

## Conclusion

The preceding history now affords review and comparison. Contribution to theory and adherence to Goodman's irrealism have been assessed in Chapter Ten. Here its application to art history is considered. Firstly, the application proceeds against objections by Elkins and Bell that the theory is too difficult, abstruse, glib, suave or otherwise flawed. It persists against objections by Gombrich and Bell that the period represents only the failure of depiction, a disillusion for history. It perseveres against hermeneutic, deconstructionist and post-structuralist criticism that such a period defies analysis or that such analysis can still be worthwhile. The study finds to the contrary. A history of depiction and painting based upon modes of exemplification not only handles the full range of painting for the period and integrates it closely with other plastic arts, but also delivers more precise analysis of depictive features and more flexible style sources for group, place and period. The job can be done, is worth doing and is done by irrealism here.

The method rests upon a theory of depiction and painting that discards absolute stylistic realism, primacy of intention, and priority of the abstract or concrete. Method begins from a more comprehensive stylistics and also allows that history has many right versions, can improve upon some; provide a novel or different version to others. It does this through matching traditional or established sources to right stylistics, new sources to traditional stylistics or simply new sources for new stylistics. Where traditional sources are secured by improved stylistics or traditional stylistics more accurately aligned with new sources, history is improved. Where new styles rival old ones or new sources replace old ones, an equally valid or right interpretation emerges and adds to rather than improves upon versions.

Care taken in matters of theory now rewards history with stricter demarcation and greater breadth or diversity within periods. But method also promotes a more adventurous attitude to construction. It accepts that not all lesser styles may be

needed or enough for a period; that others may be found or made where stylistic features for a work or source allow telling distinction, or others omitted where work or source offers less interest. Here, for example, 'Overstyle' 'Rerealism' and 'Reciprocal Depiction' are introduced as more accurate and useful groupings for understanding Modernism. More generally, the point is that art history need not always start from individual works or styles and ascend to larger groupings, but can equally start from period to detect lesser styles, to prompt research of individual works and styles. Art history does not ascend to a 'meta' level in dealing with period, is not exclusively or preferably a matter of individual works or styles (unless under a nominalist construction, of course).<sup>389</sup>

But while adventure is encouraged, constraints apply. Only if it maintains the rules of style, by accurate and consistent reference features for work and of the facts of source, only where it offers greater construction, makes more sense of surrounding periods, or thus conforms with more or longer history, only when it gives new direction to historical inquiry, or focuses attention anew, can art history be thus extended. So while irrealism here takes a more proactive stance toward style, reconstruction remains within severe limits. Whether better or different, versions follow the same rules.

Revision of styles here starts with the troubled notion of abstraction. Depiction as exemplification of two-dimensionality for a three-dimensional object, firstly clarifies issues of the picture plane and distinction with pattern. Projection and influence of style explains the course of 'a pattern of a picture plane' (or vice versa). While abstraction here is held to be full or absolute where it asserts pattern, no one picture plane or pattern is held to dominate practice for each. On the contrary, abstraction for depiction arises just as diversity of picture planes allows 'simultaneous and successive' depiction new and greater play, and this synchrony is taken to signal the start of Modernism. The arrangement more accurately locates abstraction in depiction, adheres to accepted chronology and identity of works but now allows abstraction to be seen within a larger framework. The arrangement is better for

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<sup>389</sup> The positivist zeal that 'starts' from particulars, takes the unpublished document or unrecognised work as primary, encourages the attitude that works precede styles, that the particulars of time and place come first in advancing art history. But categories or styles do not take care of themselves; much less accept any and every such detail. There are no works before or without styles, no art history without stylistics, which is as valid for period as personal style.

explaining more works more concisely, is different rather than worse for resisting extension of source, since source rapidly splinters into factors or factions for the social, psychological, national, political, economic and so forth. To pursue source thus is the task of a different rather than better history.

So Cubism and Expressionism in this view are not Modernist, nor lead to just abstraction, as is often supposed, but rather branch to opposing projects or styles, to 'Overstyle' and 'Rerealism' and their three-way competition largely measures the course of Early Modernism. 'Overstyle' and 'Rerealism' are introduced not as substitutes for Surrealism and Synthetic Cubism but because they actually pick out slightly different groups of works, stress differences in picture plane construction and crucial relations with abstraction. The change of styles also frees member works from narrower interpretation. Sampling two-dimensionality depends on a recognised three-dimensionality, and abstraction is often pursued or projected to sculpture and three-dimensional works by this, and further outward to architecture and applied design in this period. The shift from Early Modernism to Late Modernism is marked by a loss of impetus to such projection, and a convergence of competing styles of depiction around the middle of the century.

Late Modernism is also a matter of competing styles. But now a compound of abstraction, 'Overstyle' and 'Rerealism' arises as 'Reciprocal Depiction', where the abstract counterbalances the concrete, material with picture plane and object. 'Reciprocal Depiction', while a novel and perhaps clumsy term, nonetheless identifies qualities to accepted works otherwise ignored or denied. For the history dedicated to the advance of abstraction, such work is no more than a compromise, a slide toward the conservative and traditional. Yet this view cannot then explain why tradition is not more fully embraced, nor Modernism more convincingly abandoned. The view remains simply insensitive to finer stylistic features and ultimately robs abstraction of valuable relations. Equally crude is the history that can only recognise such works in light of later developments, especially Pop Art, finds much of the work forerunners or pioneers, yet cannot then explain why they remain tentative, or what it is that prevents them from being more wholeheartedly Pop Art. Again the view obscures important links and finer distinction, and while it easily traces roots to Early Modernist collage for example, as often fails to note key

differences to picture plane scheme and so ultimately robs Pop Art of valuable relations. 'Reciprocal Depiction' may seem to cluster a disparate group of works at first, but can point more convincingly to stylistic precedent, to related strategies of 'layout' 'traction' and 'interruption', to a formal rigour equal to that of abstraction, a shared mood or attitude and how they variously arrive at Pop Art and Post-Modernism. It is a radical proposal, but consistent with treatment of preceding and subsequent periods.

Against 'Reciprocal Depiction', abstraction projects more confidently to greater symmetry and scale, and distinctions here in value of scale to materials, and of location of symmetrical axes to key works particularly for New York-based abstraction, differ from standard accounts, as noted. Against painting and the plastic arts; works of 'expanded materials' extend to time and motion, kinetics and performance. Competing projects again share a crucial synchrony. Depiction and pattern are mutually extended in painting, and impetus is carried through to works of 'expanded materials'. Yet Late Modernism is a relatively brief period, lasts around ten years, and is succeeded around 1960 by Post-Modernism. Projects in Late Modernism do not so much converge or stall in transition as diverge and sprawl. 'Reciprocal Depiction' in its Late Modernist form gives way firstly to print sampling by painting, usually called Pop Art, and here the account draws upon the theory of painting as the work of sole instance, in re-defining the style. 'Reciprocal Depiction' less promptly contracts to a radical 'badness' or Neo-Expressionism, and the sampling of style against allegory.

Greater pattern in abstraction at a certain point reverses its sample; is not so much *by* pattern *of* greater scale and linked materials, but *by* such properties, *of* pattern. Abstraction then enters a Post-Modernist period. Such painting becomes the striking instance or extension to even the most basic patterns and is generally called Minimalism. Sampling of motion, duration and performance in works of 'expanded materials' also arises, extends fine art to literature, to script or score for performance or duration and place, and to other recording practices. It is usually called Conceptual Art, but the name here is stripped of misleading notions of a work of pure concept or seeming dematerialisation. It is sensibly redressed by Goodman's theory of sampling and a modicum of common sense. Pop Art,

Minimalism and Conceptual Art now constitute initial competing projects for Post-Modernism. The proposed theory of depiction, of exemplification and of painting as work of sole instance thus allows vital reconstruction of styles and period.<sup>390</sup> If anything the name for the period is the most disappointing aspect, although at least points to a more radical juncture than that between Early and Late Modernism. The name is as often applied to a later period. But Post-Modernism here continues until the mid eighties when it is succeeded by the last period to the century, now named 'Globalism'.

The name suggests not only the growing economic integration of the period, but also an emphasis upon holistic strategies, variously pursued in competing styles. The transition now offers both greater divergence for works of 'expanded materials', and convergence between pattern, print and depiction in painting. For works of 'expanded materials', sampling of performance, literature and other recording, leads to greater institutional support and ultimately to sampling of institutional prestige. For abstraction and entrenched pattern, the shift leads from repeating pictures and even the single motif to 'layouts' of printing and more rare or diffuse pattern. Print sampling by painting on the other hand leads firstly back to 'traction', to minor sampling, either to Neo-Expressionism, 'Bad' Painting or New Image Painting. It is an end to Post-Modernism. Neo-Expressionism then leads to the clichés of Pre-Modernist traditions or genres, and to genre more widely conceived, to those depictive worlds shared by both print and painting, or globally.

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<sup>390</sup> Attention to a single style such as Pop Art has for some time been content with the iconography and culture of the times rather than a more precise account of stylistic features. For example Marco Livingstone, *Pop Art: A continuing history*, London, 1990, p. 9, labours under the definition 'the use of existing imagery, from mass culture already processed into two dimensions, preferably borrowed from advertising, photography, comic strips and other mass media sources' unable to quite put his finger on print sampling, to see the forest for the trees or to acknowledge that *all depiction* uses 'existing imagery'. As a consequence the book is unable to quite see either what is central and peripheral to the movement, properly its derivation or relation to Minimalism and Conceptual Art. Similarly, claims for the start of Post-Modernism with Pop Art often compound the error. For example in Brandon Taylor, *Modernism, post-modernism, realism: a critical perspective for art*, Winchester, 1987, p. 8, the claim is that 'Andy Warhol became Post-Modern at the point where he stopped making images about the world and began making images about images' Implicit in both views is the idea that there is some more direct way for depiction to be about the world than 'existing imagery' or that 'existing imagery' is not then about the world. This is really to appeal to a naive copying in depiction, thoroughly discredited since Gombrich, at least. All depiction builds on older versions – is 'about images' – belongs to and builds worlds – is 'about the world'. Of course Taylor is hardly alone in this glib view of Post-Modernism, no more than falls in step with Livingstone's *Pop Art*. More precisely, however, Warhol began making *paintings* about *printing*, sampled just this difference in depiction, and with it engaged those objects depicted, their world and ways of depicting, rather than merely 'images about images' or 'existing imagery'.

Interestingly, labels for competing projects in this period fail to gain wider currency. Where this period is termed Post-Modernism, the more radical print sampling of say, a Pittman or a Pettibon are often lumped in with Pop Art, or the ‘readily-mades’ of a Hirst or Orozco casually ceded to Conceptual Art. But there is little gained by such attenuation. Equally, claims for a Post-Modernist period at this point often amount to no more than a declaration of rampant pluralism, or paradoxically, an end to art history.<sup>391</sup> Obviously the two reinforce one another and discourage greater discrimination. ‘Globalism’ on the other hand acknowledges only an open period; one that does not end with the century, but is only measured against preceding periods and synchrony of projects. Admittedly, the period is at best half a description by this and theory here offers no direct support for such construction, but care taken in preceding periods and projects nevertheless carries construction further than rival versions, points to crucial integration of projects for period, to distinctions with preceding periods and works, to new distinctions within period.

‘Globalism’ is not just the works labelled Post-Modernism in accounts by Michael Archer, Mathew Collings, Jonathan Fineberg, Hal Foster, David Hopkins, Edward Lucie-Smith, Brandon Taylor, or Daniel Wheeler, for example.<sup>392</sup> It differs in both the variety of work considered and train of development, or in both synchronic and diachronic changes. It introduces distinctions between the readymade and the ‘readily-made’ for example, as well as between a Pittman and a Marshall, a Lasker and a Lombardi, a Ritchie and a Marden, a Currin and a Tuymans, a Saville and a Cecily Brown, and indeed variously between any of the above all in demonstrating the further reaches of print sampling, genre, ‘layout’ and pattern in ‘Globalism’.<sup>393</sup> But rather than trace realisms between styles, art history here has been content to

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<sup>391</sup> For strong advocacy of this termination, see Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. New York/Guildford/Surrey, 1986, and Danto, *Encounters And Reflections: Art In The Historical Present*, Berkeley/London, 1986.

<sup>392</sup> Archer, *Art since 1960*, London, 1997, Collings, *This is modern art*, New York, 2000, Fineberg, *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) London /New York, 2000, Foster, *Return of the real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, Cambridge, Mass, and London, 1996, Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000*, Oxford/New York, 2000, Lucie Smith, *Artoday*, London, 1995, Taylor, *Modernism, post-modernism, realism: a critical perspective for art*, Winchester, 1987, Taylor, *Avant-Garde and after: rethinking art now*, New York, 1995, Wheeler, *Art Since Mid Century*, New York, 1991.

<sup>393</sup> Incidentally, emphasis upon a return to genre in ‘Globalism’ also suggests further research to the pre-Modernist period here, as the dismantling of genre.

demonstrate benefits to historical derivation. At its simplest, it promotes a filing system. The history organises works and styles often ignored or dismissed along with regular favourites and so extends sensitivities, builds tolerance and curiosity. The priority has thus been with construction, with rightness of category, or fit, before realisms. This is not to say that works and styles included are exhaustive or the best, only that it provides a history that is right in several ways, better than some, different to others.

Attention to such systematic rigour inevitably suggests structuralism. The typical concerns with holism, change and self-regulation to structuralist analysis are indeed shared with irrealism here. Differences lie in scope allowed historical or diachronic change as well as reference relations. Reference is not limited to exemplification; exemplification is not limited to depiction and painting. History here deals only with some of the range of reference, only for some periods, and only in some of the ways those periods follow each other. Reference is not locked into just this history. Standard objections to the rigidity or sterility of structuralism thus do not arise. Objections to a betrayal of pluralism in supporting a holism of history or reference are likewise avoided.

But this is only to review the impact of theoretical resources on art history. As important as assets of clarity, scope, rigour and sensitivity, are advantages gained in looking beyond art history. Here the argument is obviously and overwhelmingly for the value of depiction and painting, for their continued vigour in reference. But the case is not just that depiction and painting remain central to fine arts, on the contrary, the case is that their contribution is only to be measured against the full spectrum of arts, that the synchrony - even symbiosis - between arts ensures that there is no one line of progress, avant-garde or prime plastic art; that multiple interactions ensure that there are many, if any. Consequently, art history must juggle too many for progress against too few for persuasion or practice. History holds no suspicious self-regulation in this regard, only gauges that of reference and concerns itself with as much as is of interest to the plastic arts at a given point.

As important are links made or found between arts and periods, other practices and reference. The study points to an appreciation of surrounding practices, not only to

curatorial practice and collection, co-operation and co-opting, but also to more and other 'Globalisms' of genre, pattern or publication. It points to the world beyond the works that help make it. Then again the study points to greater scope for works and study, and against, for example, prevailing practice of the massive and misguided survey of contemporary art, not so much to curb mounting curatorial power as to redirect and disperse its resources. Practices of display clearly have a part to play in art and its history, but curatorial practice serves neither by relentless conformity, frequency or expansion. More shows are only to the good so long as they are of different things in different ways. Some things and ways may even require fewer shows. But practice here cannot do justice to history or works where curatorial practice gives priority to 'expanded materials' for example, or assumes that hybrids succeed in competition with single arts, or that history is made only with recent works. The study in this respect urges that the task of the collector, curator or critic now lies in reconsidering how, when and where works are shown as much as what is shown, and that meaning resides as much in such practices as a narrow and neurotic historicism. In this, the argument is hardly unique perhaps, but hopefully lends new weight.

An adequate review must also acknowledge certain omissions. Many of these are registered at suitable points in the study; some find no point before this. The study has conspicuously avoided social history in advancing routes of reference for example, and so avoids perhaps 'too much history' for its art. But circumstances and background to sources are more commonly available, so that rather than unduly extend study in this, study here readily cedes the task to rival versions, to *Artoday* for its many subcultures and regional differences, to *After Modern Art 1945-2000* for its ideological, if uneven insights, to *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being* for its detail of personality and lifestyle, to *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* for its patient catalogue of artist's interpretations, to *Return of the real* for sensitivity to philosophical fashions and post-colonial interests, and *Theorizing Modernism*, for psychoanalytic speculations.<sup>394</sup> No art history can do everything, nor need try where some versions enable or assist others. A more troubling omission concerns treatment of architecture, sculpture and printing, due both to constraints of space

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<sup>394</sup> Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (eds) *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, a Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, Berkeley/London, 1995, Johanna Drucker, *Theorizing Modernism, Visual Art and the Critical Tradition*, New York, 1994.

and concentration upon painting.<sup>395</sup> But here the study must be content with indicating issues of sampling and projection for three-dimensionality and other arts. Also, what initially seemed a useful contrast or counter to Gombrich's version of Modernism, in which architecture and the applied arts influence pattern in depiction, on reflection, now perhaps overstates the reverse influence, from depiction and painting to pattern and other arts. A more accurate view allows a two-way exchange.

A less troubling omission concerns the middle ground or the more conservative in painting for the period. Such work registers as 'Interstyle' in the account of Early Modernism here, but strictly is less distinguished or indicative of period. Works by artists such as Frenchmen Henri Matisse (1869-1954) Georges Rouault (1871-1958) and Balthus, a.k.a. Balthasar Klossowski de Rola (1908-2001) Russian Chaim Soutine (1893-1943) Italian Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) Germans Max Beckmann (1884-1950) and Otto Dix (1891-1969) and comparable figures in the United States and elsewhere, neither quite remain primitivist or Expressionist, accept greater abstraction or 'simultaneous and successive' depiction. Instead they pursue variation where it falls between projects, amount to the more traditional in Modernism, the more Modernist of tradition. In a longer study more would be made of the way such work teases tradition and period. For example, the middle ground may sometimes gauge where projects tire or tradition triumphs and in other ways may offer fresh starting points.

In Late Modernism significantly, the middle ground widens. 'Reciprocal Depiction' partially returns to single picture planes and objects against which to sample 'layout', 'traction' and 'interruption'. It relies upon tradition in this, but tradition now is not easily isolated or sampled on these terms, as noted, must contend with a middle ground and diminishing projection. In fact 'Reciprocal Depiction' more easily allows milder versions, or becomes an 'Interstyle', and uncomfortably inflates the middle ground. Works here range from the lean and linear 'Miserablism' of Frenchmen Bernard Buffet (1928-99) or Francois Gruber (1912-48) to the laboured plotting of Englishmen Euan Uglow (1932-2000) or Michael Andrews (1928-95) to

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<sup>395</sup> The author takes up some recent sculptors, photographers and Conceptual artists in the blog [Currentartpics](#).

the brittle bodily disproportions of Englishman Lucien Freud (b.1922) which find echoes in work by Philip Pearlstein (b.1924) and Alfred Leslie (b.1927) to the terse anecdotes and close-ups of Alex Katz (b.1927) the mythical and literary figures married to novel gesture and techniques in the work of Leon Golub (b.1922) Irving Petlin (b.1934) or Australian Sir Sidney Nolan (1917-92) as well as other, again comparable figures elsewhere.<sup>396</sup>

The impact of print sampling and end of period owe something to this diffusion. Post Modernism in turn, measures 'Bad' painting or Neo-Expressionism against just such compromise, settles for the cusp of Modernism as a starting point. Globalism's revival of genre also negotiates a middle ground; must find instance not too rare and non-traditional and such practice not only revises views of earlier work such as a Katz or Buffet, but also generates its own milder instances and rarer genres. A middle ground also arises for abstraction as styles and periods allow greater differentiation and compromise, and again there are many works and artists typical of this that a longer study would comfortably accommodate. However, having indicated enough of how they fit with this history, why such omissions are made, and having reviewed distinctive features to the history, compared them with rival versions, noted further advantages and insights, a conclusion now awaits only the reader's judgement.

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<sup>396</sup> For interesting revision of such work see Storr, *Modern art despite modernism*, New York, 2000.