

**A Modern Critique of Modernism:  
Lukács, Greenberg, Ideology<sup>1</sup>**

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## I

I would like to juxtapose two seemingly different mid-century characterizations of Modernism: one from 1955 by the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács, in his essay "The Ideology of Modernism,"<sup>2</sup> the other by the American art critic and theorist Clement Greenberg, in his very short but influential 1960 essay "Modernist Painting."<sup>3</sup> And to best appreciate this juxtaposition it helps to recall that while Lukács is best known for a path-breaking reorientation of Marxism, prompted by his 1923 book *History and Class Consciousness*,<sup>4</sup> Greenberg is known for his championing of the American painter Jackson Pollock, and Abstract Expressionist art in general, in a series of reviews and essays published during the 1940s.<sup>5</sup> My purpose here is neither to defend nor to criticize either of these essays' characterizations of Modernism. Rather, I hope to present them as mutually illuminating one another; in particular, I want to suggest that Lukács and Greenberg are traditionalists insofar as their primary concern was in regard to how the cultural values of the past might best be preserved and thereby, though perhaps this is curious, transform the future. I will therefore want finally to suggest that each of these aesthetic theories is the making manifest of hope. Or, to paraphrase George Kubler, these aesthetic theories are the shape of hope, indeed of the increasingly desperate, though circumscribed, character of hope.<sup>6</sup> And if Greenberg and Lukács shared but one thing, in addition to traditionalism, it was a desperation in regard to their contemporary culture.

For a less desperate expression of hope, though one nonetheless also centered around the shaping produced by artworks, we might retreat from the cold war era to the period between the world wars and attend to Virginia Woolf—incidentally, if you listen with the right ears to the following passage from *A Room of One's Own* you might also discern Woolf's socialism. She writes:

If one shuts one's eyes and thinks of the novel as a whole, it would seem to be a creation owning a certain looking-glass likeness to life, though of course with simplifications and distortions innumerable. At any rate, it is a structure leaving a shape on the mind's eye ... This shape, I thought, thinking back over certain famous novels, starts in one the kind of emotion that is appropriate to it. But that emotion at once blends itself with others, for the 'shape' is not made by the relation of stone to stone, but by the relation of human being to human being. Thus a novel starts in us all sorts of antagonistic and opposed emotions. Life conflicts with something that is not life.<sup>7</sup>

Lukács, I suspect, would fully endorse Woolf's description of how some novels move us, since he theorized the novel in particular as an attempt to conjure life precisely as what he insisted was a totality, despite what he took to be the novel's inherent limitations—just what Woolf calls its innumerable "simplifications and distortions." The telos of any novel is, for Lukács, the restoration of the wholeness of life. His complaint, in the essay under consideration here, is that some Modernist novels have forsaken the impulse toward

wholeness, which is, according to him, just what gave rise to the novel form in the first place.<sup>8</sup>

In order best to understand how the Modernist novel—and indeed Modernism—came to turn against itself, that is, became ideological, we need to examine Lukács's account of the relation between Naturalism and Modernism. The former he describes as an aesthetic form or technique consisting of a simple, bald enumeration of facts, or rather of mere details, since 'fact' is too strong in at least two registers: 'fact' implies a context of meaningfulness as well as some relation to reality. Lukács denies that Naturalism seeks either. According to him, Naturalism is the aesthetic attempt to avoid both meaningfulness and reality. And Lukács finds just such avoidance pre-eminently in the work of Emile Zola. There is nothing contentious in designating Zola a novelist of Naturalism, since it seems everyone agrees on this point, except of course Zola himself, who instead took Flaubert to be the first Naturalist. What is instead at stake is what Naturalism amounts to—its shape, if you will. Let me offer as an example of Naturalism—and hence something that would raise Lukács's hackles—a passage from Zola's 1880 novel *Nana*. The following passage occurs toward the end of the novel in the midst of an evening sometime during the late 1860s at the house of Nana, one of the wealthiest courtesans in Paris:

The company went upstairs to take coffee in the little drawing-room, where a couple of lamps shed a soft glow over the pink hangings and the lacquer and old gold of the knick-knacks. At that hour of the evening the light played discreetly over coffers, bronzes and china, lighting up silver and ivory inlaid work, picking out the shining contours of a carved stick, and covering a panel with the shimmering gleams of watered silk. The fire, which had been burning since the afternoon, was dying out in glowing embers.<sup>9</sup>

We might surmise that for Lukács what is absent from this passage in particular, and from Naturalism in general, is symptomatic of the world it attempts to describe: specifically, a lack of cohesion that is then compensated for by a surfeit of stimulation. In lieu of integrated experience, a smorgasbord of sensation—to visualize the aesthetic dynamic of Naturalism one need only picture to oneself a painting from the dominant style in France contemporaneous with Zola's *Nana*: Impressionism. A Monet water-lily painting offers no occasion for a unification of experience—I might add that it most likely intended none—but instead proclaims, as it were, that it is nothing but surface, or even surfaces. There is neither literal nor figurative depth there; the eye tends to skid off the Impressionist surface just as the intellect finds precious little purchase in the foregoing Zola passage. Indeed, the best two-word summary judgment—actually the only two-word summary judgment I am aware of—in regard to this period in the history of painting, say from the first Impressionist exhibition of 1874 to the onset of Cubism in Braque and Picasso around 1908, is Duchamp's expletive that it is nothing but retinal painting.<sup>10</sup> And though previously I understood Duchamp's complaint as directed against pretty, that is, pleasing paintings, I now understand it as a Lukácsian complaint against an aesthetic

program that constrains itself too thoroughly—hence Duchamp's cultured charge against the narrowness of painting tout court.

Lukács's implicit distinction is between perception and experience, and we might here map this distinction onto his fundamental dichotomy of Naturalism and Realism. Realism, the positive term in Lukács's pair, is what serves the novel's constitutive aspiration to wholeness. Realism takes as its model—and though we might disagree as to whether this model actually exists or not, nonetheless it takes as its model—the unity of experience, whereas Naturalism imitates perception, or perhaps at most only its effects.<sup>11</sup> But let us here leave Realism aside and continue our pursuit of Lukács's diagnosis of Modernism via its relation to Naturalism.

Now, though he takes Naturalism to be not only the immediate predecessor but also the origin of Modernism, technically Lukács finds fault neither with the technique nor with the perspective of Naturalism. For, as a symptom, Naturalism is, so to speak, a natural reflection of late nineteenth century life; as Lukács explains, "Life under capitalism is, often rightly, presented as a distortion (a petrification or paralysis) of the human substance."<sup>12</sup> Lukács reads this distorted presentation of life as at once an accurate imitation as well as a protest against it.<sup>13</sup> Both Naturalism and Modernism are composed of, in Lukács's sense, natural—if even because empty—reflections of the increasing spiritual emptiness within the capitalist organization of life. However, rather than assert that Naturalism is a "natural" development—which the term "reflection" also might imply—let us instead understand Lukács as claiming that Naturalism is a thoroughly historical phenomenon. Naturalism, then, is a historically appropriate reflection of superficial, fragmented life. Lukács's orientation here—just as it is in his 1916 *Theory of the Novel*—is to pose the question as to why, at a certain historical moment, aesthetic form takes the shape of Naturalism, that is, of a reproduction of perception rather than experience, or for that matter a reproduction of anything else. And here is an apt place from which to observe Lukács's general notion of aesthetic theory, which we might thus characterize as a commitment to a realm of intellectual reflection on those human reflections—call them artworks—which are themselves at once both blind and full of insight.

So that the blindness, if you will, of Naturalism consists of its failure to recognize itself as an imitation of truncated life, while its insight resides in the persistence with which this imitation is nonetheless propounded. Lukács, then, is consistent in not finding only fault with Naturalism as it is, but a historically bounded reflection unable to realize its aspiration to wholeness. And strictly speaking, he does not even find fault with Modernism; it is instead only against what he calls the "ideology" of Modernism that he complains. (For how could anyone ever find fault with any reflection per se?)

Still, there is what Lukács calls a "continuity" from Naturalism to Modernism, and he cautions that this continuity is limited to what he describes as their shared "underlying ideological principle." And he adds, somewhat ominously, "I would suggest that the ever-increasing part played by psychopathology was one of the main features of the continuity."<sup>14</sup> Lukács goes on to cite Alfred Kerr, the Berlin drama critic writing early in this century, to the effect that after Zola Naturalism became a kind of poetics of neurosis, with the explanation that Naturalism turns to psychopathology in order to escape the everyday dreariness of life under capitalism.<sup>15</sup>

Lukács's account of the transformation of aesthetic form is thoroughly Hegelian: first, in what it sees as the developments within Naturalism from Zola to early twentieth-century German poetry; then in the transition from Naturalism to Modernism; and, finally, in what I hope to show he argues is the mistaken development of Modernism into ideological Modernism. In all three of these accounts aesthetic form changes because it either becomes aware of itself, or worse, form becomes further entrenched in its blindness because it seeks to avoid knowing itself. In short, while Lukács believes early Naturalism was but a transcription of perception, he comes to agree with Kerr that Naturalism's further development is prompted by an increasing unease with a desperate and dehumanizing condition as well as with an increasing dissatisfaction with Naturalism itself.

For Lukács, the crucial juncture where one might best judge the adequacy of any aesthetic form is just here, where form ought to rise to the occasion of worsening conditions and so too rise to the occasion of form's own continuing and increasing inadequacy. Consequently, Lukács asserts that though Naturalism turns to psychopathology because of an urgent aesthetic need—and it would be wrong to think that for Lukács an aesthetic need ranks below any other need—he nonetheless suggests that Naturalism employs psychopathology as a mere decorative device. That is, Naturalism's failure is to have responded only decorously to a real need. Again, it helps here to appreciate the depth of Lukács's Hegelianism. If, for Hegel famously, philosophy "is its own time apprehended in thoughts,"<sup>16</sup> for Lukács the novel is instead the symptom of philosophy's inability to apprehend its own time. It is as if Lukács took all too seriously—and I think thereby correctly - Novalis's stunning notion that "novels arise out of the shortcomings of history."<sup>17</sup> The novel, then, is the philosophical formulation of time being out of joint with reason.

Whatever prompted Naturalism as a formal response—aesthetic form, that is—remains a real, unresolved dilemma because of the feebleness of what nevertheless remains a protest. Although that protest, as we have seen, is for Lukács inevitably against capitalism, its force is blunted not by Naturalism's employment of psychopathology, but rather by its insufficient embrace of its own symptom. It is then, according to Lukács, with Robert Musil's obsession with psychopathology (think of Ulrich in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*) that Naturalism's "decorative" poetics of neurosis is transformed into what Lukács calls "a moral protest against capitalism,"<sup>18</sup> It is this transition, or transformation, that requires scrutiny, for it is just here where Lukács gives full weight to the power of the aesthetic—what he will elsewhere term critical realism<sup>19</sup>—to lay bare, as well as to criticize, the very condition which first gave rise to it as protest.

Musil serves as the key figure for Lukács in the "Ideology of Modernism" essay because he is taken to be at once both the engine which pulls Naturalism out of its decorative poetics of neurosis as well as the foundation upon which Modernism founders. In short, aesthetically, Musil succeeds too well: "What served, with Musil, as the ideological basis of a new typology—escape into neurosis as a protest against the evils of society—becomes with other modernist writers an immutable condition humaine."<sup>20</sup> Musil embraced Naturalism's symptomatic psychopathology, other writers merely adopted it.

Here we have the core of Lukács's objection to Modernism, or, as I would prefer to put it for him, here is where Modernism becomes ideological: when its insights and techniques become "immutable." And psychopathology, again according to Lukács, is the route by means of which Modernism presents a particular historical, human condition as unchangeable, and indeed universal.<sup>21</sup>

There is another thought, and connection, lurking unexpressed in Lukács's formulation of what ails Modernism; and perhaps a means toward it is to ask after the implicit connection Lukács assumes between immutability and the production of meaning. He writes:

Every human action is based on a presupposition of its inherent meaningfulness, at least to the subject. Absence of meaning makes a mockery of action and reduces art to naturalistic description ... As the ideology of most modernist writers asserts the unalterability of outward reality (even if this is reduced to a mere state of consciousness) human activity is, a priori, rendered impotent and robbed of meaning.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the very possibility of meaning depends, for Lukács, upon the assumption (or might we say in Modernism: the hope) that human action is capable of producing an effect. Regardless of the intention, it is precisely the function of the ideology of Modernism to jettison this assumption. Lukács's unformulated thought is thus akin to Herbert Marcuse's insight: ideology's affirmation of what already is, is less the assigning of a positive value to the status quo, and more the withholding of the possibility that there might be some alternative to it.<sup>23</sup> In short, ideology is a species of resignation. The true, rather than ideological, aesthetic of Modernism would instead consist of an opposition to just such resignation. Ideology, rather than being mere false consciousness, is more like the simple absence of it.<sup>24</sup>

Here we might attempt to trace back Lukács's conception of the origins of meaning in order to more fully appreciate just how large a task he assigns to Modernism and, by extension, to the aesthetic as a whole, which is for him perhaps the realm of human aspiration. If, as we have just read, Lukács finds meaning presupposed by all human action, how might he answer the question as to why artworks come into existence—that is, why, in particular, do just these meaningful things come to be produced? What sort of meaning is presupposed by the human action of making art? We already have a preliminary response from Lukács in his description of Naturalist and Modernist works as protests against life according to—or, shall we say, under—capitalism. And if we now join this description with Lukács's uncontentious assertion that all human action presupposes an "inherent meaningfulness," we arrive at what I believe would be Lukács's answer to the question of why art exists at all: it exists as an attempt to meliorate a condition in which an insufficiency of meaning is perceived. Art is, in short, the attempt to fill an absence of meaning which ought anyway to have been presupposed. But still more bluntly: art under capitalism originates with the perception (no: intuition) that the inherent meaningfulness of human action has vanished, or at least been usurped. The category of the aesthetic is thus inherently dialectical for Lukács: it is at once both the

symptom of a deficiency of meaning within human life while it is also the attempt, quite literally, to make meaning, and thereby to restore meaningfulness to human action.<sup>25</sup>

In order to flesh out, for an aesthetic theory, the contours of this restoration of meaning, we need to keep especially in mind that it is, according to Lukács, within and according to human action that meaning is presupposed. The implication, I believe, is that in order for aesthetic things (artworks) to be meaningful, they must be active. Indeed, I want to suggest that it is especially in regard to action that we might best understand where and how Lukács would like a critical realism to function.

But before I attempt to specify just how 'action' occurs aesthetically, allow me first to explain the special sense in which Lukács's realism is to be understood. The ideology of Modernism transforms the active potential of aesthetic production into the static acceptance of the status quo. Hence, for Lukács, ideology functions as the inducement to turn away from the assumption of meaning within human activity. Ideology's inducement to turn away succeeds not so much by way of substituting a static image for active making (this would look more like a theory of entertainment—which, by the way, is in this sense a profoundly ideological enterprise insofar as entertainment's dynamic is to proffer stimulation in lieu of fulfillment—how else to explain the feeling, after one has been entertained, of being at once fatigued and empty), but rather by forestalling any active realization of potentiality through the acceptance of a static, universal condition.

Ideology here precludes the very possibility of action (or let us call it praxis), not because it begins with the embrace of one image or another of human subjectivity, but rather because it adopts as a precondition for any human action the premise that, in effect, all possible forms of human life have already been realized. Psychopathology, or at least according to Lukács its prevalence in Modernist literature, is thus the specific historical form through which reference to human potentiality is denied.

For Lukács, the aesthetic is always an ineluctably historical response to specific historical dilemmas, which nonetheless formulates itself as response by assuming a universal context, and Lukács employs the term *Weltanschauung* to signify the unstable blend of particularity and universality. Here is, if you will, the trajectory of aesthetic form, which arises only out of particularity (and conflict) to move solely toward universality (and reconciliation). Insofar as Naturalism and the ideology of Modernism deny the very particularity from which they originate, Naturalism and ideological Modernism are not only anti-aesthetic but anti-historical as well. This is, I believe, the crux of Lukács's objection to any aesthetic movement becoming ideological, because it thereby cancels itself.

The aesthetic is, for him, precisely that realm wherein human potential elsewhere prohibited is instead promoted and indeed activated. But ideological Modernism deactivates the aesthetic as a realm of possibility. Ideological Modernism is then anti-modern in its disavowal of the possibility that art—as something other than post-historical repetition—might still evoke human potentiality. It is ironic yet tragic that the aesthetic becomes its opposite: the place where the fecklessness of human action, indeed even human desire, is insisted upon. And yet, perhaps the despair of Modernism's ideology follows from Modernism's aspiration and success.

But how, and in what, did Modernism aspire and succeed? For Lukács its success lay in its production of potentiality, and hence, of reality. Reality, and so too real human

subjectivity, consists for Lukács in an interplay between what he calls abstract and concrete potentiality. Whereas the former "belongs wholly to the realm of subjectivity,"<sup>26</sup> the latter occurs in turn between an "individual's subjectivity and objective reality."<sup>27</sup> Modernism's retreat from objective reality is likewise a retreat from concrete potentiality and hence from subjectivity itself. Even though Lukács occasionally makes it appear that the failure of Modernism is a result of its withdrawal from reality—for example, in his complaint that Musil offers no "concrete criticism"—the reality that Modernism turns away from is not just the alienated, reified one that confronts subjectivity as an inhuman impediment, but so too Modernism turns away from the reality of subjectivity's own existence, which originates and resides in the space between abstract and concrete potentiality: "If the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality vanishes, if man's inwardness is identified with an abstract subjectivity, human personality must necessarily disintegrate."<sup>28</sup>

Further, because aesthetic phenomena are, according to Lukács, always historically specific responses, Modernism itself—its techniques as well as its underlying *Weltanschauung*—is most appropriately considered a solution rather than the solution to a historically specific configuration that impedes human action. In this light, ideology appears as the elevation of some historically-bounded particular to a universal condition, or, in short, to totality. It is with this critique in mind that Lukács distinguishes the work of Thomas Mann from that of James Joyce. Although both authors employ the same technique, *dialogue interieur*, they achieve, according to Lukács, opposite results. Mann employs the technique as a means toward constructing and revealing an underlying *Weltanschauung*, whereas Joyce, at least according to Lukács, makes this technique absolute, makes it into an end in itself. Thereby the place wherein human potentiality might have flourished—the aesthetic sphere—by finding refuge from a surfeit of determination, is foreclosed. And, ironically enough, this foreclosure of potentiality occurs within the sphere that exists precisely in order to imagine and activate potentiality. There is an enlightening parallel to be drawn here between Lukács and Adorno insofar as both consider the aesthetic a realm of potential freedom just insofar as it serves as a refuge from inhuman conditions. And although Adorno diagnoses the decay of the aesthetic to be a result of its complicity with entertainment while Lukács, perhaps, faults Modernism itself for having become ideological, both agree in effect in judging that the aesthetic is less and less a mimesis of human possibility and more and more a mimesis of stunted life under capitalism. For Lukács, capitalism becomes a totality with the aid of the ideology of Modernism. Totality means here not that absolutely everything is under the sway of one thing, but rather that alternatives are no longer capable of being imagined. Insofar as the aesthetic sphere, when converted to ideology, gives up just its ability to imagine some complex of human affairs other than one resembling the status quo, the aesthetic thereby becomes part of the totalizing process and, strictly speaking, no longer aesthetic.<sup>29</sup>

## II

If we turn now to Greenberg's formulation of the origin as well as the reach of Modernism, we find that it parallels Lukács's in regard both to the continuity within



which Modernism arises as well as its totalizing sway. Indeed, although Greenberg opens his short essay with a recognition of the expansion of Modernism—"Modernism includes more than just art and literature. By now it includes almost the whole of what is truly alive in culture"<sup>30</sup>—he nonetheless concludes with an affirmation of Modernism's origination in tradition and traditional culture: "Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. Art is, among other things, continuity."<sup>31</sup> Greenberg likewise remarks on the self-imposed limitation which Modernism so vehemently embraces. So while Lukács finds that Modernism's self-limitation results from a withdrawal into psychopathology, Greenberg locates Modernist painting's self-limitation in the jettisoning of any and all non-painterly supports—Greenberg famously asserted that Modernist painting sought to purify itself of everything extraneous to painting, which he took to be two-dimensionality and color. Both Lukács and Greenberg nonetheless agree that the limitations are self-imposed as well as following historically from the traditions in which fiction and painting, respectively, find themselves.

Still, it is in the characterization and naming of the tradition out of which Modernism (and its ideology) arises that we find an important distinction between Greenberg and Lukács. In lauding Kant as the first Modernist, Greenberg makes self-limitation the premier virtue of Modernism. And Greenberg goes on to describe Modernist art (but recall that this includes for him all that is most truly alive) as having its greatest affinity with the procedures and spirit of modern science. Although Lukács fully embraces the dynamic of self-definition, and likewise designates Kant its originator, his accord with Greenberg would appear to stop abruptly when the central dynamic of the project of Modernism prescribes in advance the boundaries of that process. This is precisely what Lukács criticizes as the absoluteness of technique. But for Greenberg it is just this power of procedure which gives to the productions of Modernism their ability to be something more than idiosyncratic expression and something more than repetitious reflections of the past. In order to flesh out the content of this discord between Greenberg and Lukács in regard to the status of technique and procedure, I will pursue a perhaps perverse intuition: that Greenberg's formulation of the cultural import of Modernism is best revealed not in his voluminous comments on painting, sculpture, and literature, but rather in his sporadic, ambiguous, and contradictory characterizations of science. Let me begin at the beginning, in the 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" with which he launched his career: "It was no accident, therefore, that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically—and geographically, too—with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe."<sup>32</sup> The term "scientific" functions here as more than mere endorsement of what Greenberg no doubt then took to be the correctness of that revolutionary thought. It also serves to designate a reflexive, self-defining, and systematic procedure, since these three attributes are just what characterize the avant-garde for Greenberg. The next appearance of the term in the same essay occurs in the following: "Kitsch, by virtue of a rationalized technique that draws on science and industry, has erased this distinction [between those values only to be found in art and the values which can be found elsewhere] in practice."<sup>33</sup> Kitsch, the rear-guard complement to the avant-garde, is produced by the same reflexive procedure that is the hallmark of the avant-garde. The crucial difference, however, is that while the avant-garde is a reflexivity

that refuses to detach itself from reflection per se—Greenberg even describes avant-garde culture as "the imitation of imitating"<sup>34</sup>—kitsch is precisely the detachment of reflexivity such that it thereby becomes available as mere procedure, rather than a ceaseless process of self-definition: "Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility [to the values of genuine culture ... Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations."<sup>35</sup>

There is, then, at the very beginning of Greenberg, a deep ambiguity that expresses itself in regard to what we might hope, or fear, from the proceduralism of science.<sup>36</sup> I cannot help but note, however, the curious disanalogy between art and science in Greenberg, in that he spends much of his life policing the demarcation line between genuine and ersatz culture, between art and entertainment, indeed must even maintain the line between good and bad art, and yet allows himself a genuine openness toward the products of science, whatever its pursuits.<sup>37</sup> This becomes all the more curious when we consider how, according to "Modernist Painting," modern art is inextricably enmeshed in scientific procedure, indeed might best be considered an outgrowth of it: "Kantian self-criticism [recall that the essay's opening paragraph declares Kant the first Modernist], as it now turns out, has found its fullest expression in science rather than philosophy, and when it began to be applied in art, the latter was brought closer in real spirit to scientific method than ever before."<sup>38</sup> If we compress the terms self-criticism and Modernism, as I believe this passage invites us, and append Greenberg's assessment that science has succeeded in being more fully Modernist (modern?) than philosophy, then we might better appreciate the extent to which Greenberg's Modernism is procedural rather than intellectual.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it is just the primacy of procedure which helps assure that the purity of Modernist painting will not become tainted by anything extraneous to procedure itself. In "Modernist Painting" Greenberg insists upon the origination and legitimacy of consistency: "That visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in any other order of experience, is a notion whose only justification lies in scientific consistency."<sup>40</sup> That is, there is nothing meaningful to be gained by the fact that Modernist painting proceeded by adopting scientific proceduralism. Indeed, Greenberg puts science and Modernist painting in a still more undermotivated relation to one another: "From the point of view of art in itself, its convergence with science happens to be a mere accident ... What their convergence does show, however, is the profound degree to which Modernist art belongs to the same specific cultural tendency as modern science, and this is of the highest significance as a historical fact."<sup>41</sup> It is lamentable that Greenberg did not go on to specify just how that shared "cultural tendency" might best be described, nor did he give any explicit indication as to the content of its "highest significance."

We might nonetheless speculate; and since speculation, like critique, is more likely to succeed when it begins with an evaluation of how something fails to achieve its own concept, let us proceed by considering how most Modernist painting failed to live up to what Greenberg thought it ought to be. "Modernist Painting" is in this regard an elaboration of the central theme of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch": a description of the cultural imperative propelling the avant-garde;<sup>42</sup> that is, both essays describe not what cultural artifacts should look like, but rather what procedures are more likely to lead to

successful art-making. Put this way, a remarkable affinity appears within Greenberg's theorizing between the telos of science and that of art, or, more properly, culture. Kitsch, we should recall, is strictly speaking an abomination against culture rather than against art. Specifically, kitsch is the failure of culture to pursue its own interest, just as bad science results from any agenda being imposed on it. We need thus to revise our earlier characterization of kitsch as a detached, purely procedural phenomenon. Rather, kitsch's impurity arises not from the cultural and scientific achievement of procedural detachment, but from detachment having made possible the ironic historical situation in which the cultural success of autonomous art production turns against the very culture that gave rise to it. This is, I believe, the crux of Greenberg's cultural theory, and it is the failure to fully appreciate the explanatory role of science that explains, in part, the continuing rampant misreadings of him.

Science too aspires to be avant-garde, which is to say that science attempts to produce the next scientific fact or theory. Next and scientific are the key terms for specifying the dynamic of the avant-garde. Next of course implies the continuity of tradition, of what has already occurred; scientific is a still further purification of that very continuity. Indeed, it is unremarkable to realize that regardless of the meaning we want to ascribe to any contemporary scientific achievement, it counts as such just to the extent it is taken to be an advance over what came before it. So too for Greenberg's assessment of avant-garde art. This likeness helps us understand Greenberg's consistent lack of interest in what might be called the content or meaning of a painting, just as one might imagine a truly consistent scientist's lack of interest in the meaning of any particular scientific advance. Or, to put it differently, the content or meaning of any artwork ought to amount, as exclusively as possible, to the question of whether or not the work is an advance, in short, whether it is avant-garde. The underlying scientism of Greenberg's cultural theory is more fully evident in one of his best-known essays, the 1959 "Case for Abstract Art," chronologically the essay which precedes "Modernist Painting." Greenberg here rests his case for abstract art on the cultural significance of disinterestedness, indeed prescribes it as a kind of "antidote":

Abstract art comes, on this level, as a relief, an arch-example of something that does not have to mean, or be useful for, anything other than itself. And it seems fitting, too, that abstract art should at present flourish most in this country. If American society is indeed given over as no other society has been to purposeful activity and material production, then it is right that it should be reminded, in extreme terms, of the essential nature of disinterested activity.<sup>43</sup>

This is a richly ambiguous passage, beginning as it does with the "relief from purposive activity, that is, labor, provided by contemporary culture. And yet it concludes with a return not only to purposiveness—we are to be "reminded" of something "essential" about ourselves—but with a kind of moralizing suggestion that there is indeed some labor, but now a humanizing one, that remains to be pursued. Hence our relief from the non-humanizing labor of "purposeful activity and material production" liberates us for the essentially human activity of disinterestedness, which is to say, free, autonomous activity.

But why, especially in light of this promise of a disinterested autonomous life, should the artwork be fettered to whatever precedes it?

Just here is it apposite to consider why the criterion for judging whether any particular artwork is in fact an occasion for the realization of human freedom becomes the question of whether or not it is the next one.<sup>44</sup> And to best understand this conjunction, let us consider how, on Greenberg's account, some artworks fail to do so. Greenberg offers a systematic account of just such failure in his 1971 essay "The Counter-Avant-Garde"<sup>45</sup> And it is in Greenberg's diagnosis of the cause of this failure that we find a deep affinity with Lukács's critique of Modernism's ideology. If "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is a somewhat ahistorical examination of how culture fails to live up to its own concept, then the "Counter-Avant-Garde" is a historically specific diagnosis of how culture fell short of itself when "avant-gardism" replaced avant-garde culture. The transformation of avant-garde to avant-gardism is a precise parallel to Lukács's critique of Modernism's decay into ideology. In the 1971 essay, Greenberg even goes so far as to critically specify the meaning of the epithet "academic," which was the term of abuse he had hurled most prodigiously over the previous thirty years at nearly all artwork he considered as having fallen short.<sup>46</sup> "Academicism," he writes, is "an aggressive tendency inside the precincts of the avant-garde, and not just a matter of imitativeness or belatedness."<sup>47</sup> He continues, "I would add that Dada and Surrealism, insofar as they were avant-gardist . . . constituted a first attempt not just to modify, but to capture the avant-garde—from within as it were—in order to turn it against itself."<sup>48</sup>

It is important here to specify avant-gardism's relation to kitsch. If kitsch results from the aping of the effects of avant-garde culture, especially the avant-garde's development of procedure, then avant-gardism, by contrast, is the production of the appearance of avant-garde culture. Avant-gardism is the more insidious because its telos is to make itself—at least in appearance—indistinguishable from the avant-garde. Put differently, avant-gardism—i.e., Dada and Surrealism—is Modernist art's kitsch. Greenberg puts it as follows: "It's one of avant-gardism's great theoretical services to have demonstrated that the look, at least, of the unconventional, the adventurous, the advanced, can be standardized enough to be made available to the tritest sensibility."<sup>49</sup> Standardization needs to be understood here as something more than yet another accomplishment of modernity. It ought, in addition, to be formulated as a specific, profound power.<sup>50</sup>

In particular, standardization, an achievement of procedure and technique, consists of an ability to provide the means by which some productions might disavow whatever it is out of which they arose. That is, in kitsch-making, procedure and technique purify objects of their historic particularity. But, and this is crucial, because the particularity effaced by the purification of procedure is the circumstance of its advent—or, let us say, the fact that a work occurs in history—art, in contrast to kitsch, will embrace rather than efface its circumstantial origin. Therefore, and because Greenberg recognizes that art-making proceeds according to the same proceduralism of kitsch-making, art will have to be distinguished from kitsch by a very different relation to its own history, so that a wholly different product might result from one and the same procedure. (The best evidence in Greenberg for the affinity, via procedure, between kitsch

and art is his underappreciated quip in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" that a rear-guard nearly always accompanies an advanced one.<sup>51</sup>)

In what therefore appears at first a seemingly trivial contrast with kitsch, Greenberg insists that the artwork requires only a minimal historicity: that it merely be next in sequence. Philip Fisher has in fact taken Greenberg to task for this severe restriction of the notion of history to sequence. Fisher writes that for Greenberg, "to consider the finished work as a part of an ordered past, would define it completely. The work of art is its place in the sequence of art history which is itself seen as an explanation, like the history of invention."<sup>52</sup> If we substitute "science" for Fisher's "invention t" we might then read his conclusion as being in parallel with our exposition of Greenberg's conception of what constitutes successful science. The question of Greenberg's traditionalism therefore might be raised here in regard to his commitment to science as a cultural institution, and further, his commitment to art's institutionalization, namely, the museum. Fisher reads Greenberg as fundamentally committed to just this, and perhaps only this: "What Greenberg provides is a way of immediately valuing an art object in terms of its potential future as a part of a museum collection ... For Greenberg the painting proposes the series of which it is a member, and by its membership it makes itself authentic."<sup>53</sup>

Avant-gardism, on the other hand, renounces even the minimal historical component embedded in Modernist art's serialization. Avant-gardism instead produces only the look of being historical, the appearance of nextness. The one thing Greenberg would not have avant-garde art-making capable of, no matter how appropriately and insistently procedural, is a detachment from the circumstances it arose in response to. And yet, curiously, the content or meaning of those circumstances matters not at all as it is rather the bond between contemporary artwork and whatever is taken as its precedent work that seemingly defines it as artwork. It is therefore not procedure per se that bears the weight of Greenberg's aesthetics, but rather the fact that procedure insures a strong bond—however limited—a minimal continuity, between two artifacts, or more strongly, between an artifact and the event of whatever makes itself next. Fisher astutely surmises this bonding as entailing that "the only history that can be described by Greenberg's technique is the pre-history of contemporary art." The premier limitation of such a history then becomes a constitutional narrowness in defense of the avant-garde artwork that sanctions it.<sup>54</sup> Art history, following Fisher, thereby collapses into a tenacious commitment to mere sequentiality. I believe Fisher is indeed onto something here, though perhaps too far on. He focuses on Greenberg's reduction of art history to sequentiality; but Fisher oversteps his insight by asserting that this reduction thereby makes the history of art exclusively retrospective, that past objects are determined only from the point of view of the most recent one. Sequentiality, as a program of art-making, might indeed be restrictive. But it is not thereby any more determinative of what is taken to be past than other constructions of history.

Kitsch and avant-gardism are the two modern strategies for a procedural detachment from history. In this regard they are insistently ahistoricizing. Consider, contra Fisher, that Greenberg is not committed to any particular historical account, but rather to the movement of history per se—recall that for him it is an accident, as well as

not particularly meaningful for artworks, that art-making adopts the proceduralism of science, regardless of how momentous this accident is for culture.

Now that we better understand Greenberg's characterization of the nature of avant-gardism, and its only apparent likeness to the avant-garde, let us return to his primary examples of it. Dada and Surrealism figure for Greenberg in much the same way Naturalism figures for Lukács: they are various styles of rigidification. These styles represent, and thereby continue, the reification of human action by circumscribing it under the appearance of life. Because these styles apparently represent life, they are sometimes mistaken for it. That very mistakenness allows them to proliferate throughout culture. Hence Lukács perceives Naturalism as at once an aesthetic dead-end as well as an impediment to further life, while Greenberg's famous distaste for Dada, Surrealism, and the styles he saw as their further elaboration, was also the perception that they impede whatever forms of life might next occur. Greenberg's fear of the proliferation of the image of life by avant-gardisms like Dada and Surrealism is perhaps confirmed by recent claims. Consider Michael Lowy's opening paragraph in his review of Penelope Rosemont's *Surrealist Women: An international Anthology*. Surrealism, Lowy writes, is

a vast and ambitious poetic, cultural and political revolutionary movement, a subversive protest, in the name of desire and imagination, against bourgeois civilization. International in its scope, historically open-ended, its aim was nothing less than to combine two of the highest Utopian dreams: to transform the world (Marx) and to change life (Rimbaud).<sup>55</sup>

In response to that description one wants to ask if there is anything Surrealism is not. Faced with such instances of avant-gardism—of mistaking ahistoricizing style for life—Greenberg's analysis would have us conclude that these art-historical events efface their historic specificity in order to obscure any boundaries between art and life. That is, the avant-gardist success with proceduralism produces the illusion of nature by erasing whatever preceded it. In other words, it is no accident that Surrealism has the appearance of an eruption of life. The possibility of just such an appearance is due to the nature of strict proceduralism's success at illusion.

It is just here where we might most fully appreciate the depth of Lukács's and Greenberg's reliance upon what they presume to be the inexhaustibleness of the cultural traditions within which Modernism arises, and hence of the historical per se. For Greenberg, the work of Modernism lies not in a mere effacement of all the painterly structures upon which meaning was at one time or another sustained—such things as linear perspective, narrative, figuration, genre, etc.—but rather in an entrenchment of cultural production below, and underpinning, ostensible and ready-to-hand meaning. Greenberg's faith, like Lukács's, lay in the meaning, or rather the meaningfulness, of action and life, of cultural production *überhaupt*, rather than in the meaning put forth by this or that object at this or that historical moment. (Or, as Fisher puts it, "the central category for Greenberg, far more important than the individual work, is the history of art itself."<sup>56</sup>) However, it is precisely the standardization of just this meaningfulness which is self-eviscerating, a kind of cultural and artistic suicide. Greenberg and Lukács would

agree that the meaningfulness and vitality of cultural production take place only by way of an immersion still deeper into particularity: for Greenberg, in the literal material supports of painting, including what precedes any work; for Lukács, in concrete circumstances. The crucial effect of this immersion is to tether the artwork to whatever the circumstances of its historical specificity. Hence, in the case of Greenberg, the self-purification of Modernist production was not, despite his many interpreters, an attempt to achieve an absolute, ahistorical condition of painting, but was instead a means to continue to unfold traditional art-making's trajectory of human action, and the hope then was to bring that action increasingly into the foreground.

I want to suggest that this faith of Greenberg's in the underlying vitality of making anew—best exemplified by science—is deeply akin to Lukács's faith in what he calls the underlying *Weltanschauung* of the Modernist writer. What they both sought to curb was the faux universality of ready-to-hand meaning, not simply because false, but more importantly because static. Indeed, in a 1964 essay titled "The 'Crisis' of Abstract Art,"<sup>57</sup> Greenberg asserts that abstract painting is but the most recent example of what he calls the "centuries-old tradition of painterliness"—and what he means by "the painterly" is loosely executed or "brushy" painting; that is, for him the painterly refers to the legible marks of the act of painting. In opposition to the painterly is the cultural tendency to read all pigment as designating something (else). He writes:

This is why the painterly used to be so often identified with the unfinished. As this is part of the reason why, when the painterly stopped serving representation, as it did in postwar abstract art, it became so widely identified with the formless, which is, notionally, the unfinished par excellence.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, for Greenberg the best painting over the past few centuries has been in the service of forestalling the closure of meaning and finishedness, and in this way forestalling the closure of history.

Despite the seemingly prescriptive character of Greenberg and Lukács's analyses, one might instead appreciate the modesty of their aspiration. Each of them constructs an aesthetic in the hope of salvaging some moment of human wholeness, while each recognizes the compromised and pernicious results of every systematic attempt to reproduce and depict wholeness. Greenberg's premise is the full-scale withdrawal of history into mere sequence—even if he lauds this an achievement of modernity; Lukács presupposes that the wholeness of human life can only be found in this or that aesthetic *Weltanschauung*. And because wholeness has retreated, Greenberg and Lukács are all the more vehemently committed to its diminished, truncated appearance in mere sequence or *Weltanschauung*.<sup>59</sup> Their orientation lies in a shared criticism of all cultural movements that continue to avoid this historical impasse by retreating into style. Procedure per se is not the object of their critique; rather, in both their cases procedure only becomes negative—indeed fails utterly—when it is delusionally detached from whatever whole ought to be imagined as its origin.

I want finally to suggest that in their very expressions of faith Greenberg and Lukács also display a sign of their desperation: they re-affirm the vitality of tradition in

the midst of most instances of this tradition failing—on their own—to do so. Lukács and Greenberg each attempt, paradoxically enough, to support the absolute value of particular expressions, each is committed theoretically to a defense of human production not despite but because it is limited by circumstance.



## NOTES

1. I thank Jay Bernstein and David Weisberg for the help provided by their comments.

2. Georg Lukás, "The Ideology of Modernism," in *Realism in Our Time*, tr. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 17-46.

3. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4 *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-93.

4. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness; Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, tr. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

5. And yet this juxtaposition becomes less striking as soon as it is recalled that Greenberg's political persuasion during the 1940s was aligned with Trotskyism of *Partisan Review* and *The Nation*, the two publications he served as editor and contributor throughout the decade.

6. Cf. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time; Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

7. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1981), 71.

8. Cf. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel; A Historical-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

9. Émile Zola, *Nana*, trans. George Holden (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 335-6.

10. Cf. Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism; On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

11. David Summers, in offering his own characterization of the distinction between Naturalism and Realism, though in painting rather than in literature, nonetheless refines Lukács's: "'Naturalism' and 'realism' are sometimes used interchangeably, but it is necessary to distinguish carefully between them. 'Realism' is at base a category of subject matter, and refers to art having a concrete historical reference or an apparent concrete historical reference." And though Naturalism, like Realism, is a form imitation, it is nevertheless a "kind of imitation in which the artificial analogue is a virtual relationship of light, dark, and color determined at least in principle by optics, by the physical geometry of sight." Again, Naturalism is a *virtual* analogue of perception alone whereas Realism, by referring to a prior event, implies and constitutes a cohesion of experience. David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense; Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3. Though this is not the place to pursue the topic, it is interesting to note that, by locating both Naturalism and Realism within the domain of imitation, Summers in effect underscores the need for a comprehensive account of mimesis.

12. Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism," 33.

13. As J.M. Bernstein remarks regarding the historical form of the novel: “the *function* of Lukács's historiographical schema is not to put forward a universal philosophy of history of any sort, but rather to aid in the establishing of the historical specificity, the historical uniqueness of the novel and its world, the world of capitalism.” *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 47.

14. Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 29.

15. It is not any particular content of psychopathology that makes it irredeemably ideological for Lukács—for we can certainly assume that Lukács was aware that psychopathology's tendency, like the novel's, was toward a restoration of wholeness—it instead becomes ideological when it is reified in the novel as an *insurmountable* obstacle to wholeness.

16. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 11.

17. See Penelope Fitzgerald's novel attempt to respond to just this sentiment in her fictional account of the life of Novalis, *The Blue Flower* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995). So too in this context is it illuminating to read the opening pages of Part One of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, where he begins by invoking Novalis's reflections on the inadequacies of philosophy. Finally, it is helpful here to remember that Kant too was well aware of the power of the novel in contrast to that of philosophy. In his “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” he remarks that “It is admittedly a strange and at first sight absurd proposition to write a *history* according to an idea of how world events must develop if they are to conform to certain rational ends; it would seem only a *novel* could result from such premises.” In *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 51-2.

18. Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 29.

19. See Part III, “Critical Realism and Socialist Realism,” in *Realism in Our Time*, 93-135.

20. Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 29.

21. I have become increasingly sympathetic to Lukács's characterization of the kind of resignation to which psychopathology lends itself. One might well imagine Freud himself writing, say in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, something like: “If there's a cure for this, to express so poignantly the supposed pleasure of resigning oneself to dysfunction.

22. Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 36.

23. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, “On the Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *Negations: essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 88-133.

24. Helpful in this context is Terry Eagleton's survey of the history of the use of the term ideology in his *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991).

25. Psychopathology, at least in the novel, *becomes* an aesthetic dead-end when it functions to prescribe in advance the boundaries of meaningfulness.

26. Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 23.

27. *Ibid.*, 24.

28. *Ibid.*, 24-5.

29. Especially helpful here in tracing the advent and history of the concept of totality is Martin Jay's *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

30. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 85.

31. *Ibid.*, 93.

32. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 7. In *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 1: *Perceptions and Judgment, 1939-1944* (University of Chicago Press, 1986). T.J. Clark cites this passage and comments: "By which last he means, need I say it, preeminently the thought of Marx." Agreed, but the question remains as to what work the qualification "scientific" is meant to perform here. T.J. Clark, "More on the Differences between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves," in *Modernism and Modernity: the Vancouver Conference Papers*, eds. Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983).

33. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 15.

34. In response to this formulation the temptation again arises to pursue an understanding of mimesis (see note 11), and then to specify the affinities and contrasts between Greenberg and Lukács according to the particular place each occupies in regard to it. A further consequence of drawing mimesis toward the center of any account of Greenberg would reveal a perhaps striking likeness to Adorno's aesthetics and culture critique. As Thierry de Duve puts it: "One need only read the article on jazz in *Primen* to realize that Adorno could have signed many sentences in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'." In *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, trans. Brian Holmes (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1996), 43-4. And perhaps the best evidence for the centrality of mimesis in Greenberg is the following well-known passage from "Towards a Newer Laocoön," a passage that has elicited innumerable commentaries regarding the flatness of the picture plane, though precious few in response to what it contains regarding imitation: "The history of avant-garde painting is that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to 'hole through' it for realistic perceptual space. In making this surrender, painting not only got rid of imitation—and with it, 'literature'—but also of realistic imitation's corollary confusion between painting and sculpture." Clement Greenberg, "Towards a New Laocoön," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, 34.

35. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 12.

36. An especially helpful treatment of this ambiguity between modernism and mass culture is to be found in Thomas Crow's "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Modernism and Modernity: the Vancouver Conference Papers*, 215-64.

37. Another way to put this is to say that Greenberg absolved himself of any responsibility for judging what counted as science. Put this way, we might better understand Greenberg's late defense of the unavoidability, even necessity, of taste in response to art. Greenberg's underlying distinction between the demands made on us by science versus those made on us by art—and though he credits Kant with his observation—was formulated most succinctly by Edmund Burke, Burke asserts that the faculty of taste arises because of the "want of some common measure." (Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed.

James T. Boulton (University of Notre Dame Press, 1968 [1759]), 22.) That is, while science finds its own common measures in perception and reason, taste comes about whenever such measures are absent. In this light, Greenberg's insistence on the objectivity of taste might be judged an attempt to give taste a firm a basis as that which scientific judgment enjoys thanks to reason. Cf. "Can Taste Be Objective?" in Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22-30.

38. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 90.

39. I assert this in contrast to Paul Crowther's claim that "the distinctness of Greenberg's theory lies ... in an intellectualist notion of aesthetic value." I will find this claim astounding and nearly appalling in its willful avoidance of the innumerable places where Greenberg rails against "academic" art, and hence against all things not only formulaic but theoretical or intellectual in Modernist painting. Paul Crowther, "Greenberg's Kant and the Problem of Modernist Painting," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 1985): 317-25.

40. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 91.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Cf. Florence Rubenfeld's biography for the claim that "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," along with "A Newer Laocoön," chart Greenberg's theoretical program for the following decades: *Clement Greenberg: A life* (New York: Scribner, 1998).

43. Clement Greenberg, "The Case for Abstract Art," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, 80.

44. Because of the primacy for Greenberg of the criterion of "next"—or put differently: that the overriding dynamic of cultural production and reproduction ought to be that of the avant-garde—I would amend T.J. Clark's assessment of Greenberg's position as "Eliotic Trotskyism." Greenberg's commitment is not to the cultural elitism of Eliot but to the advance of culture, that is, to the production of what is best. Hence Greenberg is Arnoldian rather Eliotic. Nor is there likewise in Greenberg a positive commitment to Trotskyism but rather only an opposition to Stalinism; therefore in lieu of Clark's designation of Greenberg's Eliotic Trotskyism I propose Arnoldian Anti-Stalinism. Clark's designation appears in "More on the Differences Between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves," 172.

45. Clement Greenberg, "The Counter-Avant-Garde," in *Art International*, vol. XV, no. 5 (May 1971), 16-19.

46. Though it is interesting to note that Greenberg is prompted finally to define what "academic" means by the essay "Dada, Surrealism, and the Academy," written by Charles W. Millard and published in *Hudson Review* in 1969.

47. Again the temptation arises to formulate Greenberg's aesthetics under the rubric of mimesis. Here one might suggest that academicism and avant-gardism function via a kind of vicious and subversive imitation.

48. Greenberg, "The Counter-Avant-Garde," 17.

49. *Ibid.*

50. According to the schema of his long essay on Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, titled "The Plight of Our Culture," Greenberg would most likely explain the advent of avant-gardism's embrace of standardization as the transformation

of highbrow into middlebrow culture, since the primary characteristic of the latter is the desire “to have [its] expectations filled exactly as [it] expects to have them filled.” In *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3: *Affirmations and Refusals*, 1950-1956, 137.

51. Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsche,” 11.

52. Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 170.

53. *Ibid.*, 170-1.

54. *Ibid.*, 110.

55. *New Left Review* 236 (July/August 1999): 128.

56. Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art*, 170.

57. Clement Greenberg, “The ‘Crisis’ of Abstract Art,” in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, 176-81.

58. *Ibid.*, 179.

59. In short, the principal misreading of Lukács and Greenberg has been to take their aesthetic theories as prescriptive rather than diagnostic.