

Art in Theory

1900–1990

An Anthology of Changing Ideas

Edited by Charles Harrison
and Paul Wood

Art
N6490
.A7167
1993

Introductions, selection and editorial matter Copyright © Charles Harrison and Paul Wood 1992

First published 1992

First published in USA 1993

Blackwell Publishers
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF
UK

238 Main Street, Suite 501
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142
USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Art in theory, 1900–1990 / edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-631-16574-6 (h/b: acid-free paper). – ISBN 0-631-16575-4

(p/b : acid-free paper)

1. Art, Modern – 20th century – Philosophy. I. Harrison, Charles, 1942-. II. Wood, Paul, 1949-.
N6490.A7167 1992

709' .04-dc20 92-6007 CIP

Typeset in 10 on 12 pt Ehrhardt

by Pure Tech Corporation, Pondicherry, India

Printed in Great Britain by T.J. Press Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

This book is printed on acid-free paper


BLACKWELL
Oxford UK & Cambridge USA

9/93
HW

found himself captivated by the rhythm. Driven by the power of the rhythm he must have danced into a state of euphoria. For primitive man, sensation was everything – the sensation of nature, wild and unknown, the sensation of music and rhythm. We intend to develop that original characteristic of man.

The subconscious, that magnificent well of images perceived by the mind, takes on the essence and form of those images and harbours the notions that make up man's nature. Thus, as the objective world is transformed, what the subconscious identifies with is also transformed, and this produces changes in man's mode of conception.

The subconscious determines the historical legacy of pre-civilized states and the manner of our adaptation to new lifestyles. The subconscious shapes, composes and transforms the individual. It gives him a sense of order, which comes from the world and is adopted by the individual. All artistic concepts are due to the workings of the subconscious.

Plastic art developed from its original base of natural shapes. The manifestations of the subconscious adapted easily to natural forms as a consequence of the idealized conception of existence.

Our material consciousness, that is, our need for things which are easily verifiable, demands that art-forms should flow directly from the individual and that they should assume natural form. An art based on forms created by the subconscious and balanced by reason, constitutes a true expression of existence and is the synthesis of a moment in time.

The position of the rational artists is false. In their effort to privilege reason and to deny the workings of the subconscious, they succeed only in rendering them less visible. We can see this process at work in their every endeavour.

Reason does not create. In creating shapes, it is subordinate to the subconscious. In all of his activities, man uses all of his faculties. Their free development is fundamental for creating and interpreting a new kind of art. Analysis and synthesis, meditation and spontaneity, construction and sensation, are all values which come together to work in union; and their development in experience is the only way to achieve a complete demonstration of being.

Society suppresses disparate energies and integrates them into a greater unified force. Modern science is based on the progressive unification of all its elements.

Humanity weaves together its knowledge and its values, in an historic process which has developed over hundreds of years.

A new, integrated art flows from this new state of consciousness, in which existence is shown in its totality.

After several millennia of analytical artistic development, the moment of synthesis has arrived. Prior to this moment, specialization was necessary. Now however this specialization amounts to a disintegration of the unity we envisage.

We imagine synthesis as the sum total of the physical elements: colour, sound, movement, time, space, integrated in physical and mental union. Colour, the element of space; sound, the element of time and movement, which develops

in time and space. These are fundamental to the new art which encompasses the four dimensions of existence. Time and space.

The new art requires that all of man's energies be used productively in creation and interpretation. Existence is shown in an integrated manner, with all its vitality. *Colour Sound Movement*

(Bernardo Arias, Horacio Cazeneuve, Marcos Fridman, Pablo Arias, Rodolfo Burgos, Enrique Benito, Cesar Bernal, Luis Coll, Alfredo Hansen, Jorge Rocamonte)

9 Vladimir Kamenov (b. c. 1920) from 'Aspects of Two Cultures'

With the onset of the Cold War immediately following the defeat of Fascism, culture became a site of struggle between the two leading world powers. In the Soviet Union the doctrine of Socialist Realism was hardened again after a comparative relaxation during the years of the Popular Front. Kamenov's article is a root-and-branch attack on the avant-garde, for its 'decadence', 'individualism', and 'anti-humanism'. As a text published in English specifically for foreign consumption, it achieved considerable prominence as clinching evidence of Communist perfidy in the eyes of Western defenders of the avant-garde. Originally published in the *VOKS Bulletin* by the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Moscow, 1947, pp. 20–36. Reprinted in H. B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, California, 1968, from which the present extracts are taken.

The basic features of decadent bourgeois art are its falseness, its belligerent anti-realism, its hostility to objective knowledge and to the truthful portrayal of life in art. Here, too, the reactionary tendency in contemporary bourgeois art is presented under the banner of 'originality,' of struggle against 'bourgeois' ideology, etc. Those extreme forms represented by the various '-isms' of anti-realistic bourgeois art were led up to by the gradual renunciation by bourgeois artists of the finest traditions of bourgeois realism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as of the realistic traditions of the art of Greece and the Renaissance. The decline of bourgeois art became most rapid at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, with the rise of the epoch of imperialism and the decay of bourgeois culture which it involved. [...]

* * *

For all the 'freedom' which artists won after they had driven life from the realm of their formalistic art, they nevertheless tried at the beginning of the century to justify this subjective anarchy by pseudo-scientific, technical, and other subterfuges in their work, writings and declarations... to prove its analytical character, and so on. However, very soon even this quasi-scientific terminology was discarded, and in contemporary bourgeois formalistic art the most rampant subjectivism, proclaiming the cult of mysticism and of the

subconscious, has triumphed openly, and abnormal mental states are held up as examples of the complete creative freedom of the individual.

All these features of decadent bourgeois art were declared aspects of 'art for art's sake,' which is alleged to be alien to any semblance of ideological content. As a matter of fact, this 'pure' art actually disseminated reactionary ideas, ideas that were advantageous or useful to the capitalists. Formalistic artists ceased to be rebels and became the abject slaves of capital, even though from time to time they did assail capitalism, sometimes even sincerely. How are these different factors to be reconciled? Among certain formalistic artists in foreign countries a yawning chasm formed between their political views and public sympathies on the one hand, and their artistic practice on the other. This chasm proved so great that even the events of the world war against fascism, in which many of them participated as members of the allied armies or the resistance movement, could not change their views on art. They continued demonstratively to deny the ideological content of art and all connection between the aims of art and the interests of the wide masses.

Even those formalists, who, like Picasso, have repeatedly professed sympathy for the struggle of democracy against fascism show a marked unwillingness to apply the progressive aspects of their world outlook to their artistic practice. A yawning chasm still exists in their work to this day, resulting not merely in the failure of these artists to advance the struggle of their peoples against fascism and reaction by their creative efforts, but also, objectively, in their furthering (through their art) the very aims of the bourgeois reaction against which they vehemently protest in their political utterances and declarations.

By proclaiming 'art for art's sake,' void of all contact with the struggle, aspirations and interests of the wide masses, by cultivating individualism, the formalists are affirming the very thing the reactionaries want them to. They are playing into the hands of the decadent bourgeoisie who in their efforts to preserve their domination look with hatred upon the development of the consciousness of the masses, upon the growth of their sense of human dignity and their feeling of solidarity, upon any rousing of their activity through the means of realistic art rich in ideological content.

* * *

Soviet art is progressing along the path of socialist realism, a path pointed out by Stalin. It is this path that has led to the creation of a vital Soviet art, ideologically forward-looking and artistically wholesome: socialist in content and national in form; an art worthy of the great Stalin epoch.

As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, hypocritically hiding its reactionary class nature behind phrases such as 'pure art' and 'art for art's sake,' Soviet artists openly espouse the ideas of Bolshevism expressing the advanced ideas of the Soviet people who at present represent the most advanced people of the world, for they have built up Socialism, the most advanced form of contemporary society. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art with its anti-humanism, Soviet artists present the art of socialist humanism, an art imbued with supreme love for man, with pride in the emancipated individual of the socialist land, with profound sympathy for that part of humanity living under the capitalist system,

a system which cripples and degrades men. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art with its falseness, its rejection of a realistic, truthful reflection of life as it is, Soviet artists present the wholesome and integral art of socialist realism, expressed in profound artistic images reflecting true life, showing the struggle between the old and the new and the inevitable triumph of the new and progressive, an art mobilizing Soviet people for further victories. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, divorced from the people, hostile to the interests of the democratic masses, permeated with biological individualism and mysticism, reactionary and anti-popular, Soviet artists present an art created for the people, inspired by the thoughts, feelings and achievements of the people, and which in its turn enriches the people with its lofty ideas and noble images.

Young Soviet art has already created works of world-wide significance. Soviet artists are inspired by great tasks and purposes. Soviet art is advancing along the true path indicated by the genius of Stalin.

Among the many burdens which the young Soviet republic inherited a quarter of a century ago from old landlord-bourgeois Russia, was the decadent, formalistic art of that time. All those 'original' tricks which the formalists of Europe and America take such pride in, were ousted by Soviet artists long ago as ridiculous anachronisms.

The road travelled by Soviet art in overcoming formalism is of inestimable importance to the art culture of the whole world. The experience accumulated by Soviet artists will time and again stand the artists of other countries in good stead when they begin to look for a way out of the impasse of formalism and to create a genuine people's art. [...]

10 Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) and Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978) 'The Question of What Will Emerge Is Left Open'

The authors offer a refusal of the direction of artistic practice according to the mounting dictates of Cold War politics. The hope was that an essentially unplanned, open-ended inquiry would prove indigestible by the competing monoliths, and even constitute a kind of subversive third force with respect to both. In the event, liberalism was substantially able to turn such a programme to its own ends. Originally published as the opening statement in the first (and only) issue of *Possibilities: An Occasional Review*, no. 1, New York, Winter 1947/8, p. 1. Reprinted in Chipp, op. cit., from which the present text is taken.

This is a magazine of artists and writers who 'practice' in their work their own experience without seeking to transcend it in academic, group or political formulas.

Such practice implies the belief that through conversion of energy something valid may come out, whatever the situation one is forced to begin with.

The question of what will emerge is left open. One functions in an attitude of expectancy. As Juan Gris said: 'You are lost the instant you know what the result will be.'