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## Greenberg on Hauser: The Art Critic as Book Critic

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In recent decades, Arnold Hauser has disappeared from classrooms and reading lists at North American universities. His ideas about art and society are not debated, *The Social History of Art* and *The Philosophy of Art History* are not read. Hauser's books, which most university libraries still carry in multiple copies—an indication of the high demand that once existed for them—now gather dust on library shelves. *The Social History of Art* has been reprinted seven times since the 1960s, most recently in 1999, in a new edition introduced by the British art historian Jonathan Harris.<sup>1</sup> Obviously Hauser's work retains a readership, but not in the North American academy.

Three anthologies in use on North American campuses provide hard evidence of Hauser's eclipse. The anthologies construct narratives about the history of art history and are designed to fill a market niche in the various methodology and theory courses offered by post-secondary art history programs. In this post-millennial moment of self-reflexivity and theoretical skepticism, such courses have become *de rigueur* at North American universities. In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, a book that runs to almost six hundred pages, Donald Preziosi fails to mention Hauser at all, let alone to provide an excerpt from Hauser's writing as an example of how social art history was formulated at mid-century by its most insightful practitioner.<sup>2</sup> Steve Edwards, in *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, also omits Hauser from his version of the history of art history. Among the seventy "seminal works" that Edwards selects as "formative of the discipline or informative about historical and recent debate about art," Hauser's work is nowhere to be found, and nor is Hauser's work discussed by Edwards and the authors chosen for inclusion in the anthology.<sup>3</sup> A third anthology, *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, does mention Hauser.<sup>4</sup> The reference is so brief, however, that I am inclined to think that silence might have been preferable. Moxey correctly identifies Hauser, Frederick Antal, Max Raphael, and T.J. Clark as writers whose work developed out of the Hegelian tradition and who belonged to a Marxist-informed art history. Moxey writes that these art historians "secularized and materialized the spirit as the class struggle."<sup>5</sup> Although Moxey professes to admire the work of the Marxist wing to which he alludes, he views Hauser's art history as being cut from the same cloth as that of Heinrich Wölfflin, thus collapsing the Hauserian "social" with the Wölfflinian "formal." At best the formulation is misguided, at worst disingenuous.

Hauser's work developed within a Marxist discursive formation, a formation delimited by its own historical coordinates. In this article, I want to reflect on Hauser's notion of the social history of art at the moment of its inception. Most of all, I want to reflect on the art critic Clement Greenberg's mid-century understanding and admiration of Hauser's theoretical position. Greenberg first wrote about Hauser in 1951, in a review of *The Social History of Art* for *The New York Times Book Review*.<sup>6</sup> I will argue that there were grounds—historically specific grounds—for Greenberg's approbation of Hauser's work at that time. In order to map those grounds, I will first examine Greenberg's practice as a book critic—which is not, of course, quite the same thing as his practice as an art critic. As a book critic or reviewer, Greenberg expressed dismay at art history's undialectical positivism, on the one hand, and at its biographical focalizations, on the other. What passed for art history, he said more than once, was second-rate art

appreciation (he once called it “gush”) and hagiographical biography (more “gush”). In his criticism, he was on the lookout for books that exhibited historical rigour about the production and reception of art. One of those books was Hauser’s *The Social History of Art*.

### How Art Writing Earns Its Good Name

Greenberg’s essay “How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name,” published in 1962, was his most sustained attack on contemporary art writing.<sup>7</sup> The occasion for the piece was a reconsideration of Harold Rosenberg’s article from 1952, “The American Action Painters,” and the subsequent propagation of Rosenberg’s ideas among art critics in the United States, England and France.<sup>8</sup> Greenberg took exception to the notion that Jackson Pollock’s art represented a sharp rupture with the past, and to the reverberating echo of Rosenberg’s putative misrepresentations in the writings of Lawrence Alloway, Robert Goldwater, Herbert Read and Michel Tapié. This was not the first time Greenberg set out to expose the “absurdities,” “repetitions” and “solecisms of logic,” as he called them, that he took to be characteristic of much contemporary art writing.<sup>9</sup> In his first piece of textual criticism for *Partisan Review*, in 1942, he declared flatly that “It is possible to get away with murder in writing about art,” and then showed how it had been achieved in a book about Maurice Vlaminck.<sup>10</sup> In one form or another, that refrain was repeated many times during the next two decades as Greenberg interrogated the writings of art critics, theoreticians and historians in reviews for half a dozen periodicals, including *Commentary* and *The New York Times Book Review*.

If Greenberg had done no more than spoken out against the “vistas of inanity” that he observed spreading across the field of art writing in the postwar years, his skepticism about the genre would have been a contribution.<sup>11</sup> As he once wrote, “In no other field—except politics and perhaps music—can one get away with such hokum in print.” He considered it a part of his practice as a critic to expose the abundance of hokum he found in art writing—“The vulgarity of its learning and thinking, the misinformation it contains, and the violent and banal simple-mindedness with which it mauls its material to fit its thesis.”<sup>12</sup>

It may come as something of a surprise, therefore, to learn how few of Greenberg’s reviews were actually given over to condemning bad books. A review of his reviews reveals that he was much more likely—and in this he followed his own *modus operandi* as an art critic—to search out what he found worthwhile and to praise it.<sup>13</sup> “Really valuable texts on art are so few,” he wrote in 1945 in reference to *Cézanne’s Composition* by Earle Loran, “that whenever one appears the fact should be proclaimed in haste.”<sup>14</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, his search for what was valuable led him to proclaim on behalf of an astonishing array of texts on subjects ranging from Chinese painting to British architecture, from Buddhist sculpture to Renaissance aesthetics, from nineteenth-century French graphics to, of course, contemporary art. Among the authors reviewed by him, several on more than one occasion, were Meyer Schapiro, John Rewald, Lionello Venturi, Herbert Read, Bernard Berenson, Charles Baudelaire, Max Friedländer, Anthony Blunt, Wyndham Lewis, Henri Frankfort, Michel Seuphor and, of course, Hauser. The list, it seems to me, is as impressive for its catholicity as for the resonance of its names. By holding the work of these writers up to scrutiny, Greenberg helped to clarify for American audiences what good art writing might attain—while adding himself to the store of it by his own example.

During a span of a decade, Greenberg wrote sixteen pieces for the *Times Book Review* and a comparable number for other publications, a compendium of work that he

curiously chose to overlook when selecting articles for inclusion in his book of essays and criticism, *Art and Culture*, published in 1961.<sup>15</sup> I say “curiously” because the sheer volume of the reviews would seem to have argued for their recognition in the book. Possibly because Greenberg himself slighted his own reviews in this way, they have received scant attention.<sup>16</sup>

I am not sure that the consignment of the reviews to secondary status has served either Greenberg or Greenberg scholarship well. As I read these trenchant pieces, they seem to me not only to usefully inform Greenberg’s theories of art, but also to inform disciplinary developments in art history. Taken as a whole, I am persuaded that the reviews provided Greenberg with an opportunity to measure in print his own critical practice against the art writing around him, and to determine what should count in the activity. In this sense, he functioned less as a critic’s critic—though he may have been that, too—than as a critic *of* critics, as well as a critic *of* art historians. To paraphrase what Greenberg once said about Kant, in the reviews he was criticizing the means itself of criticism.<sup>17</sup>

What did Greenberg think were the attributes that made for superior criticism? In one of his initial articles for the *Times Book Review*, in 1947, he wrote on the first translation into English of Baudelaire’s *Eugène Delacroix: sa vie et son oeuvre*. He opened the article with the following observations:

In Baudelaire and Apollinaire French poetry supplied us with two outstanding art critics. The former was by far the completer: he not only felt (which was all Apollinaire could do), he also discriminated and understood and explained. His interest in painting was not merely the expression of an overflow of vitality, but a directed passion, centered on its object and fed by it.<sup>18</sup>

If we are to deduce from this what qualities Greenberg thought it necessary for an art critic to possess, it is advisable to start with his verbs. Baudelaire “not only *felt*...he also *discriminated* and *understood* and *explained*.” The first prerequisite of the good critic, then, was a capacity to feel or experience the work of art. It comes as no great revelation that for Greenberg, as for Hauser, the experience of the work of art was the *sine qua non*, from which all the rest—the discrimination, the understanding, the explanation—had to follow.

In his articles for the *Times Book Review*, Greenberg invariably reserved his greatest admiration for those who most possessed the capacity to engage the work of art. In short, he looked for “sensibility” (a favorite term of approbation) in the writers under review, and extolled it even when forced to admit that some of the same writers he endorsed exhibited limited powers of systematic or historical analysis. Thus, in Greenberg’s opinion, Bernard Berenson succeeded in his endeavor “to make of himself an instrument of precision in the appreciation of works of art” (the description is Berenson’s own), even though he was “no adept of systematic thought”; Kenneth Clark was correct to be “concerned more with aesthetic results as we enjoy them here and now than with art as a historical process”; Lionello Venturi was right to offer “true criticism, which delivers strictures as well as appreciation,” though he failed “to chart sufficiently either the historical or esthetic current” running through the art he discussed; and, applying the same criterion in the realm of literature, T.S. Eliot’s merit lay “almost equally in his ability to raise pertinent problems and in the fineness of his taste,” notwithstanding his frivolousness when addressing matters of a social and political nature.<sup>19</sup>

Greenberg, it seems to me, was highly consistent in applying this criterion of what should matter in art writing. Even when he deemed the scholarship of particular

writers to be exceptional, he would not concede that their work was the equal of Berenson *et al.*, if their powers of critical discrimination were deficient. No matter how much he might respect the historical thoroughness of Rewald on Impressionism or Blunt on sixteenth-century French architecture, to take two examples, these historians were still rebuked for an unwillingness to engage in critical judgment, to answer what Greenberg took to be the most important question of all about art—“namely, how successful *as art* is the work of art in hand?”<sup>20</sup> In a review of Rewald’s *The History of Impressionism*, he stated that while he considered it “one of the most useful works of art scholarship ever published in English...for the wealth of fact it contains and for the chronological vividness with which it is arranged,” it fell short of being satisfactory because of its dogged insistence on sticking so closely to those same so-called “facts.”<sup>21</sup> Greenberg’s complaint was with Rewald’s positivism, with the author’s faith in the objective compilation of historical data, a confidence that paradoxically characterized some of the best (not the worst) art writing of the time. Far better the positivism of Rewald than the irresponsible “gush” of Klaus G. Perls on Vlaminck. But, Greenberg added, “Mr. Rewald is an art historian exclusively, not at all a critic,” as if to say it was too much to hope that art historians might lower their protective shields and try to answer the truly recalcitrant questions about art.<sup>22</sup>

Baudelaire’s essay on Delacroix, by contrast, furnished “a model specimen of art writing.” It was, in Greenberg’s opinion, “rich in perception and analysis, and at the same time colored throughout by the original emotion generated by the works of art themselves.”<sup>23</sup> Clearly, Baudelaire’s example was the kind that contemporary art writing should aspire to, certainly the kind that Greenberg himself aspired to. By way of demonstration he quoted at length from the famous passage in the essay that begins: “A picture by Delacroix, hung at too great a distance for you to judge the harmony of its contours and the more or less dramatic quality of its theme, already fills you with a kind of supernatural voluptuousness....”<sup>24</sup>

Greenberg was particularly taken with Baudelaire’s observations about the subservience of subject matter to medium in the apprehension of paintings. He wrote:

Baudelaire anticipated and made articulate much that later art critics—Roger Fry, for example—could realize only through the experience of post-impressionist painting. He was the first to put the subject in its proper place and one of the first to foretaste abstract art.<sup>25</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Greenberg should have seized upon Baudelaire’s insight into the transcending power of medium, and to have transformed it into an apologia for abstraction. An insistence on medium and how it functions in modern art, particularly how it functions to justify abstraction in an historical sense, had been at the heart of his two earlier theoretical essays, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939) and “Towards a Newer Laocoon” (1940).

In recent years the arguments of these essays have been the focus of an on-going debate around modernism.<sup>26</sup> In them Greenberg associated medium, and the limitations it imposed upon serious art, with a state of “purity” (for which read “abstraction”) that had been achieved by modernist production during the previous half century. In one haunting sentence, he referred to the way the arts had been “hunted back to their mediums,” there to be “isolated, concentrated and defined.”<sup>27</sup> Once again, it seems to me, his choice of verbs is telling, for what served to “hunt back,” “isolate” and “define” each of the arts in the modern period was nothing less than the failure of the bourgeois order to provide a culture worthy of the name. In “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” he explained the central paradox of modernism as the way art was bound to the arrangements of capitalist society

while remaining estranged from them. The dictates of modernity, by which Greenberg meant its emptiness and degradation, forced art to cut itself off from significant engagement with the phenomena of the everyday, propelling it ever more insistently towards a self-absorbed preoccupation with its own field of competence, towards a protected and autonomous sphere. This process, it should be emphasized, was born of Greenberg's cultural pessimism about modernity. The autonomy and the close attention to the handling of medium that he found in avant-garde practice, and that was held up as exemplary, was grounded in a social argument.

In assessing the art writing he encountered in the 1940s and 1950s, Greenberg in his book reviews was guided by the formulations and insights of his early theoretical essays. It was part of his strength as a critic that he wrote "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" and "Towards a Newer Laocoon" before he wrote art criticism, and worked through a theory of art under capitalism before engaging in the give-and-take of critical response. However much he insisted upon the direct experience of art as a starting point for critical judgment, it is also the case that his judgments about both art and art writing depended upon highly systematic readings. The commendable writers for him were not only those who distinguished the primacy of medium in art and who engaged with individual works and discriminated between them, but also those who recognized that art was produced not in a social void but under concrete historical conditions.

### **Art and the Extraction of Meaning from Social Flux**

"Most of the talk about the relations between art and society," Greenberg began his review of Hauser's two-volume *The Social History of Art*, "has been by people more competent—when they are that at all—to discuss the latter than the former."<sup>28</sup> In Hauser, Greenberg found a writer who was equally competent in both spheres. Here at last were books about the social conditions under which art was produced and consumed—"a momentous work," so Greenberg thought—in which the author's "sensitivity and interest in art in its own right are such that he achieves not only a social history but an improved history of art."<sup>29</sup>

Greenberg's enthusiasm for Hauser's achievement in *The Social History of Art* reveals a good deal about his own critical thinking at a particular juncture, 1951, as well as about the delimitations of art history as a discipline at the time. This juncture coincided with a hardening in Greenberg's political convictions, hastened by developments in the Cold War. Although in 1940 he had concluded "Towards a Newer Laocoon" by asserting that "The only future which offers any hope and any credibility to the masses is that of socialism," by the late 1940s he had drawn away from socialism and moved towards an ascendant American liberalism as the best hope for the future.<sup>30</sup> In other words, he had abandoned a marginal position for a more centrist one, whatever qualifications he maintained about the latter. In late 1950, he elected to become a founding member of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, a subsidiary of the Congress for Cultural Freedom established earlier the same year in Paris for the purpose of combating Communism.<sup>31</sup>

Greenberg's rejection of socialism (he had always been opposed to Soviet Communism) should not be interpreted to mean that he also rejected Marxism as a method of social analysis. On the contrary, his account of the social matrix remained systematically Marxist, as it had from the beginning. From the 1930s through the 1960s, he repeatedly stated that Marxism was the only method capable of extracting meaning from social flux, and part of his admiration for Hauser stemmed from the uses to which Hauser had put a Marxist methodology:

His analysis of the development of society is unequivocally Marxist—appropriately so, because no other *available* [Greenberg’s emphasis] method can extract equally plausible meanings from the contradictoriness of social evolution, especially in its relation to art. Mr. Hauser’s Marxism is too “orthodox,” in the Bolshevik sense ... but it rarely interferes with his view of art, since he does not extend his Marxism to aesthetic questions proper.<sup>32</sup>

The passage provides a clear sense of the degree to which Greenberg’s own critical intelligence was informed by Marxian dialectical attitudes towards culture, notwithstanding his refusal of Marxist ideology. It also demonstrates that he looked for it in others. Even T.S. Eliot and Paul Valéry, whom he admired in other ways, could not be excused for their benightedness about Marxism and the social forces at work around them. “Anyone who in the twentieth century protects his mind as carefully as Valéry did from Marx,” Greenberg wrote about a translation of Valéry’s essays on social issues in 1948, “has small intellectual right to express his views on politics in public.”<sup>33</sup> And Eliot, for all his lucidity as a critic, had an entirely “superstructural” view of culture, one that failed to recognize how inextricably bound up culture was with economic and social institutions.<sup>34</sup>

It was precisely Hauser’s achievement to have demonstrated the immensely complex process of reciprocity between the superstructure and the base, or between art and social interests, without resorting to any fixed explanatory model. Unlike Alexander Romm, in *Matisse: A Social Critique*, which Greenberg had reviewed three years earlier, Hauser’s Marxism was not of the spurious kind that assessed art according to how it mirrored the social conflicts of the time and place in which it was produced.<sup>35</sup> Hauser had successfully steered clear of political correctness in judging art, so Greenberg thought. He was too much the “art critic” to have succumbed to a vulgar reflection theory of art.

I concur with Greenberg’s assessment. It is not, however, a judgment widely shared at present. Even Jonathan Harris, in his introduction to the recent edition of *The Social History of Art*, which one might have expected to provide a balanced account of Hauser’s methodological achievement and of the art historical conventions Hauser’s book challenged at mid-century, takes a sledgehammer to what he calls the “vapidity” of Hauser’s abstractions.<sup>36</sup> Whereas Greenberg approves of Hauser’s account of the correlations of art and social development, claiming that Hauser “rides no theses,” Harris strikes out against Hauser’s “analytic crudities,” dismissing them as primitive “‘reflectionism’, ‘mechanistic reduction’ and ‘teleological projection’.”<sup>37</sup> I am prompted to wonder why Harris bothered with Hauser at all. “Those art historians indifferent or actually antagonistic to [Hauser’s] intellectual and political motivations,” writes Harris, “have found, and continue to find, many of his claims, by turns, either truistic—because pitched at such a high level of abstraction—and therefore banal, or simply empirically unverifiable....”<sup>38</sup> In this act of ventriloquism, Harris seems to be describing his own antagonisms to Hauser’s social art history.

Harris’s rejection of Hauser is in part an indication of extreme anxiety about the social history of art as a descriptive category. Soon after T.J. Clark reconceived of the category in 1973, it was overwhelmed by a scholarly impulse to pack as much social detail around visual images as possible, as if the accumulated drifts of facts might somehow speak for the images.<sup>39</sup> This was a parody of social art history as Clark imagined it—and, it needs to be emphasized, of how Hauser conceived of it. Clark has distanced himself from a “social history of art” by choosing to talk about it in the past tense.<sup>40</sup> I am less eager than Clark to disavow the designation. The social history of art as first conceived by Hauser, and then reworked two decades later by Clark, remains for me a useable narrative of relations between societal interests and artistic production and

reception, whatever qualifications we may wish to attach to it. It may be one of the few useable narratives left to us in the hypertrophied era of post-postmodernism.

### Rejecting Trotskyism

In 1953 Greenberg prepared an autobiographical statement that was published two years later. “Art criticism,” he wrote, “is about the most ungrateful form of ‘elevated’ writing I know of. It may also be one of the most challenging—if only because so few people have done it well enough to be remembered—but I’m not sure the challenge is worth it.”<sup>41</sup> Greenberg’s doubts about the rewards of writing art criticism, or of writing art history of the kind produced by Hauser, were reflected in the declining volume of his critical output, which fell off markedly during the 1950s. They were also reflected in a shift in his critical commitments. From around the time of the Hauser review in 1951 to his last piece written for the *Times Book Review* in November 1956, on *The Art of Sculpture* by Herbert Read, Greenberg’s theoretical deliberations on the relations between art and society were steadily supplanted by an even more exclusive preoccupation with art *qua* art than he had exhibited up to that time.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the sort of informing social analysis found in the early programmatic essays, in the Hauser review, and in the important 1953 essay, “The Plight of Our Culture,” not only diminished but virtually vanished by the time the essay “‘American-Type’ Painting” was published in 1955.

Greenberg’s former concern for the complex reciprocity between art and social interests did not reappear in his writings, except as a residual shadow. In his review of Read’s book on sculpture, to take the example at hand, his focus was entirely on Read’s failure to grasp properly the nature of sculpture as a medium, on his reported misrepresentation of sculpture as an art primarily of touch rather than sight. When Greenberg observed in the review that it had been the tendency of all the arts in the previous century “to withdraw into their respective mediums and ‘purify’ themselves,” an observation that was hardly new in his criticism, it was not accompanied by any explanation for why this should have been so.<sup>43</sup> Not so many years before, Greenberg would have felt obliged to point out—and with equal force—that the hygienic withdrawal was for the purpose of protecting art from the degradations of the machine-made, from being assimilated to entertainment and all that that connoted about modernity and mass culture.

Greenberg’s cultural pessimism had given way to qualified cultural optimism. During the first half of the 1950s he expressed the hope that the American middle class, which he had formerly castigated for its undemanding taste, might one day aspire to high culture; and in the sphere of international relations he increasingly demonstrated his support for the *pax americana*. There was a merger in his thinking between cultural optimism and Cold War politics, a merger particularly evident in the triumphalist tone of “‘American-Type’ Painting.” The turnaround, his unsticking of the Trotskyist label attached to his early work, was complete; his former emphasis on modern art’s adversarial capacity for disaffirming the dominant values of bourgeois society became mute. From a position of Eliotic Trotskyism, as T.J. Clark has called it, he had moved to a position of what I call Kantian anti-Communism.<sup>44</sup> The central paradox of modernism, high art’s attachment to and estrangement from the arrangements of capitalism, was therefore stripped of its former political cogency. What remained, and what Greenberg’s book reviews as well as his art criticism focused on, was modern art’s self-reflexivity, its fixation on its own field of competence, its absorption with questions of delimitation and medium. Those who failed to recognize this were “inveterate futurists, votaries of false dawns, sufferers from the millennial complex.”<sup>45</sup>

In his textual criticism, Greenberg was primarily interested in testing his own understanding of the tasks art writing should perform against the best models he could find. Baudelaire was one such model, Hauser another, Berenson yet another. About a pair of books published by Berenson in the mid-1950s, he wrote: “I find my understanding and awareness, not only of single works of art, but of a whole age of art sharpened by his words. Where I disagree I always find something *worth* disagreeing about; Mr. Berenson is never trivial or obtuse.”<sup>46</sup> The same, I think, might be said of Hauser.

Since the late 1960s, art history has been transformed from a discipline secure about its delimitations into a discipline doubtful about boundaries of any kind. From the relatively stable field of inquiry of Hauser and Greenberg’s time, in which the two descriptive terms, art and history, were rarely considered to be in doubt, much less the conceptual glue that held them together, art history has become an indeterminate field. Not only do tensions exist in the terms themselves but also in how the discipline relates to other spheres of professional inquiry.<sup>47</sup> Anthropology, literary theory and communications studies, to say nothing of the omniverous hybrid called cultural studies, are all engaged today in the theorization and analysis of visuality and visual imagery. As W.J.T. Mitchell has observed, there has been an explosion of interest in “visual culture” in the past thirty years.<sup>48</sup>

This explosion must be counted as one of the significant revolutions in higher education. Among the benefits to art history is the pressure it has put on the discipline to be self-reflexive about its practices and procedures. University programs in North America now anxiously debate the discipline’s theoretical and institutional histories, hoping to sharpen recognition for what is distinctive (or not so distinctive) in its pursuits, and to open up new avenues of investigation. The omission of Hauser from the debate, however, seems to me an act of blindness. His insights into how social conditions, how processes of production and consumption at specific moments of time, related to art’s form and content in complex and manifold ways were unprecedented in 1951. This was Greenberg’s argument at the time of publication, and it is mine now. Of *The Social History of Art*, Greenberg wrote:

The social matrix is probed in order to elucidate the aesthetic facts, and these are neither reduced to merely social facts nor wrenched to make sociological points. Society contains and throws light on art, receiving light in return, but this reciprocity does not completely explain either art or society. That Mr. Hauser observes this limitation without succumbing to it, that he remains both an art critic and sociologist, is one of the important reasons why he makes such an authentic as well as large contribution.<sup>49</sup>

Hauser understood the multifariousness of his enormous subject, Greenberg concluded, and did not “simplify in order to synopsise.”<sup>50</sup> Instead, he disturbed settled opinion. Fifty years after the publication of *The Social History of Art*, academic opinion in North America has settled *against* Hauser and his book to the point of indifference. This indifference should disturb us.

\* This article was initially delivered as an invited lecture at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, in 2000, and subsequently revised for a book on Arnold Hauser, edited by Jerry Zaslove, that failed to find a publisher. For helpful comments on earlier iterations of the article, I am grateful to Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Jerry Zaslove. This version has benefited from contributions by William Buschert and participants in the workshop, “What’s Left of Modernism? Greenberg, Kant, and Contemporary Aesthetics.”

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (4 vols.), introduced by Jonathan Harris (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). Harris has written a "General Introduction" to accompany the series, as well as introductions to each of the separate volumes.
- <sup>2</sup> Donald Preziosi, ed. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Steve Edwards, ed. *Art and Its Histories: A Reader* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey, eds. *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> Keith Moxey, "Art History's Hegelian Unconscious: Naturalism as Nationalism in the Study of Early Netherlandish Painting," in *The Subjects of Art History*, 27.
- <sup>6</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Review of *The Social History of Art* by Arnold Hauser," *The New York Times Book Review*, 23 December 1951, republished in John O'Brian, ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 94-98. Hereafter, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* will be cited as CG, followed by the respective volume number.
- <sup>7</sup> The essay was first published in *The Second Coming Magazine* in March 1962, and then in an expanded version in *Encounter* in December 1962. The *Encounter* version is reprinted in CG 4.
- <sup>8</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* (December 1952). In "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name" Greenberg incorrectly identified the essay as "Action Painting," which has led to some confusion.
- <sup>9</sup> "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," (1962) CG 4, 143. It was not the last time Greenberg attacked contemporary art writing. "La 'crise' de l'art abstrait," *Preuves*, February 1964 (CG 4, 176-181), picked up where "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name" left off by taking French critics to task for their explanation and understanding of "art informel." In the second half of the 1960s and in the 1970s, Greenberg continued his sorties against contemporary art writing.
- <sup>10</sup> "Review of *Vlaminck* by Klaus G. Perls" (1942), CG 1, 93.
- <sup>11</sup> "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," CG 3, 143.
- <sup>12</sup> "Pictures and Prattle: Review of *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* by Sidney Janis" (1945), CG 2, 36.
- <sup>13</sup> This conclusion is reached on the basis of Greenberg's reviews and criticism published over three decades from 1939 to 1969.
- <sup>14</sup> "Review of *Cézanne's Composition* by Earle Loran" (1945), CG 2, 46.

- <sup>15</sup> Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).
- <sup>16</sup> In North America, the revival of interest in Greenberg's essays and criticism began with the publication by Donald B. Kuspit of *Clement Greenberg: Art Critic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), and received a major impetus from the 1981 Vancouver conference "Modernism and Modernity," at which Greenberg himself was present (see *Modernism and Modernity*, eds. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin [Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983]). Since then, the literature on Greenberg has expanded into a substantial bibliography.
- <sup>17</sup> See "Modernist Painting" (1960), CG 4, 85.
- <sup>18</sup> "Review of *Eugène Delacroix: His Life and Work* by Charles Baudelaire" (1947), CG 2, 155.
- <sup>19</sup> See "Review of *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* by Bernard Berenson" (1948), CG 2, 263-265; "The Seeing Eye: Review of *Landscape Painting* by Kenneth Clark" (1950), CG 3, 26-28; "The Wellsprings of Modern Art: Review of *Modern Painters* by Lionello Venturi" (1947), CG 2, 175-178; and "T.S. Eliot: The Criticism, The Poetry" (1950), CG 3, 66.
- <sup>20</sup> "T.S. Eliot: The Criticism, The Poetry" (1950), CG 3, 66.
- <sup>21</sup> "Review of *The History of Impressionism* by John Rewald" (1948), CG 2, 235.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 235. It is worth observing that Greenberg himself exhibited the reverse characteristics of Rewald; it might be said that he was an art critic exclusively, not at all a historian. His books on *Joan Miró* (1948), *Henri Matisse* (1953), and *Hans Hofmann* (1961) are less notable for their historical rigor than for their critical insight. When Greenberg started to write a critical biography of Jackson Pollock in the late 1950s he found the going slow and difficult; after a few years, he abandoned the project.
- <sup>23</sup> "Review of *Eugène Delacroix: His Life and Work* by Charles Baudelaire" (1947), CG 2, 156.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>26</sup> See, for example, the republication of T.J. Clark's essay on Greenberg in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982-83), under the title "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art." The book incorporates a reply to the article by Michael Fried, "How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark," and a riposte to Fried by Clark. See, also, John O'Brian, "Greenberg's Matisse and the Problem of Avant-Garde Hedonism," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990); and Robert Storr, "No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg's Modernism Then and Now," in *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990). A special issue of *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* 44/45 (Autumn/Winter 1993) was devoted to Greenberg, and Thierry de Duve, *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines* (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1996), added to the debate in the 1990s. The most substantial account of the

“Greenberg effect,” as Caroline A. Jones calls it, is her book *Eyesight Alone: Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), CG 1, 32.

<sup>28</sup> "Review of *The Social History of Art* by Arnold Hauser" (1951), CG 3, 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), CG 1, 41; the shift in Greenberg's political convictions during the 1940s can be traced in his collected writings.

<sup>31</sup> Unpublished minutes of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, 14 December 1950 (Tamiment Library, New York University, New York). When I first published this information in 1993, Hilton Kramer took me to task for being more concerned about matters of politics than art ("Clement Greenberg & the Cold War," *The New Criterion*, March 1993). Like Hauser and the early Greenberg, my position is that two are not easily separated.

<sup>32</sup> "Review of *The Social History of Art* by Arnold Hauser" (1951), CG 3, 95.

<sup>33</sup> "Valéry, the Littérateur in Essence: Review of *Reflections of the World Today* by Paul Valéry" (1948), CG 2, 253.

<sup>34</sup> "The Plight of Our Culture" (1953), CG 3, 127.

<sup>35</sup> See "Matisse Seen Through Soviet Eyes: Review of *Matisse: A Social Critique* by Alexander Romm" (1948), CG 2, 203-204.

<sup>36</sup> Harris often allows others to voice objections against Hauser. Because he makes no attempt to distance himself from these objections, I am led to conclude that he shares some of them (see his "General Introduction," *The Social History of Art*, xviii and xix).

<sup>37</sup> Harris, "General Introduction," *The Social History of Art*, xix.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>39</sup> T.J. Clark, *Image of the People and The Absolute Bourgeois* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973). See, also, his controversial article, "The Conditions of Artistic Creation," *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 May 1974, 561-562.

<sup>40</sup> T.J. Clark, unpublished lecture, Association of Art Historians, Leeds, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> The autobiographical statement was prepared in 1953 for *Twentieth Century Authors* (first supplement) (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1955); it is reprinted in CG 3, 194-196.

<sup>42</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, who investigated changes in Greenberg's art criticism in the period from 1946 to 1958, arrives at a similar conclusion; see his "Les amendments de Greenberg," *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* 44/45 (Autumn/Winter 1993), 52-60.

<sup>43</sup> "Roundness Isn't All: Review of *The Art of Sculpture* by Herbert Read" (1956), CG 3, 272.

<sup>44</sup> The concern Greenberg exhibits in the 1940s and early 1950s with art's engagement with social and historical forces gives way in the later 1950s and early 1960s to a more exclusive preoccupation with art and its delimitations. T.J. Clark coined the term "Eliotic Trotskyism" in his cogent essay, "More on the Differences Between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves," *Modernism and Modernity*, 169-193; I employed the term "Kantian anti-Communism" in my introduction to CG 3, xv-xxxiii.

<sup>45</sup> "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name" (1962), CG 4, p. 142.

<sup>46</sup> "Review of *Piero della Francesca* and *The Arch of Constantine*, both by Bernard Berenson" (1955), CG 3, p. 253.

<sup>47</sup> For a period of time during the 1980s, the anxiety that is so prevalent in the discipline today was suppressed in some quarters. The back cover of *The New Art History*, published in the United Kingdom in 1986, confidently promised that the book would unveil "the camouflaged links between art scholar and the art market," thus unpacking "art's hidden ideology." "Q: What is the New Art History? A: A convenient title for the impact of feminist, marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic and sociopolitical ideas on a discipline notorious for its conservatism." It is no surprise that the coinage has not stuck. Convenient or not, this signifier was unable to unite fundamentally incompatible methodological positions. See A.L. Rees and F. Borzello, eds. *The New Art History* (London: Camden Press, 1986). Most of the essays in the anthology, by authors such as Stephen Bann, Jon Bird, Victor Burgin, Margaret Iversen, Lynda Nead, Marcia Pointon and John Tagg, were much less confident than the cover copy that bracketed them.

<sup>48</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>49</sup> "Review of *The Social History of Art* by Arnold Hauser" (1951), CG 3, 94-95.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

In his insightful essay, "Greenberg on Hauser: The Art Critic as Book Critic", the art historian John O'Brian shows us that Greenberg, the cultural critic who opportunistically became a founder member of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom – an affiliate of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, one of the CIA's Cold War cultural fronts, in the late 1950s – had taken quite a different line as a book reviewer in the two previous decades. During the 1940s and 1950s, his affinity for a Trotskyite position had led him often to criticise authors for not being attentive enough to the relationship. An edition of Clement Greenberg, art critic (1979). Clement Greenberg, art critic. First published in 1979. Subjects. Clement Greenberg (/ˈɛːrɪˈnɔːr/) (January 16, 1909 – May 7, 1994), occasionally writing under the pseudonym K. Hardesh, was an American essayist known mainly as a very influential visual art critic closely associated with American Modern art of the mid-20th century and a Formalist aesthete. He is best remembered for his association with the art movement Abstract Expressionism and the painter Jackson Pollock. Art Criticism: Resources - Art Evaluation - How to Appreciate Paintings - How to Appreciate Sculpture. FAMOUS ART CRITICS Louis Leroy (1812-1885) Louis Vauxcelles (1870-1943) Felix Feneon (1861-1944) Roger Fry (1866-1934) Apollinaire (1880-1918) Herbert Read (1893-1968) Kenneth Clark (1903-83) Leo Steinberg (1920-2011). Biography. One of the most famous art critics in America, Clement Greenberg was a commentator and curator, who was closely associated with abstract art of the mid-20th century. In fact, he ranks with Harold Rosenberg (1906-78) and John Canaday (1907-85) as the most influential The American art critic Clement Greenberg was no Ruskin. His clipped, effective prose did not rise to those heights, nor did his ideas about art have the generous scope and grandeur of Ruskin's cultural vision. Yet Greenberg has achieved immortality of a kind. He flourished as a critic in New York from the 1940s to 1960s, but even today, decades after his best-known work and 17 years after his death, he is a totemic and constantly invoked voice on modern art. As a critic, he championed Jackson Pollock. As an intellectual, he argued that pure abstract painting was the logical and necessary conclusion of modern art. The whole tendency of serious modernism, he claimed, was to strip various art forms down and reduce them to a philosophical core of truth.