as artists, they were themselves theoreticians. There was also this interest in the relation of the avant-garde to politics, hence the name *October*, you know, I don't know that anyone else will tell you this, but Annette Michelson was born on the seventh of November, the anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

PEM

What about this notion of reviving the Constructivist project?

I don't know that I would characterise it like that. This is the way Annette would have written the story I think. Which is different to the other side of it which emphasized an interest in a new type of continental theory that basically the art world had not seen before; for that matter the intellectual world in America had not been much exposed to. So there was an interest in trying to bring that to bear on the practices of the contemporary avant-garde.

PEM

How did you first come across this kind of theorising?

It was on my own. It was for myself actually. I had a French educated Moroccan boyfriend (Christian) who studies with Barthes. I think I had read Barthes even before I met him, but he was someone who knew Guy Hocquenghem who was one of the founders of the Gay Liberation group in France; Hocquenghem died of AIDS. He wrote a very important book in 1971-72 called *Homosexual Desire*, which was a Deleuzian, very theoretical work on sexuality for its time. *Duke University Press* republished it not so long ago. It's considered a kind of landmark of theory in Gay Studies or Queer Theory. I got to know Christian and Guy, they were very good friends. This is early 70s before I was involved in *October*, they were all part of the same kind of world— so I had a kind of personal attachment to all of this. I read material on semiology from around 70-71 when it was first being translated and published in this country. Annette of course had lived in Paris for a long time and knew these people, and of course she will tell you that *October* was partly modelled on *Tel Quel*. Annette was sort of in these circles.

PEM

Could you tell me something about the *Pictures* exhibition?

DC

Did you know that it was reconstituted last summer? *Artist's Space* redid the exhibition in so far as they were able to—of course they couldn't fully reconstitute it. But some young curator decided to redo the show. It was on the cover of *Artforum* [October 2001] there were two articles about it, actually they tried to reconstruct even the installation, but of course it wasn't even in the same space. It was weird, it was weird to go and see it and some of the work held up well, some of it didn't. You know, it was a very modest little thing that I did, it just became one of those emblematic things where a lot of things happened and somehow everybody locates its origin in one place, which is nonsense. But I think that the very positive reception of the second text in particular is a measure of *October's* influence. And you know some of those artists went on to do very well like Cindy Sherman, and I suppose that I invented a way of talking about a new kind of work. But the myth is put in place—like *Stonewall* or something—that everything happened in this one particular place. But it was actually I have to say Rosalind's idea, and the exhibition did generate a lot of interest and I wrote a small catalogue for it in which I attempted to theorize this work. Then some other things happened and Rosalind said: you know this text should be published in *October*. This is a year later and by then the writing seemed somewhat naive to me. By then I'd read more of the kind of theory I was interested in and so I re-wrote the text. Actually it has the same title but it's a different text and different artists even, and by then I had a kind of better grasp of the work because more had happened and so on. It was really that text which then became particularly influential. And of course, because of those artists, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman and so on, it sort of took off. Then there was the founding of *Metro Pictures* after that in 1981 and then more and more people became interested in the notion of postmodernism. I talked about it, and then I went on to continue working and I published a lot of this material in *October*, and that was the stuff that became my book *On the Museum's Ruins*. And a lot of that initial work, the first several texts again were to do with this conflation of certain ideas about originality, and appropriation that got to be the vocabulary of a certain post-modern theory.

PEM

Could you speak about your break-up with the magazine?

DC

I was with them for thirteen years. I became managing editor, then they made me into an executive editor in order to not just make me basically just one of them, then they made me one of them finally. So I was the managing editor from 77-83, executive editor they called me from 83-86, and then editor from 86-90. But, in effect, I was the only person in the office doing the hands on work. I laid the magazine out, I edited the text. I did all the day-to-day stuff; it was my job. I wrote, I went to school, I did some teaching gigs, but basically it was my main job. And as time went by, I think this is relevant although I

don't know how one would characterise this, but the more I did the job, eventually some other people were involved, Joan Copjec was my assistant for a while³³⁹, Craig [Owens] was there briefly but that was early on, eventually I hired someone to be kind of an assistant to me and do more nuts and bolts stuff, Tarik Farrow. Anyway, first of all, I suppose its relevant, Annette and Rosalind themselves had a difficult relationship, competitive. When I was first with the magazine they didn't speak to each other, and part of my job was being a go between – it was not easy. You know each one of them would call me early in the morning and complain about the other, so like, this was not a picnic. I think that we all contributed a lot to what got published. It was always frankly a scramble to get material, to get it into an issue or to invent issues. It was a hard job to find enough material and to get the writers to produce it when they said they would. I suppose its always like this, but we were not a juried journal, we didn't accept submissions, we hardly ever published material that we didn't solicit unlike other scholarly journals. They never solicit; they just get what comes to them and send it to readers. And I brought certain writers to the magazine; probably the best known would be Benjamin Buchloh and Rosalyn Deutshe. But more and more, say towards the late 80s, Rosalind and Annette tended to be involved in other things. Less concerned with the magazine, leaving in my hands to the extent that it was really a full time job – really a lot of work. But I loved the job; I loved making the magazine every aspect of it–so that was fine.

I don't know how much my work was changing, but eventually I suppose that the real turning point was the issue I did on AIDS in 87 (*October* 43). And at that point the relationship between us was such that when I said I want to publish some material on AIDS, they said fine. Then I went back to them and said I want to do a full issue on AIDS, it should be a special issue, well they weren't so sure of that. But at the same time it wasn't like they had any substitute for it and they said okay.

I don't believe that Annette and Rosalind ever saw a single thing that went into it– they just weren't interested. It was not a subject they cared about. Anyway, the way I prepared for that issue was basically to join ACT UP. I was going to activist meetings every week and I met a lot of people through that. So the issue became what it was, which was this kind of hybrid between academic theory and activist material, because of this shift and my own participation in the movement. Because of the nature of the debate and what it seemed to demand as discourse. And so, at a certain point, it grew rather big. I actually wanted to break it into two issues and they didn't want to do two issues on AIDS– they thought that was way too much. And we couldn't do a double issue, MIT would not allow it, and basically when you're doing a quarterly people want four magazines per year not three, so they wouldn't allow that. So I had to do this really big issue and it was expensive, it was a cost overrun for us because it was twice as big as a normal issue, but then it just got a huge amount of attention. It sold more than any other issue, and we had to reprint it eventually and I had to do it as a book. It put *October* in the black for the first time in its history and it won awards and really got a lot of attention. And I think, you know, that was the beginning of my problems with Rosalind and Annette because I think that they heard once too often about this journal *October*, Douglas Crimp's magazine. Nothing happened at the time– nothing was said to me. I mean how could they not be happy? MIT wanted to renegotiate their deal with us because suddenly we were in the

³³⁹ One should note that this was actually a ten-year working relationship (see an interview with Joan Copjec p. 208)

black. And you know Rosalind Krauss was very interested in trying to get me to do the book version of it. But then, this was the winter of 87-88, a year and a half had passed and eventually what happened was I proposed something that would lead to my resignation. I had a gay reading group and we were reading Foucault and gay theory and material like that, and at a certain point we were told by someone at the New York State Council that there was a possible grant available to do a conference, and we should apply. And so we did, and we got this very big grant to do like a dream conference for us. It was basically a community led conference on gay and lesbian media, film and video, and we invited six speakers. We had enough money to actually pay some interlocutors to be in the audience and be part of the discussions afterwards. So, I asked my fellow editors at *October* to publish the papers of this conference and they agreed essentially.

And the conference took place: it was amazing we all thought. The papers were by Teresa de Lauretis, Kobena Mercer, Judith Baine, Cindy Patton, Richard Fung and Stuart Marshall and the people in the audience were people like Isaac Julien, John Grayson, a lot of other media makers—interesting people. So, the question and answer session was really great and we get the papers and they, basically Rosalind and Annette and Joan along with them, said that they wouldn't publish two of them. They were Richard Fung's and Cindy Patton's, both of which happened to be on pornography. Cindy Patton's was on safe sex and Richard's was on the representation of Asians in gay pornography: a text that by the way— a text called 'Looking for my Penis'— that went on to become the founding text in Queer Theory in Asian Studies: it's incredibly important, everybody cites this text. And so a kind of real fight ensued. They were not up to the standard of theory of *October* and we shouldn't publish them— but they would publish the four other papers. But they were not my papers, it was a collective enterprise and either *October* published the whole thing or we would have to take it elsewhere, in which case I also said I would leave because you know, the discussion about it was an ugly discussion. Thus it came back to the AIDS issue: it was a disaster; it was like not the kind of theory that *October* published.

I think it was very clear that my own work was moving in the direction of Cultural Studies, and if you know the subsequent history of *October* especially since issue no 77, you know that there has grown up among these high modernists a real antipathy to Visual Studies. Mass culture is still the absolute enemy for these people, its Adorno 1947. I mean its really as if Birmingham never happened, it's as if, and it takes the kind of odd character now of being a kind of defence of the disciple of art history. Almost all these people who actually were the first to contest the discipline— it's really a very odd phenomenon.

But the hostility to visual studies—now I teach in a Visual Studies programme— is really adamant. I mean its in the magazine, its in conferences: not that I'm sure that any of them is actually sure what Visual Studies really is, but somehow they see it, I think they see it or some of them see it at least, possibly Hal, possibly Rosalind, I don't know about Benjamin, Benjamin just sees Visual Studies as the embrace of mass culture. I think Hal and Rosalind see it as the embrace if identity politics. Cultural Studies, my interest in activism which they saw as antithetical to theory, which I don't at all. And this is totally more subjective, a kind of competitiveness, where it seemed like I was getting too much attention with the AIDS issue.

You know, it was beginning to be; well you can see what happened when I left. The journal became much more of an art history journal, much more high modernist in its theoretical approach, and much I think, more narrow in its disciplinary approach. Which isn't to say that it doesn't do interesting stuff, but I think the range is considerably narrower and given that intellectual disciplines have been more interdisciplinary, more about issues of race and sexuality and so on, well, the journal is just not going to go there. And so at this point I think the journal is much more, almost old fashioned in a sense. I have to say that I don't read it consistently so perhaps its not fair of me to talk about it. But it seems like a modernist project where it was once a postmodernist project. And that post-modern project, the direction that postmodernist theory embraced, was in part one that embraced issues of difference, and became the most important point of where post-modern theory went. That plus an interest in globalisation, in which a whole range of things take difference to a further point or take the discussion of difference in a different direction. But, nevertheless, identity and difference are essential to the post-modern project. When we were theorizing it at *October* I felt that that the magazine was a little bit inattentive to these things. I think there was never even that much of an interest in feminism at *October*, Joan Copjec obviously is a feminist, but she is a particular kind of Lacanian feminist that has a certain orthodoxy about it that didn't want to embrace other things. And Rosalind and Annette have never been particularly interested in the feminist project: I think Craig Owens was right when he wrote in 'The Discourse of Others' that the melding of post-modern theory with feminism is essential, and that feminism contributes absolutely, essentially to postmodernism. I think that Silvia Kolbowski has attempted to bring that to bear on the journal, but I think its not been the easiest thing in the world to do. So that's kind of the story!

As an addendum, we did go on to publish a book *How Do I Look*, it was published by *Bay Press* and became a kind of groundbreaking book for Gay and Lesbian media theory. So what would have been an issue of *October* was published as a really successful book. Teresa's essay is an absolutely ground breaking essay, so is Richard Fung's, its like exactly what was refused by the journal. So for me, that was a kind of vindication that the project was good. Things were said along the way— I was told by people at MIT that Rosalind was saying I was trying to make this into a gay magazine and stuff like that.

Transcript of an interview with Professor Annette Michelson conducted by the author in
NYC

February 13th 2003

PEM

Could you tell me something about your time living in Paris; I understand for example that you attended a number of lectures by Merleau-Ponty?

AM

I went to Paris out of a feeling of standard francophilia. At that time I was doing graduate studies at Columbia in art history. I had wanted to do graduate studies in philosophy, but at that time there just wasn't any place that I felt was congenial or interesting, so I went to Paris. I had been working while I was at Columbia and I informed my teacher Meyer Shapiro (who had been very kind to me) that I would be back in 6 months and of course that was absolutely not the case— I stayed for years. I was there largely between the 50s and the 60s, that is to say most of the '50s and half of the '60s, and Shapiro, from time to time, asked when I would be writing my dissertation, and I had to eventually tell him that I wasn't because I didn't want to be an academic at all: I had no desire whatsoever to be an academic. While I was in Paris I earned my living—to the extent that it was a living—working as a critic and as a journalist. I was the art editor for the *New York Herald Tribune* magazine and foreign correspondent for *Art International* (actually, I also worked for Hilton Kramer). Generally I did what one does to survive in a foreign country, translations and that sort of thing. And periodically I would come back to New York to look around (every five years or so) and then I would go back to Paris. Yes, people often asked me what kept me in Paris, and it was not simply— although it was primarily— the intellectual ferment of that time, but it was also the political situation. I think it was the political ferment of the '50s and the first half of the 60s that kept me there. But in 1965, I came back and looked around and it was all extremely exciting here, it was an extraordinary time of transition. There was a burgeoning on a number of fronts, for example, the dissolution of the absolute hegemony of Abstract Expressionism, its ethos and mystique, that interested me, but not only that. I was essentially in Europe during most of the McCarthy period (actually during all of the McCarthy period), and by the time I decide to come back the civil rights movement was in progress, actually it was at a kind of high point, as was the student movement, all of those things were exciting. I had been following these changes from abroad, and all of these elements contributed to my return. Yes, I did attend lectures by Merleau-Ponty at *Collège de France*. I heard him give a talk proceed by a reading (he had a very nice voice and loved to read aloud), I heard him talk on the condition of women proceeded by a reading from *La Vie de Marianne*. Well, before I started attending his lectures and by force of circumstances as it were, at that time I was living with someone who had been doing major work of translating a great deal of French literature which had not yet appeared in English, and because of that I was brought into contact with variety of theatrical and literary milieus.

so a great many things happening generally, but also specifically and intimately related to what I was doing. It was also the case that it was a very exciting time in that the intellectual activity that involved one was not yet thoroughly absorbed into the academy. There was still an intellectual life outside the academy and of course the absorption became suddenly intensified in the 1960. It already existed but became intensified, and so it was very fascinating for me to follow that process. Also I think the moment that seemed so politic to me in the intelligibility of the world in early structuralism was superseded to some extent by further theoretical explanations, my readings and attendances at Maurice Merleau-Ponty's lectures were followed by my readings of the very early Derrida for example, and so there was a certain kind of transition that was very remarkable. By the way, I was also doing some scouting for an American publisher (at that time a young publisher) called Ronnie Rosett, and I remember recommending to him a number of younger writers, one of them was Purrer, another who had publish his first book on Michelle, was Rolland Barthes. So there were a lot of transitions in effect while I was there. Very briefly those are some of the reasons why I stayed, and some of the reasons why I left.

PEM

How did you become involved in *October*?

AM

When I came back on a visit to New York in '65, my friend Barbara Rose (well actually I didn't know her, but I was introduced to her and we became friends at that time) told me about this art magazine that was being published in California (I was about to go to California on my first visit) this contact coincided with the recommendation of my French friends, who told me that I should see 'le far west', and how wonderful it was there, so off I went. Barbara told me to get in touch with Philip Leider who had started this magazine *Artforum*, and when we met he immediately asked me if I would begin writing for the magazine, and I said, well, if I go back to France I don't think you would want the latest news from Paris, but if I stayed here yes, why not. The outcome was that I did go back to Paris but returned to New York in 1966 and began collaborating with the magazine. I was there for 10 years [1966-1976] as editor for film and performance. But when Coplans became editor it soon became apparent that I had to leave. Coplans didn't really like my writing anyway he considered it somehow obscure. By the way, after I came back from Paris and started writing people here found me somewhat difficult to read, of course all of that relaxed once all the various factions began to influence the American academic scene. People became much more used to a certain kind of discourse. my writing by now is very easy, it's by no means— and purposely so—as turgid as I find academic discourse has become. In any case, I had to leave *Artforum*, Coplans made it very clear to me that I was not bringing in what he called the 'life blood' of the magazine, and of course the 'life blood' of the magazine was money. I was dealing with material that was neither essential nor central to the gallery scene, and although film and performance have by now a settled place in *Artforum*, it took a very long time. Coplans cancelled a couple of projects, one in particular that I had already organized and committed artists and writers to, so I simply had to leave. You know, I think everybody wants his or her own journal at some time, intellectuals certainly do and not only

intellectuals, and so Rosalind and I were able to leave at the same time and *October* happened. Initially we had the support of an enterprising book dealer Jaap Reitman who simply paid for the first four issues. I suppose we could have gone around begging for money from various people, but who knows what would have happened? At any rate, because of Reitman it was a very good start— it was very encouraging. However, the distribution of the journal was another matter; the first thing we did was to just borrow a car from one of my students and we just took copies around to various places where the magazine might be sold, but Rosalind had a previous relationship with *The MIT Press* and they did in fact, assume the cost of distribution. At this point we would certainly like more effort expended and money expended on advertising, but on the whole, it's been a very successful relationship. I also think that one thing that has strengthened our relationship with *The MIT Press* is a series of books. In my checkered past I worked for a series of publishers so I've always been interested in doing books, very much interested in achieving a standard of production that is high. And on the whole we've been very satisfied with the kind of production they have given our books.

PEM

How would you characterize *October's* project?

AM

Well, I tend to characterize it— and I did this when I was called upon to speak at our 100 issue anniversary— as a kind of shotgun wedding between theory and practice. As I said a shotgun wedding everybody burst into laughter, until I said between theory and practice, and then the truth of it came through. We at *October* did not see, at that time, any major reviews in the field of visual studies that were really concerned with this kind of fusion, and we thought that it was very important to initiate some kind of intervention in the direction of that fusion. We did publish in early issues I would say more documents of modernism mostly, and to some extent postmodernism, than we do now. Recently— a couple of years ago— I proposed that we do another series of books really for fundraising (which we're concerned with all the time), I proposed a variant of something that *The Page Cinema* had been doing, that is, cannibalizing there old issues to present as a series of monographic books in paperback. So I proposed that we do what is now called *The October Files*, it's not composed entirely of things already published in the journal but there is a preponderance of them. And what I think is interesting about that is that it allows one to go back and read over the journal from the very beginning, I've been particularly involved with that project. I also proposed two larger volumes that would essentially unite the various conversations and roundtable debates that have come up: and a crucial part of that would certainly be *October* cinema, my particular field. And although my work has not been exclusively concerned with cinema I was, nonetheless, concerned that here a very settled place for cinema and the moving image within the magazine. Actually, I went back to issue number one and was amazed at what we've done, we developed all kinds of things that I had forgotten. But its not only that, when you add them up: the choice of issues, the argumentation, the range and depth, I found it really heart warming.

PEM

Do you think the project has changed?

AM

We don't really have a feeling that the project has changed too much, the journal nonetheless does read differently. There is a basic project that has to do with theory and practice in relation to each other. On the other hand, since we have acquired a number of advisory editors, and since we increased the editorial staff, it is certainly the case that the magazine is now staffed by people involved primarily in art history, as against; let us say the moving image or other kinds of enterprises. So, this is certainly reflected to some extent in the composition of the journal. I think we publish fewer documents that are historical, less interviews with artists and fewer texts than we did before. On the other hand, over the last 10 years or so, we have increased the number of artist's project that we published in the magazine— but not steadily, and we're doing something to rectify that. Perhaps the most important thing we have done recently was simply to take on three young people [Malcolm Turvey, Mignon Nixon and George Baker] into what I always call the 'Central Committee' of the magazine. These are people, through the quality of their own work, that have a sense of what the magazine is or should be. They are people with whom we are really familiar, people we know will be active in the editing process and who may have a certain access or interest in artist and scholars of a younger generation. So that's been very important.

PEM

How do you think the journal is perceived?

AM

One thing has always disappointed me in that we don't get a response from our readers. I think there should be more letters to the editors to encourage more of an exchange between the editors and our readers— I'm disappointed that this is not happening. However, we know that we are read; we know that people have positive and negative feelings. I'll give you some of the kinds of responses that I've encountered. Someone who I think was sympathetic to the magazine before we published her in a very interesting book that we did, she said that the problem with the magazine was that the editors were writing for it all the time: we felt that this was one of the strengths of the magazine, however, I can see how someone might think we are a closed circle. It's true that all of us try to contribute to the magazine fairly often but we do publish a range of writers. Another thing, when the magazine first came out some twenty-six years ago, a number of artists said that they couldn't read it and that had to do with the theoretical direction, but I'm sure that's not the case for all artists. When I was with *Artforum* and Rosalind [Krauss] too— this was under the directorship of Coplans— there was an afternoon conference, perhaps more of a symposium that was organized here in Soho. It was the staff of *Artforum* essentially facing an audience composed of largely artists, many younger, and what we all perceived about half way through was that the audience was not reading the essays or papers that we were publishing (often worked on for months at a time), they were only reading the back of the magazine where the reviews

were published. There is a certain way that artists are very interested in reviews, and we don't publish reviews. I can see where there might be artists who never read us at all and then there may be people who simply disagree about our positions, it's bound to be the case. More than that however, I think there is a sense that the magazine does deal mostly with artists it supports, whereas it should, perhaps, be thinking about and commissioning work on artist who the journal does not naturally support. So, I think that the journal might be accused of supporting a narrow clan of artists, we felt that this is not really the case and that opening the journal to artists to do projects is one example of that, but I know that comment has been made. We are twenty six years old, personally I thought we would be lucky if we lasted for maybe three years, of course a wonderful journal like *Le Dumont* and many of what are called 'little magazines' only make three, four or five issues. But we are a kind of veteran by now so it's difficult not to see us as part of the establishment. Let me just reiterate a previous point, we were very very interested in this fusion of theory and practice and we were appalled that so many intellectuals that we knew were dependent on journals like *The New York Review of Books* and what was left of *Partisan Review*, various academic journals that we saw as irrelevant and totally dead, and so we really wanted to see if we could not form another readership part of which could be seduced away from *Art News* on the one hand and *The New York Review of Books* on the other.

PEM

What kind of theoretic issues are you dealing with at the moment?

AM

Well one of the things that I'm interested in has to do with the notion of representation/authenticity of the image as document. I'm rather interested in this in the context of the digitization of the image. There is a certain kind of— particularly in cinema, Goddard is a powerful instance of this— a certain kind of fetishization of the image, a certain of iconophilia. I think that one wants to examine this in relation to both photography and cinema. You know, Barthes wonderful book *La Chambre Claire* was written about seventeen years ago, and of course in that volume he points to the crucial function of the photograph, it says: this was here! And with the digitization of the image we can no longer say the same of an image, in fact it becomes very different, it can generate a certain malaise a kind of epistemological malaise, and we are beginning to realize that the same is true of cinema. Cinema is undergoing a kind of radicalization in the direction of digitization as well. Cinema first began to be theorized in a period of great expansion after World War I when European film production also began to be reborn. And so you have a generation of intellectuals who began theorizing the cinema with an extraordinary euphoria, it's a kind of epistemological euphoria as a new medium that can be revelatory, and they point to the optical effects that can be achieved. So filmmakers like Eisenstein and intellectuals like Benjamin, see this as providing some kind of penetration of the phenomenal world. It seems to me that the epistemological euphoria regarding film is also subject to an epistemological malaise. So, this is very interesting situation because you have someone like Baudelaire who poses for Nadar, but is nonetheless very hostile to these banal images of the world, what he wants are images of things that never were: well, digitization can do this. Another interest that is very

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different has to do with documentation of the past. Three extraordinary ruins punctuate the landscape of film history, they are all in the form of documentary, each was made by a figure of singular innovative force, and they are all at variants with their local production systems. They all concerned ethnographic projects. None of them was completed and they were all done by systems of patronage rather than systems of industrial production. So, there are these three ruins that are extremely interesting, the first is Eisenstein's Mexican Project, the next is the ethnographic work that Meyer Derrin did in Haiti (the first Guggenheim fellowship awarded in 1960) and the third is Orson Wells' Brazilian project filmed under Nelson Rockefeller's good neighbors policy—north America's formulation of what its policy towards South America might be. I'm very interested in all these figures turning at one point in their career to patronage. So, I'm concerned with the interrelation of these projects which all include music as well as dance and the relation of the foreign filmmaker to ethnographic works.

PEM

Are there any specific areas that I should look at when compiling this history?

AM

I would have a lot more to say about what studies in language brought to the project. That was very crucial in terms of film studies. The very first essay on film I wrote for *Artforum* was a translation of Bazin's 'What is Cinema?' Essentially, I wrote a critical introduction to Bazin's theory as a whole and this essay ends with a looking forward to the publication of Christian Metz's work on linguistics in film, which I then had translated by Oxford University Press. I was branded by Andy Harris (in the '60s and '70s a prominent film critic) and a number of people here in New York as the 'Evil Dragon Lady' who brought semiotics into film. I think it would be very interesting to talk about that and also the way language shaped De Stijl and Constructivism; also you should mention Hegel, linguistics and Van Duesenberg and Mondrian.

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Transcript of an Interview with Professor Joan Copjec, NYC February 14th 2003.

PEM

How did you become involved with *October*?

JC

I was a PhD. student in Cinema Studies at NYU and had been working with Annette Michelson (who was my dissertation advisor) for about a year when the relation between Craig Owens and Rosalind Krauss started to sour. I'm not sure what precipitated the disaffection, but the result was that Craig left the journal in 1980 and Annette asked me at that point to take his place. I worked a bit on *October* 16 (which was published in the spring of 1981), but officially joined the magazine as an editorial associate with *October* 17, a special film issue on 'The New Talkies.' I imagine I was invited onto the magazine for a number of reasons: 1) since Craig and Douglas (Crimp) were both students of Rosalind, there was a sense that Annette ought to be able to choose one of her students to work on the journal, especially because this would be an opportunity to devote more of attention to film; 2) before turning to film I had nearly completed a degree in English and therefore had significant editing skills; 3) I also had a strong background in the kind of theory practiced by *October*. Before coming to study film at NYU, I had done a graduate degree in the Film Unit at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where I studied from 1976-78. These were very exciting years for theory, film and otherwise, in England. *Screen* magazine was in the midst of the legendary years of its production – the years when film theory was being built from the ground up and people such as Christian Metz, Stephen Heath, Ben Brewster, Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, Jacqueline Rose, etc. were writing about film as well as translating and introducing film and (what would become known as) post-structuralist theory for an English-speaking audience. I had come to know French theory well from my seminars at the Slade, from *Screen*-readers' meetings, conferences at the famous Filmmakers' Coop, and various 'weekend schools,' as they were called. When I returned to the U.S., this theory was still relatively unknown and so I found myself a bit ahead of the curve. I had also developed an interest in architecture theory while in London, where I attended various seminars on architecture and semiotics. While working on my PhD. in film at NYU, I kept up my involvement with architecture theory through my job as Program Coordinator of Open Plan, a series of lectures on art and architecture at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. As it happened, *October* was closely connected to the Institute (which was founded by Peter Eisenman); *October* was published under the legal umbrella of the Institute and once I began working on the magazine, we moved our office (which had formerly been run out of Douglas' apartment, mainly) to the Institute's space at 8 West 40th Street. *October* had a little attic space (the Institute's magazine, *Oppositions*, which like *October* was published by MIT Press, had its office downstairs) where Douglas and I worked every day. But I was also running the Open Plan program and later I taught graduate seminars in architecture theory. All this was taking place at the Institute's space and so my involvement with the Institute and *October* overlapped absolutely – and very conveniently.

PEM

How did you come across the works of Derrida and Lacan?

JC

While I was studying at the Slade, Derrida and Lacan were two names in a big French theory soup. I was interested indiscriminately in all of it; it was all completely new to me and relatively indistinguishable. Derrida's *Of Grammatology* was the first book to stand out from the rest because it was the first to make perfect sense to me. I found Lacan more thrilling, but I couldn't understand him as well. While there was always some thread that allowed me to turn the pages, to make me feel I was following some thought path, the threads kept breaking off. But I kept finding others to grab onto and so I always had the sense that something important was going on in his work, even if it remained obscure. So, for me Derrida served as a kind of stepping stone to my understanding of Lacan. I understood Derrida first and he helped me gradually to understand Lacan. But when I read the controversy over Poe's 'Purloined Letter' *between* Derrida and Lacan, I knew immediately that Lacan was right and that Derrida had (almost deliberately, it seemed to me) misread him. The same thing happened with Foucault. I loved his work at the beginning. But I became quite critical of him after I read *The History of Sexuality*. I remember rushing to the bookstore to buy the book when it came out, reading it immediately, and then casting it aside with a clear conviction that its conceptions of both history and sexuality were terribly inadequate. In retrospect it seems I became a Lacanian through these theoretical debates with Derrida and Foucault; they forced me to take sides and to realize that I had understood more of Lacan than I knew.

PEM

How do you think others see the journal [now]?

JC

Now that I've left it? This is an interesting question because it asks me to comment on two quite different facts. On the one hand my relation to the journal has changed, from someone who was a part of it to someone who is uninvolved in its decisions and other operations and thus able to look at it more objectively, perhaps. On the other hand, *October* itself has changed because I'm not involved with it any longer. Let me say first that I do think the journal has changed a lot not only as a result of my departure, of course, but as a result of Douglas's as well. This is often remarked. In the years I worked on the journal, from 1981 through 1992, Douglas and I steadily assumed more and more responsibility not only for the day-to-day work and decisions, but for the intellectual agenda of *October*. I think this is very clear in a number of ways but it is evidenced most dramatically in the special issue on Lacan's *Television* (*October* 40), which I initiated and produced, and the special issue on AIDS (*October* 43), for which Douglas was responsible. Each issue entailed a lot of extra work, represented a significant departure from other issues, and won new audiences for the journal. Now, this sort of development is natural, I think; junior members, the younger blood, in any organization should take on a larger role as time goes on and contribute forceful new ideas. What's more, there was still a productive if uneasy balance among the four of us – Rosalind, Annette, Douglas,

and me, quite different people – in our working relationship. This balance was ruined by Douglas's departure and if I were to speak candidly I would say that *October* has lost the force, the influence, it had during the years the journal was run by the four of us. It doesn't seem to me to be as bold or innovative as it used to be. Many people bemoan the fact that the magazine is too focused on the historical avant-gardes and doesn't pay enough attention to new artists; and I think this is certainly true. It is a legitimate complaint, but it isn't the whole story. To my mind an equally important problem is that *October* no longer seems to take the initiative theoretically; it seems instead to be following theoretical trends and appears to me much more parochial.

PEM

Did you support Douglas's reasons for leaving the journal?

JC

Sadly, no. While Douglas and I were allies and friends, having worked together almost daily for 10 years, and I would have thought I would take his side in most disputes, I could not agree with his reasoning in this one. The problem arose from a special issue Douglas had commissioned on queer theory and film. A couple of the essays submitted were judged by Rosalind, Annette, and me to be substandard and therefore unsuitable for publication in *October*. I could understand Douglas's feeling uncomfortable about rejecting essays he had commissioned. We had this sort of problem at *October* from time to time: one of the editors would feel embarrassed about rejecting an essay that was written by a friend or someone we didn't not want to alienate for some reason and an argument would ensue about what to do. Sometimes the embarrassed editor would give in and agree that the essay had to be rejected; a couple of times we revised the essay so drastically (actually, it was I who had this dirty job) that it was hardly recognizable to its author; or the dissenting editors would be persuaded that *October's* reputation was secure enough that we could afford to publish an essay that was not very good. But Douglas did not plead for the inclusion of the offending essays on the grounds that he was personally uncomfortable about rejecting them; he argued instead that 'quality was a right-wing issue.' That is, he argued that *October* ought not to have quality standards, that standards as such were oppressive because they were designed to silence certain voices. With this position I simply could not agree, in fact, I adamantly disagreed. A magazine has to present its point of view; it has no obligation to open its pages to anyone who wants to speak. After this battle broke out, Douglas left and the balance that had existed among the editors could not be regained. It was obvious that *October* could not continue with just the three of us, so Rosalind began inviting a number of her former students and close associates to join the magazine as editors. This was fine, I thought, but there wasn't enough diversity among the people she chose and so I lobbied to add a few of my own colleagues who I thought would add other dimensions to the magazine. This proved to be a disaster and led, fairly quickly, to my resignation.

PEM

Could you speak about that?

JC

The first thing to say is that the colleagues I added to the editorial board were Homi Bhabha, Parveen Adams, and Slavoj Žižek.³⁴⁰ I had in the past invited each of them to contribute essays to the journal and so it made sense to me to argue for their greater involvement, even though I had to push hard for the original inclusion of each of them. Slavoj Žižek had never published anything in English when I brought several of his essays on Hitchcock to *October* and fought to publish them. There was considerable resistance, especially from Annette, who finally gave in and allowed me to publish a few of the essays in *October* 38. This was in the fall of 1986, three years before Slavoj's groundbreaking *The Sublime Object of Ideology* was published by Verso. I fought a lesser battle to get Homi's 'Of Mimicry and Man' into *October* 28 in a special psychoanalytic issue I edited in spring 1984. At any rate, by the time of Douglas's departure in 1990, resistance to Homi had lessened and his inclusion on the editorial board did not create any problem. There was, however, what seemed like an allergic reaction to Parveen and Slavoj on the part of Rosalind, Annette, and most of the other editors whom Rosalind had added to the board. I had asked Parveen to edit a special issue on psychoanalysis after Douglas left and she produced *October* 58, 'Rendering the Real.' At a bizarre editorial meeting Rosalind read a fax sent by Yve-Alain Bois, who was unable to attend the meeting, in which he castigated Parveen's special issue and vowed that *October* would never publish anything like it again. It was clear that this fax had been dictated by Rosalind and that it amounted to a kind of declaration of war because it was simply the opening shot in an attack on that issue by other editors present, including Hal Foster, whose lack of support surprised me, especially later when he went on to publish a book on *The Return of the Real*. At this same meeting, several suggestions which Slavoj and I had made were rudely rejected. We had proposed an *October* book of essays by Jacques-Alain Miller, the brilliant Lacanian theorist and literary executive of Lacan's work. Although this proposal had been accepted at an earlier meeting and had been sent on to MIT Press, it was announced at this meeting that the other editors now had second thoughts and had decided to reject the proposal. Moreover, two other proposals for special issues – one on 'The Cogito and the Unconscious' and the other on 'Radical Evil' – were also turned down.

PEM

Why were these projects rejected?

JC

I can only tell you why the other *October* editors *claimed* to reject them. These claims were obviously trumped up and will sound silly to anyone who hears them now, as they did to Slavoj and me then. About 'The Cogito and the Unconscious' they said that the basic idea was banal and that nothing new or interesting could be said on the subject. About 'Radical Evil' they said that it sounded 'flakey,' like 'something *Semio-texte* would do.' After this meeting, I never again spoke to Annette or Rosalind; I simply went home and typed out a two-sentence resignation. Almost immediately after this, I started

³⁴⁰ A leader of the Slovenian Lacanian School: see Slavoj Žižek, 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London, Verso, and Wright, E. and E. Wright (eds) 1999. *The Žižek Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell.

my own book series at Verso Press, called the S series, and the first volume I published in it, *Supposing the Subject*, was basically an implementation of the 'Cogito and the Unconscious' proposal Slavoj and I submitted to *October*; the second volume in the series was *Radical Evil*. Slavoj also started a book series at Duke University Press called SIC; the second volume of which was *The Cogito and the Unconscious*. Slavoj still edits this series at Duke and another at Verso; just recently he began a third book series at MIT Press, ironically, since MIT is still the publisher of *October*. After three volumes, I gave up my S series, but publish a psychoanalytic journal called *Umbr(a)* with my graduate students from Buffalo. The break with *October* has been very productive in the sense that it made room for these other publishing ventures.

PEM

What kinds of projects are you working on now?

JC

I've just published another book with MIT called *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* and am writing a book on shame and Iranian Cinema with the working title, 'Mental Dams.' I became interested in affect, and particularly in shame, while writing the last book. People always complain that Lacan neglected affect in his theory, but this is far from being the case. I want to show how he distinguishes affect and emotion and also to argue for the political purchase of affect in his theory. In the mist of researching existing work on shame, however, I became interested in Iranian cinema and it suddenly occurred to me that shame was an important aspect of this cinema.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ Joan Copjec: 1981-83 Editorial Associate, 1983-87 Associate Editor, 1987-92 (Senior) Editor. Publications in *October* #17 The New Talkies (summer 1981), #21 Fassbinder, #23 Film Bodies, #28 Discipline Ships, #32 Hollis Frampton, #40 Television, #58 Rendering the Real. Other Special Issues: #25 Sexuality of Christ, #35 Moscow Diaries, #36 Bataille, #42 Broodthaers, #43 AIDS, #61 Identity in Question. Last Issue #62 (Fall 92) (source, Professor Joan Copjec)