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CLEMENT GREENBERG, RADICAL PAINTING, AND THE LOGIC OF MODERNISM

The collected art criticism of Michael Fried appeared in 1998 with the title *Art and Objecthood*. The centerpiece of the book is the essay by the same name, Fried's most famous statement regarding the art of the 1960s. In this essay, Fried had articulated a critique of the move toward "minimalism" or, in Fried's own preferred term, "literalism" in art. Whereas painting involved the illusion of space and the relation of parts, literalism aimed at a unitary, three-dimensional object. These literal objects would not be sculptures, however; they would have a wholeness and singleness of "shape" inspired by recent painting, above all the work of Frank Stella, that had reduced painting to its most minimal, two-dimensional elements and foregrounded the shape of the support. This new kind of painting, Donald Judd remarked at the time, "overpowers the earlier painting" because it is "nearly an entity, one thing"; but it also exhausted the specific art of painting, with its restriction to two dimensions, and necessitated literalism's opening to three dimensions.

To the arguments of the minimalists/literalists Fried responded that literalism was the "negation of art" because it was, in the terms of a complex argument that I cannot reproduce here, nothing more than "a new genre of theater" (153). In Fried's view, it was imperative for painting to fend off the literalist challenge by observing the distinction between *literal* and *pictorial* shape, thus disproving the charge that the art of painting was now exhausted. The shape of which Judd spoke was "shape as a fundamental property of [literal] objects"; but this sense of shape was distinct from the type of shape with which the painter is concerned, "shape as a medium of painting" (151) – "pictorial" shape. In order for the specificity of the art of painting to remain viable in the contemporary crisis, a painting had to "defeat or suspend its own [literal] objecthood" by the assertion of pictorial shape (ibid.).

In the introduction to the collected work Fried updates, but fundamentally reaffirms, the judgments about contemporary art at which he had arrived when he wrote the earlier work, and notes that he stopped writing art criticism in the 1970s because he was out of sympathy with the direction art had taken and saw no point in continuing to reiterate his opposition.

Just as *Art and Objecthood* appeared, however, *Artforum* (Sept. 1998) carried a review by Fried of monochrome paintings by the New York painter Joseph Marioni. In this remarkable document Fried declared, against all expectation, that Marioni's monochromes were "paintings in

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the fullest and most exalted sense of the word," and went on to this conclusion:

> … I consider Marioni to be one of the foremost painters at work anywhere at the present, and the great and thought-provoking surprise his work has given me is not only that it transcends the previous limitations of the monochrome but also that it is the first body of work I have seen that suggests that the Minimalist intervention might have had productive consequences for painting of the highest ambition. Simply put, the Minimalist hypostatization of objecthood … seems to have led in Marioni's art to a new, more deeply founded integration of color, amateriality, and support, which is to say to an affirmation of the continued vitality of painting that has something of the character of a new beginning. (149)

Who is Marioni, and what has he wrought that it could cause a theorist as brilliant and polemical as Fried to change his mind in such a fundamental way about the possibilities of monochrome – a type of work that, until he saw Marioni's work, Fried associated with mere literalism and considered "a vehicle for a hackneyed theoretical/ideological stance" (ibid.)? Even more important: could Fried be *right* in his assessment of Marioni's achievement, and, if so, what would this mean for the standard narratives about modernism in painting, and, more broadly, for our sense of the fate of painting (whose "death" has been routinely declared for decades now) and of art as a whole in the era of postmodernity?

I will give a quick introductory account of Marioni and his work, then turn to the metacritical issues raised by his work and its associated theoretical apparatus. Marioni has been living and painting in New York since the early 1970s, but his career for many years was mainly in Europe, especially Germany. His work has special significance in my eyes because it is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a loosely structured movement that has shown under different names but has most consistently called itself "Radical Painting," and which has been quietly carrying on the project of "reduction to the essence" of the art of painting that Clement Greenberg, and Fried in his wake, did so much to theorize some decades ago – although this project has gone in a direction that might have surprised Greenberg (as it does Fried). Radical Painting has taken widely divergent forms in the course of the two decades I have been following it, and I will not try to survey this variety; but Marioni is, along with his former collaborator, the Cologne painter Günther Umberg, the most theoretically minded of the group, and his paintings manifest in an exemplary way the relation of Radical Painting to the reductionist "logic of modernism."[1]

Now, whereas Greenberg in some famous statements declared *flatness* the irreducible element in the art of painting that modernism had uncovered, Marioni focuses his meditation on the question of *articulated paint* or *painted color* – not paint as it exists in the tube but as it exists when applied to a particular support by a particular means of application.[2] He uses acrylic, applied with a roller to linen on a wooden stretcher, always in a top-down direction, two to six coats of varying hues, but such as to produce a predominantly unitary color-image, each coat monochrome and forming a more or less all-over skin, with the texture of the linen visible to varying degrees through the paint or at the edges. His aesthetic aim is to create a total effect out of the relation between the specific hues he attains, the texture of the paint, the relation of the paint to the linen, and the size and shape of the picture support; this sense of the total physical presence of the painting is what Fried refers to when he mentions the effect on Marioni's work of the "minimalist intervention." However, Marioni is very insistent that his paintings should not cross the line into literalness and become literalist or minimalist "painted objects"; they remain, and are to be judged aesthetically as, paintings, and their predominant effect is of breathtaking color.

The crucial figure in Marioni's sense of the physical presence of the painting as painting, as structure of paint plus support, is, however, not any minimalist but the painter Robert Ryman, without whose work it is impossible to understand Marioni's project. Schematically, then, Radical Painting of the sort done by Marioni is modernism as analyzed by Greenberg's logic, transformed by the achievement of Ryman, and turned toward the exploration of the entire spectrum of painted color.

de duve's interpretation of greenberg

Greenberg's narrative about modernism has recently been massively re-examined and recontextualized by Thierry De Duve.[3] De Duve has heightened the philosophical stakes in this discussion by extensive analysis of the conflicting Kantian elements in Greenberg's problematic – the fact that for Greenberg the beauty of a painting always had to be evaluated by a Kantian judgment of taste, while on the other hand the "logic" of modernism that Greenberg equally derived from (his reading of) Kant implied that judgments of taste were no longer necessary. Greenberg wrote in his 1960 essay "Modernist Painting" that "the essence of Modernism," as observable in Kant, "the first real Modernist," lay "in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (85).[4] Hence modernism in art meant that each art was concerned with "all that was unique in the nature of its medium," and "the task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure' …" (86). The quest for purity, in the case of painting, yielded the reduction to mere flatness:

> It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained … more fundamental than anything else to the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art. The enclosing shape of the picture was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theater; color was a norm and a means shared not only with the theater, but also with sculpture. … [F]latness was the only condition painting shared with no other art … (87)

The logic of this famous argument is considerably less than compelling. Leaving aside its questionable relation to Kant's project, its shakiest assumption is this: that if there is to be an essence of painting, that essence must be absolutely *singular*, there must be *one* characteristic that is the essence and this one characteristic cannot be shared with any other art. By parity of argument, one would have to conclude that sound is inessential to poetry because it is shared with music, and the history of modernist poetry, with its recurrent tendency toward pure musicality, would be an unaccountable mistake.

In any case, this was the conclusion at which Greenberg arrived, a conclusion that, on De Duve's account, led him into an intolerable contradiction. For if mere flatness is the essence of the art of painting, then, as Greenberg remarked in 1962 in "After Abstract Expressionism," a stretched, unpainted canvas could be experienced as a painting or, in the slightly weasally term that he actually used, a "picture," "though not necessarily as a successful one."[5] According to De Duve (and I was surprised to find this out), no one ever presented a mere unpainted canvas as a painting; monochrome or quasi-monochrome was thus the closest thing to the limit-condition of the art of painting at which modernism in fact arrived, "the zero degree of painting" (217). But when Greenberg saw monochrome paintings, rather than thinking that they had arrived at the essence, he dismissed them as "familiar and slick." Monochrome, he judged, had become "almost overnight another taming convention" that "automatically declared itself to be art" (De Duve 251).

If a work automatically declares itself to be art, then no act of aesthetic judgment is required from the viewer; yet Greenberg was irrevocably committed to the necessity of aesthetic judgment. De Duve comments:

> Once an unpainted canvas can be called a picture or a painting, then it is automatically called art. With the dismissal of the very last *expendable convention* of modernist painting – that the canvas be painted at all – the specific [i.e., the art of painting] surrenders to the generic ["art" in general]. The consequences branch out into two possibilities. Either … the making and appreciation of art require nothing but a mere identification predicated on the conceptual "logic" of modernism, and aesthetic judgment is no longer necessary; … or aesthetic judgment is

> still necessary. But the pressure that the conventions of painting had put on its practice is now nil … (De Duve 222)

On De Duve's reading, then, if there is a reductive "logic" of modernism, it follows that, once the reduction is complete, there will no longer be any room for judgments regarding the beauty of the work, either on the part of the viewer or on the part of the artist as he creates his work; or, conversely, if there is to be aesthetic judgment, "purism or reductivism is no longer tenable" (ibid.). Hence, Greenberg's choice in favor of aesthetic judgment meant that he had to abandon "modernism" with its progressive paring away of nonessentials from the medium.

De Duve's account, which skillfully exploits the weaknesses in Greenberg's own formulations (importing, however, these same weaknesses into his own argument – as we will see), gains its plausibility not only from its elegant formulation but from the historical sequel, the "Greenbergian anti-Greenbergianism" of Donald Judd and Joseph Kosuth that developed the terms of Greenberg's logic uncompromisingly away from the specificity of the art of painting and toward the negation of aesthetic judgment. Looking at Stella's black paintings in 1962 with Greenberg's doctrine in mind, Judd and his generation of artists had "no alternative other than to pursue the modernist tradition even beyond the literal monochrome where it actually meets its end" (231). Stella's paintings, which seemed to mark the limit to which the modernist reduction could be pushed, were interpreted by Judd as really more like objects than paintings. "[M]ost of the works," Judd wrote, "… suggest slabs, since they project more than usual" (cited in De Duve 236). But Judd argued that three-dimensional "actual space" is "intrinsically more powerful and specific than painting on a flat surface." "Because the nature of three dimensions isn't set, given beforehand, something credible can be made, almost anything" (in De Duve 235). As these remarks indicate, Judd was still awkwardly trying to work with Greenberg's idea of specificity while loosening the traditional constraints to which Greenberg had bound it: Judd's new three-dimensionality in order to open its unlimited new realm of freedom needed to keep clear of the specificity of sculpture as well as that of painting; the new minimalist or literalist art could flourish only in the specificity of the space between the older genres.

Joseph Kosuth went even further than Judd. For him, "the propositions of art are not factual, but linguistic in character – that is, they do not describe the behavior of physical or even mental objects; they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art. Accordingly, we can say that art operates on a logic." This new logic leaves specificity entirely behind, for the artist's true task "now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art. … That's because the word art is general and the word painting is specific" (in De Duve 245).

In the space of art-in-general, anything whatever could be an artwork; according to Kosuth, the fiat of the artist and not anything intrinsic to the work decreed that something be art. But this was the door to "generic art" that Duchamp had already opened fifty years earlier with his readymades, particularly the famous urinal (hence the title of De Duve's book); the aftermath of the implosion of modernism was thus, according to De Duve, simply the final triumph of Duchamp's intervention.

from ryman to radical painting

The elegance of De Duve's argument conceals a serious flaw, one that becomes evident in light of the retrospective action on the history of modernism of painters like Ryman, Marioni, and Umberg. The flaw is De Duve's assimilation of the monochrome to the blank canvas, as though the conclusion drawn from the possibility of an unpainted painting – "the pressure that the conventions of painting had put on its practice is now nil" – were with equal validity to be drawn from monochrome, so that, in the absence of actual unpainted canvases, the "literal monochrome" would mark the place where the modernist tradition "actually meets its end" (231). It is easy to see how this assimilation could slip, uncriticized, into De Duve's argument on

the basis of Stella's early work, which teetered on the edge of the minimalist reduction; more puzzling is how De Duve can praise Ryman as a great painter but quickly assimilate his work, because it "acknowledge[s] the readymade," to the tradition of Duchamp (277). For Ryman's work in fact exploits to an unparalleled degree the pressure that the conventions of painting put on its practice.

Ryman has made an entire career out of paintings that are nominally white, yet each of which is a distinctive exploration of the immense variety of effects of texture, color, and reflectivity that can be achieved within the limits of what language labels univocally (and quite inadequately) as "white"; of the interaction of paint with the immense variety of surfaces to which it can be applied (linen, plastic, paper, metal, etc.); and of the thematization, as part of the formal whole, of the other, previously merely substructural elements, such as the stretcher, the size of the brush and the amount of paint it will hold, the means of attachment to the wall (a very rich element for Ryman, who has used tape, bolts of various sorts, tacks, and so forth, exposing them and making them part of the composition of the painting) – and even the wall itself, which Ryman also calculates as an integral part of the aesthetic structure of the painting. De Duve appears to leap from the fact that brushes, bolts, and so forth are manufactured objects to his conclusion that Ryman's art is properly to be understood as an "acknowledgment of the readymade." There is some interest in linking Ryman in this way to the tradition of Duchamp; but the artistic goal at which Ryman aims could scarcely be more distant from Duchamp's. The thematization of readymade elements in Ryman's work is subordinate to a more comprehensive logic of making than that of the readymade – a logic, older than modernism, that, before it involves their manufactured character, involves acknowledging, and drawing out the consequences of, the materiality of the artwork's component materials.

The characteristically modern critical awareness that there is no pure, raw materiality, that the materials of art come to us already worked over by a long cultural history, becomes for many contemporary theorists, including De Duve, a vision of pure Hegelian *Aufhebung* in which the materiality of art is entirely sublated into the realm of "convention," with convention itself understood as ultimately discursive in nature. The emergence of conceptualism can then be narrated as the logical culmination of the "logic" of modernism. The narrative of sublation cannot, however, do justice to the vital tradition of work within which the unsublated substratum of materiality of even the most readymade materials continues to function. Such work must either be reinterpreted against the grain or rejected as merely naive. Yet the charge of naivety can scarcely be sustained in the face of the fact that Radical Painting is constituted through and through as a continuing critical reflection, carried on within and beyond the terms of the dialectic of modernism developed by Greenberg and Fried, on the techniques and conventional materiality constituting the art of painting at the present moment in culture history.

Ryman, a crucial figure in this alternative tradition, is for his own part unequivocal about the controlling aim of his work: "The basic problem is what to do with paint. What is done with paint is the essence of all painting."[6] The significance of the various material elements of the artwork is wholly reconfigured by their subordination to this aim; and Ryman's work, rather than confirming the tradition of Duchamp, might be more readily understood as the triumph of making, in the entirely *specific* form of the art of painting, over the readymade. Which is to say, not making *ex nihilo*, as the pure originating power of a godlike genius (the model toward which conceptualism gravitates), or as the imposition of form on formless matter, but as the process by which an artist operates the conventional techniques and culturally worked-over materials of a historically evolved *tekhne* and evolves it further. (The crucial philosophical reference for this tradition would then be not Kant – whose aesthetics is the product of the Romantic episode that briefly carried aesthetic theory into the ether of the ineffable – but Aristotle, the original theorist of art as *tekhne* who is much more plausibly considered the predecessor, even if not the actual inspiration, of

the modernist idea of the specific medium. I will say more about this at the conclusion of this essay.)

Now, Ryman is often praised for his pragmatic, non-theoretical stance toward his work; yet in his terse way he has situated himself very precisely as working within the selfsame "logic" that was more fully theorized in the 1980s by Marioni and Umberg in their jointly authored account of the nature of Radical Painting.[7] There are, Ryman says, three kinds of painting "procedure": representation, abstraction, and his own, which has "been called by various names, none of them very satisfactory": "There's been 'concrete,' … it's been called 'absolute', 'non-objective', and it's even been called 'abstraction'" (a list to which we can now add "radical"). Ryman prefers to call it "realism," because, unlike the first two procedures, this type of work involves no picture, no illusion, only the perceptual reality of the painting itself.

It is much harder to achieve freedom from representation than one might think. The very fact that "realism" has been confused with "abstraction" (a concept that retains the notion of something represented, only "abstractly") shows that even the idea of purely non-representational painting is not easy to grasp. The notion of a painting's having no picture at all (not even one that is abstractly gestured at), is deceptively simple to state, yet the radical extirpation of representation requires a thinking-through of every conventional and material element of the art of painting – a thinking-through that produces a new logic of form. Realism, says Ryman, "uses all the devices that are used by abstraction and representation such as composition and color complexity, and surface and light, and line and so on," and yet all these terms are transformed when their logic is reconfigured from scratch without the relation to figure. Consider an element as simple and fundamental as *line*: if line is still to be found in the "realist" or radical painting, it cannot be *drawn*, because drawing is a function – classically, for Aristotle as much as for Kant[8] – the defining function, of the procedure of representation. Hence: "I would not actually paint a line, I would paint an area of paint and stop. And then at the edge of the paint would be a line" (Ryman, in Sauer and Rausmüller 64–65).

By contrast with Ryman's endless experimentation, Marioni tinkers only in subtle ways with the format of his paintings, focusing instead on the exploration of an almost unlimited range of hue. And, because the logic of his work is more homogeneously than Ryman's a paint-logic, there is no place in it for composition or line, even as paint-edge (one reason why he paints with a roller). Yet, in part because of what he has learned from Ryman, Marioni's paintings are informed by the most refined awareness of the full physicality of the painting as a composite unity attached to a wall. The successive skins of paint interlock in such a way as to create a highly specific visual effect, as though we were looking into the paint, into a color-space that is not illusionistic but the actual space created between the layers of paint; yet the paint is not laid on thickly, does not create what Greenberg called "furtive bas relief." The successive layers are veil-like in their subtlety, and the weave of the linen shows through (Marioni paints only on linen – eight different kinds depending on the texture and porosity he needs to achieve a specific color-image). Marioni is also acutely attentive to the relation between the color he creates and the shape and size of the painting. The form, or "structure," as he prefers to call it, of the painting, arises, as in Ryman's work – although arguably, as Fried says, "in a wholly different spirit" – out of the interaction of all these elements; hence there is no question of falling into what Harold Rosenberg called mere "matterism," a false sense of aesthetic richness arising from the intoxication of the eye that puts itself to the tracing of raw physical textures in all their endless variety. As always in art, it is a matter of *form*; and yet this is form that is tied in the most intimate way to the materiality of the medium. The "pressure of the conventions of the medium" does not disappear but is transformed; painters are made more conscious of this pressure by their own increasing articulation of the medium's material elements in all their diversity, and this in turn leads to a yet more refined articulation and a yet subtler consciousness.

The difference between Ryman's work and Marioni's, and then again between either of theirs and that of Umberg, shows how vast is the range of possibility of this fundamental or radical or realist exploration of painting. Like the work of the others, Umberg's has evolved through a number of transformations, but in the 1980s when he was collaborating with Marioni he painted intensely black-looking paintings on thin sheets of aluminum, made of dry particles of graphite or ivory black, which he brushed dry onto moist dammar, horizontally and vertically, thirty or forty layers, building up a porous texture that registers the disciplined lines of the brush strokes in the strikingly dry painted surface. This texture is extremely fragile: the merest touch will destroy it. This fragility, together with the thinness of the support – which makes the painting seem at first to be part of the wall – creates a sort of attenuation of materiality, at least in the sense of withdrawal from three-dimensionality. Yet the paint, with its delicately refined yet charcoal-like texture, remains intensely material, and in the absence of any figure, shape, or line, the eye can only perceive the color as bound to this materiality. Black is actualized in a specific painting-medium, and this actualization can only be judged aesthetically in the context of the specific history of aesthetic exploration out of which it comes, the context of fundamental, concrete, absolute, realist, or radical painting.

The increasingly articulate consciousness of the (historically, contextually significant) materiality of painting, the nature of the pressure it exerts on the quest for aesthetic form, and the means by which that pressure can be put to aesthetic account that painters in this tradition have developed, give the lie to Greenberg's own belief that painters had never been, and could not be, explicitly aware of the "logic" that had been guiding their practice throughout the history of modernism.[9] Yet this increased awareness actually has the opposite effect from that inferred by De Duve, moving the art of monochrome farther than ever away from any possibility of producing a painting by mere deduction from a logic.

De Duve creates his dichotomy between aesthetic judgment and conceptual deduction by ignoring the micrology of the painter's practice in its largely tacit interaction with the (materialist) "logic" according to which he works. In his reconstruction of Greenberg's thought De Duve pays lip service to the question of interaction with the medium:

> As to the modernist artist's aesthetic judgment, it has to be suggested, inspired, provoked by or received from the medium itself, for the medium is the only subject matter of modernism and the locus of the artist's aesthetic constraints. (214)

Yet De Duve renders the reference to the inspiration the painter receives from "the medium itself" effectively meaningless when, endorsing Greenberg's narrowest interpretation of the logic of modernism, he sublates the materiality of the medium into the idea of convention. In the context of this sublation, it is easy to conceive monochrome as a bodiless "zero degree" of painting that can provide no further inspiration (only "concoctions" that are produced "automatically"). And the judgment of quality must now hover in the thin air of a generalized or generic "art" that has no palpable relation to the specificity of a given medium, because this relation, if conceived as a logic, would result in the automaticity that renders aesthetic judgment irrelevant. One should pay careful attention to the sleight of hand with the word *medium* that is required for the logic of this argument:

> Between content and form, between the generic value-judgment and the specific self-criticism of the particular medium, there has to be a mediation, but one that doesn't allow for a deduction. If it did, it would mean that content – aesthetic value – could be inferred from the state of the medium. Conversely, it would mean that the medium could be deliberately manipulated so as to produce content or quality, thus allowing for what Greenberg called "concocted" art. (213)

Only the evacuation of materiality from the notion of the medium can justify the imposition of the model of *deduction* on that of "specific self-criticism." If what De Duve has identified is a problem that indeed arose in the conceptualist aftermath of modernism and that might well have

been given an essential impetus by Greenberg's "logic," it is not a problem that is intrinsic to the notion of modernism as specific self-criticism, if that notion is going to be construed not in the odd and indefensible form of its reductio in a blank canvas but in the most expansive terms – terms that look to Greenberg's critical practice, which was, as Fried notes, separated by a "gulf" from his theory – and to the history of the modernist reduction since 1962.

an alternative version of greenberg

Greenberg was never in any danger, as De Duve wants to think, of "surrendering" his taste in front of Stella's black paintings (203–04). Greenberg more than once indignantly denied ever having confused the essentialism or purism of a painting with its quality, and any unbiased reading of his work will confirm this. He had a remarkably catholic eye, and in fact confessed a preference for figuration over abstraction. What I want to focus on here, however, is his enthusiasm for color, which shows up repeatedly and which constitutes a sort of second, shadow "logic" leading to a different, and more pregnant, conclusion about the future of modernism than the one that leads to the blank canvas. His remarks on Morris Louis's work, for instance, reveal precisely the kind of eye for "literal" qualities that one needs in order to look at Radical Painting:

> The fabric, being soaked in paint rather than merely covered with it, becomes paint in itself, color in itself, like dyed cloth; the threadedness and wovenness are in the color. Louis usually contrives to leave certain areas in the canvas bare, and whether or not he whitens these afterwards with a thin gesso … the aspect of bareness is retained. It is a gray-white or white-gray bareness that functions as a color in its own right and on a parity with other colors; by this parity the other colors are leveled down as it were, to become identified with the raw cotton surface as much as the bareness is. (97)

There is clearly a relation between the way Greenberg here reads color and the idea of the reduction to flatness, and there needs to be; the idea of flatness is not simply expendable. But flatness is here fully materialized in the ensemble of constituents that make up the painting, and what Greenberg responds to is not flatness as such but the integration of paint and support. Yet Greenberg, under the influence of his doctrine of pure opticality (another dogma of his theoretical apparatus, and one which I cannot here try to reconcile with the line of thought that leads to the blank canvas), oddly concludes that the color is "disembodied," and argues that the paintings need to be large so as not to be seen as discrete, tactile objects. Thus, the overarching "logic" is not yet that of Radical Painting, but Greenberg's articulation of the physical structure of the painting comes very close.

That a new doctrine of the evolution of modernism is brewing in such observations becomes evident in the very same essay, "After Abstract Expressionism," in which Greenberg makes the remark about the blank canvas. Greenberg here rhapsodizes about the colorism of Still, Rothko, and Newman in terms that continue to resonate today and might be said to presage the onset of Radical Painting (while contrasting sharply with the ambivalent tones in which a little later he speaks of the reduction to mere flatness):

> … the ultimate effect sought [by Still, Rothko, and Newman] is one of more than chromatic intensity; it is rather one of *an almost literal openness* that embraces and absorbs color in the act of being created by it. Openness, and not only in painting, is the quality that seems most to exhilarate the attuned eyes of our time. … Let it suffice to say that by the new openness they have attained, [they] point to what I would risk saying is the only way to high pictorial art in the near future. (Emphasis added)

"Openness" is a difficult term to define, and of course Greenberg could not have had in mind quite the sort of thing that is achieved by Marioni (radical painting cannot be *deduced*); yet when he calls it "almost literal" he suggests precisely the direction these painters marked out for Marioni's further development of what he learned from them. "I would like to do for color what Pollock did for line," Marioni remarks in an interview; "I would like to free color from boundary" (Museum Abteiberg Catalog 25).

De Duve passes lightly over this praise of Still, Rothko, and Newman, taking it as somehow restoring Greenberg's confidence in the thesis of flatness and thus as leading up to the remark about a bare canvas; Fried more acutely notes that Greenberg's remarks on color are ironically at odds with the remark about the bare canvas, but argues that "the reductionist logic of Greenberg's theory of modernism meant that color or indeed 'openness' in recent painting could not assume the constitutive or essentialist significance of flatness and the delimitation of flatness ..." (39). And it is true that Greenberg now suggests the old logic has expended its impetus as Still, Rothko, and Newman have opened a "second phase" in the "self-criticism" of modernism. In this new phase, the delimitation of flatness is replaced as the central question by that of "the ultimate source of quality in art" (Greenberg 132) – a source that Greenberg identifies as "conception," in the quite traditional sense of "inspiration." But this proclamation of a new phase does not erase from the record the previous remark in which he marks out color and openness as the *exclusive* formal pathway to the future of painting – precisely the role he had formerly assigned to the problematic of flatness (of which, properly conceived, the questions of color and openness are aspects – as I will argue below).

The statement about a new phase confusedly implies both that the old formalist logic is no longer relevant as painting turns from questions of form to questions of aesthetic quality – an implication contradicted by the declaration concerning color and openness; and that the question of quality in painting was not formerly a problem for modernism as it pursued its quest for flatness – an implication that is contradicted by Greenberg's own earlier critical practice, in which he insisted on the distinction between formal means and aesthetic quality. In 1959, for instance, in "The Case for Abstract Art" Greenberg had written that "Abstract painting may be a purer, more quintessential form of pictorial art than the representational kind, but this does not of itself confer quality upon an abstract picture" (82).[10]

It is clear, despite Greenberg's muddled formulation, that the *formal* logic of modernism he had done more than anyone else to define had not all of a sudden shifted course with the achievements in color and openness of Still, Rothko, and Newman; these painters continued to follow out the consequences of the turn in the modern period away from the illusionistic space of representation. Thus, necessarily, they continued to work in a crucial, even an "essential," sense within a "logic of flatness" – the logic of the reduction of representation according to which the form of painting is reconceived in what Ryman calls a realist way. This in fact was how Greenberg himself initially developed his thesis about flatness; what was fundamentally at issue in this thesis was the rejection of representation, figuration, illusionism, "the flat picture's denial of efforts to 'hole through' it for realistic perspectival space," as Greenberg termed it in 1940 (vol. 1, 34). Clearly, this denial must remain at the center of any reflection on the modernist problematic; the work of Still, Rothko, and Newman cannot be understood without it. But because he came to isolate flatness pure and simple as the essence of painting-logic, Greenberg's recoil from flatness seemed to leave him no recourse but to conclude that his problematic, and that of modernism, had shifted in a fundamentally new direction.

If we were to choose one term to replace "flatness" as the best single index of the modernist reduction, at least within Greenberg's work, it should probably be "painterliness." Painterliness is a much richer concept than flatness, more adequately suggesting the complexity of Greenberg's insights into painting, as well as pointing toward the primacy of paint stressed by the radical painters. It is in fact a concept to which Greenberg himself accords centrality (as is indicated, for instance, by his thinking "Painterly Abstraction" was a better name than "Abstract Expressionism" for the phenomenon in question). Painterly qualities are those that pull the viewer's attention away from what the painting represents toward the physical fact of paint-applied-to-a-surface, of paint applied on top of paint, of density and flow and so forth, and the problematic of painterliness therefore calls up as interdependent, intertwined questions the denial

of figuration, the physical and perceptual qualities of painted color, and the flatness of the non-illusionistic painted surface.

the painting is the body of color

Now, however, as we move away from representation toward the full materiality of painting, we run up against the other limit of this logic: the limit of objecthood on which Fried has so richly meditated, but which Greenberg already detected. A painting cannot be a literal object, not even a literal painted object. The minimalists were very insistent on the difference between objects and paintings, and their acute investigation of the nature of literal objects is essential to the project of radical painting, a blinking red light that warns the painter how far he can go in this direction and still be making a painting. How can we tell an object that is a painting from a painted object? Only by becoming attuned to the painting-logic that produces the specific type of object that, within a certain history as construed by a certain interpretation of that history, has become as literal in its objecthood as it can be and still be a painting – that has, in fact, become most fully a painting, and nothing but a painting, by the path of its own particular brand of "literalness."

"The radical painter creates an object whose content is dependent on the intrinsic logic of its own material form," claim Marioni and Umberg (*Outside the Cartouche* 22). This logic has to be understood in terms of what they call the *function* of this object (23). "Paintings are not found objects"; they are "manmade" and hence must be understood in terms of the purpose or function that motivates their making (19). Of course paintings can be made for a variety of purposes, including the purpose of representation. But representation would be a purpose external to the "logic of the material form" of the painting. "The material itself has perceptual content that is intrinsic to its function" (24); the support, for instance, "is an object whose specific purpose is to-be-painted" (ibid.). According to this functional definition, then, flatness could not, logically, be the essence of the painting, because everything about the painting has to be understood in relation to what Marioni and Umberg could easily have called the *telos* of the painting-object or object-that-is-a-painting, which irreducibly involves *being painted*.[11] Unlike, say, a wall that one paints, the painting-support is created purely in view of this function. (Greenberg ignored this fact and thus curiously gave way to literal "literalism" when he started to think of the flatness of the support in abstraction from the purpose for which painting-supports are made.) The function of the whole painting, in turn, is to be *perceived* as a painting, to give human beings the perceptual experience that is the experience of looking-at-a-painting, where the painting, and not the illusion of space or the figure of something in the world, is indeed what is looked at – and where, of course, this entire complex of function, artifact, and experience is constituted "conventionally" by a given society with a given history. The functions of the physical support and its qualities, including flatness, are definable only with reference to the function of the full perceptual unity that is defined by this history, or by a certain appropriation of it, as the finished painting; and the form or essence of the finished painting is the "color-image" that it constitutes. In the final analysis, the "objectness" of the painting is color (ibid.); all the physical parts of which the painting is made are brought into their unity of aesthetic form by their subordination to the color. This does not mean that they are effaced, as was the tendency in representational painting. On the contrary, color is a dimension of materiality and the radical painter is not trying to detach it from materiality. "Aristotle defines color as the 'limit of the translucent in a determinately bounded body.' This is a superb definition for the painter. It locates color within a material (even though it is, in Aristotle's concept, the outermost part of a thing) and it implies the limitation of its form as material" (24). The color of a painting, if it gives the rule to the physical constituents, is itself bound to or determined by their materiality (first of all, that of the paint) as this materiality has historically evolved in relation to the evolving function of painting. But the size and shape and texture and absorptiveness of the support, the relation to the wall, and so forth, must co-operate in an overall perception, the decisive or ruling factor of which is color. Color is the

essence of the painting in much the way that for Aristotle the soul is the essence or form of the body. Even though the form is in perception detached from the material, substance or ousia is embodied form; and the radical painting is ousia as embodied color.

How can color be a form? A form is by definition bounded or what gives boundary; Aristotle himself in the *Poetics* used the drawn line as a paradigm of form, but the drawn line is one of the remnants of representation that the radical painter eschews in his search for "openness." But color becomes, or can become, a form when it finds the absolutely specific, bounded body that it reciprocally determines and is determined by. There is no notional answer to the question of how color can function as form, only the historical fact that certain painters have worked out an aesthetic and a painting-practice that treats it as such, and the proof is in the experience of their work (or not).

art vs. craft

If Radical Painting is what gives importance to yet another reconsideration, at this late date, of the logic of modernism, what gives importance to radical painting itself is the act of aesthetic judgment that says "this is good" to the work of Ryman or Marioni or Umberg. And this aesthetic judgment itself, made in the strong form that both Greenberg and Fried emphasize, in which it expresses not just a feeling of pleasure but a judgment of aesthetic quality, is indissociable from knowledge of modernism as a tradition of specific self-criticism. This tradition has not primarily been a matter of conceptual formulations and deductions concerning "conventions" and "the state of the medium," but an *education for the eye*, yet an education that has of course essentially involved the brain and language as well as the hand and the brush, and increasingly so as the tradition has become more articulately self-aware – a self-awareness that has increasingly become, among the practitioners of the art, an explicit logic of purism and reduction to the "essence." Whatever it might be for the theorist, the concept of essence is for the painter not a dogmatic doctrinal simplification but a tool with which to meditate on materiality and objecthood and which through this meditation participates in bringing forth new work. The theorist might, correspondingly, avail himself of the concept in a non-metaphysical, ordinary-language way, as a historically contingent notion, in something like the way Fried already proposed in "Art and Objecthood." Nevertheless, if Greenberg's own dogmatic reduction is too "essentialist" to be useful, Fried's version of a contingent essence of modernism is a little too flexible to capture what is distinctive about Radical Painting.

Greenberg himself suggested that the idea of purity could be "merely an illusion," but a "useful" one, that had led to good new developments among the artists under its spell. The idea of a "mere illusion" functioning in this way, however, is a hangover from nineteenth-century positivism and is inadequate to describe the functional role, within the micrology of radical painting practice, of the idea of reducing painting to its fundamentals. It is necessary to take the idea of an essence of painting seriously in order to understand Radical Painting from within, and even really to *see* it, to see it understandingly in its profound relation, not along one axis but in terms of a myriad of threads, to a tradition out of which this work grows, and which is retrospectively reconstituted once again as a tradition, with a somewhat altered meaning, in view of this new development.

Such conviction of aesthetic quality as may be derived from a radical painting, because specific to the historical-conceptual lineage of the type of artwork in question, is not of the transcendentally compulsory sort implied by De Duve's version of Kantian aesthetic judgment. The version of "specificity" that I am arguing here implies that one can, and indeed ought to, refrain from the judgment "this is art" while making the judgment "this is a good painting." This is not to deny that the generic concept of art is meaningful; only to say that the large questions of art that De Duve raises obfuscate the issue of the logic of reduction in the history of modern painting – at least along the line that leads to Radical Painting. If one knows the most resourceful form of the thesis about reduction to the essence, and if one has spent enough time looking at the most serious

work that has been produced either on the basis of this thesis or in a way that supports it, then one can in principle have an aesthetic experience that stands up to the experience one has had of the aesthetic objects that have formed one's sense of optimal aesthetic experience; but it is only as a quite *specific* experience that one can have it. Contrary to De Duve, it is not only not necessary to judge "this is art" before one can judge "this is a painting, and a good one"; it is necessary *not* to do so (though one might go on to the generic judgment afterwards, recognizing that one is now switching language-games in so doing).

As in any other question of aesthetic experience, the judgment of quality in front of a radical painting is not a matter of deduction and it is not compulsory. But Radical Painting has the earmarks of a well-grounded and valid aesthetic movement, and forces a reconsideration of questions that had seemed to be closed when it looked as though the modernist logic had hit a dead end. What all this betokens regarding the larger questions of the "culture wars" is a further question that I will touch on below; for now what I want to stress is that, if we are going to use modernism as an example of anything on the way to a larger argument, we should address it in its fullness as a historically evolving phenomenon, along with the most resourceful statement of its rationale or "theory"; and this involves criticizing and rejecting Greenberg's own dogmatic theses and De Duve's interpretation of them.

Nevertheless, I want to pay tribute to the scope and seriousness of *Kant after Duchamp*, particularly because of the framework of sociopolitical reflection that gives point to De Duve's "genealogical" reconsideration of modernist painting. My remarks here have focused on narrowly aesthetic issues, and I recognize that these issues may appear trivial compared to the question of the cultural and political mission of the artist, in the context of the great upheavals of the twentieth century, which De Duve tries to understand. I am especially troubled by the problem of the esoteric nature of the modernist–formalist aesthetic I have defended here, its seemingly elitist adherence to a refinement of aesthetic taste that can perhaps only ever be the possession of a privileged few. I have no doubt that the ultimate and genuine significance of the debates over essentialism are rooted in the problems of democratization that De Duve addresses.

However, the great democratizing movement that De Duve sees as the legacy of Duchamp – everyone an artist, the artwork as anything whatever – is achieved at the cost of an elision of the *physical labor* involved in making a work of art, and which is the ultimate source of the work's specificity. Duchamp did not make his urinal, but someone or a group of someones did – anonymous workmen in a urinal factory. I am not so worried about the possibility that artworks could be *automatically* created by deduction from a logic (a rather specialized and even artificial problem, in my view) as I am by the fact that the work of their making could then be assigned to someone else, or, in the case of the readymades, has already been done by someone else. One of the things that strikes me most about Ryman's, Marioni's, and Umberg's art is that, for all its conceptual sophistication, it has a strong affinity with *craft* – an affinity that, incidentally, goes back to the roots of modernist art-theory in Baudelaire, that great early debunker of the genius-and-inspiration theory of aesthetics and pioneer of the notion that the specific province of poetry is language as a *material* medium.[12] Marioni and Umberg, in a striking move, compared the purpose and usability of their paintings to that of an ordinary chair (*Outside the Cartouche* 23–24); and Marioni goes so far as to entirely abjure the honorific *art* for his work, defining his work strictly and solely as *painting*.

We are so inured to thinking of painting as art that Marioni's resistance to this assimilation might seem incomprehensible or even senseless. If painting isn't art, what is it? And if it isn't art, why should it have any claim on our attention?

Marioni's stubborn adherence to the specificity of the practice of painting indicates an ethicopolitical resonance of the question of the medium, of its irreducibly material nature, and of the craftsman's attunement to that materiality, which modernity, first in the aftermath of Kant's and Romanticism's infatuation with "genius," later under the spell of the poststructuralist *Aufhebung* of materiality into language, has had

trouble keeping consistently in view – in spite of the modernist intervention. The continuing significance of the thesis of specificity is for me grounded in the indissociability it suggests of the labor of the artist from the specific nature of his medium in its complex, socially conditioned materiality – which is the same as the indissociability of art from its craft-aspect. The generic judgment "this is art" is no doubt necessary in the language-game that has developed around art that intentionally wanders away from the constraints of established, specific art-forms. As I have tried to show in this essay, however, this development does not mean that some generic judgment of value has now superseded, wholly and in all contexts, the modernist logic of specificity. Moreover, De Duve's arguments that a picture must be judged to be art before it can be judged to be a picture, and that the judgment "this is beautiful" is identical with the judgment "this is art," strike me as no friendlier to a democratization of art and the creative process than they are to the vacuous cult of art-fetishism of which we already see signs in Kant's almost helpless awe before the inexplicability of genius, and of which the only slightly more foolish descendant is the contemporary worship of the art-superstar.[13]

In this essay I can only indicate the outlines of the full theorization that Radical Painting invites, and to which the current notion of the conventionality of art practices is so inadequate. The convergence once more at this late date in history of the notions of art and craft requires a rethinking of the entire history of the concept of art as this history has been configured by the evolutionary narrative of its emergence – more than once; in ancient Greece and again in the late Middle Ages – in its purity from a more generalized notion of making. Modernism is commonly – and rightly – understood as the final step in the emergence of the pure concept of art, and Greenberg's ideas about the specificity of the individual arts are an important chapter in the history of this emergence. Hence the notion that Radical Painting is a continuation of the logic of modernism, yet an overcoming of the distinction between art and craft, might seem paradoxical.

The paradox is neither illusory nor necessary. The truth is that more than one thread of "logic" traverses the history of modernism, and where we end up depends on which thread we take up. De Duve has articulated for us with great precision the decisive line that is crossed with Duchamp and conceptualism, when, following one development of the logic of specificity, the bond between artistic practice and the specificity of the medium is broken and the concept of art emerges in its own generic rather than specific purity. Once this bond is broken, everything about art begins to dissolve in the universal medium of discursivity, and this marks the final break between the profession of the artist and the guild tradition in which this profession had continued to be, however distantly, rooted. What I have tried to show in this essay is that the terms in which Radical Painting is conceived are terms that lead us ineluctably away from the universal solvent of discursivity and back toward the realm of material practices. I have been concerned to show that there is nothing naive about this turn; that it incorporates as an essential part of its conception and of its practice a reflection on the conventional nature of the materiality of the medium – that this, too, is a rigorous unfolding of the logic of specificity.[14]

I am more inclined to the latter than the former development for two interrelated reasons. First (a point I have stressed), because the sublationist narrative empties most or all of the materiality out of the notion of the medium, in favor of the notion of convention. Radical Painting, by contrast, in its reflection on the materiality of the medium, does not in any way slight the conventional element in this materiality. Second, because the sublationist dematerialization of the medium opens out an unlimited field of critical discursivity about art in which the critic or theorist is authorized to say practically anything since the entire cultural field can now be framed as aesthetic – and art itself in this postmodern regime, as Rosalind Krauss writes, "mimics just this leeching of the aesthetic out into the social field in general."[15] Not everyone will consider this a demerit; and I myself do not believe in any juridical prohibition on the critic's discourse becoming autotelic, nor am I immune to the

pleasures of postmodern cultural aesthetics. Nevertheless, there is something *specific* to the painter's, sculptor's, musician's … practice that is also autotelic, or which might be so conceived, and as so conceived made the basis of that practice, and to which justice can be done only by a critical discourse that does not auto-authorize itself but binds itself as tightly as possible to that practice in the fullness of its conventional materiality.

Here I can only sketch the outlines of the full, historically articulated account of human praxis as a whole that would constitute a more adequate account of artistic convention as grounded in what I have been calling *conventional materiality*.[16] Such an account would take as its fundamental reference points, on the one hand, Aristotle's analysis of the teleology of human practices and, on the other hand, Marx's analysis of human productive activity, that is human labor as the foundational fact of social existence.

A fully articulated theory of conventional materiality would begin with the beginnings of human culture in order to excavate the residue of fatality, the unpredictable system of limits, that arises at the point of intersection of multiple acts of individual exertion that are carried on within a social context and leave their residue on the physical world, long before the emergence of even the most rudimentary arts and crafts, and even before the advent of language. The most primordial inscriptions on the world of these residues are the rubbing clear of the ground where a group of humans or proto-humans sits to rest or lies down to sleep, of pathways where one walks after the other, of trees stripped bare of fruit around these inscribed areas so that the people are constrained to move along, fraying new paths and making new clearings. Here is the beginning of history as the simple deposit of accumulated acts within the context of sociality, and the landscape is the incipiently socialized materiality that serves as the support of this inscription. Later on in history, as Marx observes in *The German Ideology*, there will no longer be any nature left; it will all have been absorbed into the network of cultural inscription; in this earlier period there is as yet nothing that can be called a convention, and nevertheless there is already the interaction between sociality and the physical world that leaves a perduring trace that then acts as a partial determinant on the purposeful action of human beings: precisely the fundamental structure that underlies those later features of social activity, more complexly sedimented with the history of a culture, that are properly understood as conventions. Then there begins the making of tools, which are once again initially the residue of repeated acts of fraying, say to make a point or an edge, and the material of which the tool is made – hard or frangible, offering a firm grasp or slippery, etc. – together with the shape with which it has now been inscribed, is henceforth a fatality or system of limits that conditions the further development of the sociality that has brought it into being as just this tool (and even, as some theorists have argued, the further development of the human brain itself). The methods by which the tool is made are themselves the social inscription of historically accumulated individual acts in their effective interaction with the material of the tool, and might have their own further development in interaction with new materials and in combination with methods derived from other contexts. Now labor, craft, and art might begin to be differentiated; but they are part of a matrix that never entirely comes undone – or, rather, that ought never be allowed to come entirely undone.

What is brought to light in such an account, beyond or beneath the question of conventions, is the teleology of social practice that conditions all materiality within culture, and which ordains that praxis must always be grounded in its specificity. It seems to me that an essential beginning toward the thinking-through of this problematic – and at precisely the conjunction between Aristotle and Marx – was made by Georg Lukács in his final work, *The Ontology of Social Being*. "Through labour, a teleological positing is realized within material being, as the rise of a new objectivity. The first consequence of this is that labour becomes the model for any social practice, for in such social practice – no matter how ramified its mediations – teleological positings are always realized, and ultimately realized materially."[17]

notes

1 The movement was formally baptized in the public eye by a special issue of *Kunstforum International* (Mar.–Apr. 1987), edited by Amione Haase, that focused on "Radikale Malerei." Among the pieces included in this issue are my "Joseph Marioni: Malerei Jenseits Narrativität" and articles on Umberg and other German radical painters who have continued to figure significantly: Ullrich Wellman, Ingo Meller, and Peter Tollens.

2 See the essay on Umberg by Hannelore Kersting, "Painting as Articulated Paint," in the catalogue to the exhibition *Gunter Umberg*, Städelsches Kunstinstitut Frankfurt, 1985.

3 Thierry De Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1996). All citations of De Duve refer to this volume.

4 All citations of Greenberg are to *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993).

5 Painting and picture are normally synonymous in art-critical talk, and I won't object to this usage. However, the idea that there can be an unpainted picture seems to me to dissimulate an absurdity that is patent in the phrase "unpainted painting." This absurdity that Greenberg created is exploited at great length by De Duve, who buys into it because it serves his purposes admirably.

6 Stedelijk Museum Catalog, 1975; quoted by Sauer in Christel Sauer and Urs Rausmüller (eds.), *Robert Ryman*, catalog for Ryman exhibition in the Espace d'Art Contemporain, 1991, 31.

7 Joseph Marioni and Günther Umberg, *Outside the Cartouche: Zur Frage des Betrachters in der Radikalen Malerei.* English and German; German trans. Nikolaus Hoffmann and Rolf Taschen (Munich: Neue Kunst, 1986). Umberg's work in the 1990s took new directions; in this essay I refer only to the period of his collaboration with Marioni.

8 Aristotle remarks in the *Poetics*, chapter 10, that in a painting "the most beautiful pigments smeared on at random will not give as much pleasure as a black-and-white outline picture." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Gerald Else (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P) 28. And Kant comments in the Third Critique that "*delineation* is the essential thing" in all the "formative arts" (61), and painting is the foremost of these arts because "as the art of delineation it lies at the root" of all the others (175). Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951).

9 Behind this belief of Greenberg's, once again we might discern Kant, for whom "express rules" cannot be the basis on which an art is transmitted. For Kant, there is no middle term between the pure originating power, granted by nature, of the genius, on the one hand, and the explicit rules that the schools derive from the genius's original works of art in order to train subordinate, unoriginal talents to trudge in his footsteps. An art develops historically by the immediate communication of the inspiring force of nature from one genius to another, without the mediation of "rules." Kant thinks of the *tekhne* of an art only in this sense of "express rules"; he has no concept of the *medium* in the modern or modernist sense – not as a system of explicit rules but as an ensemble of techniques in dialectical interaction with the materiality of a specific material (words, tones, colors, stone, etc.). Third Critique, sects. 45–50.

10 Despite the impression De Duve creates of a sudden choice in favor of quality in 1962, this distinction had been consistently maintained by Greenberg. The remark from 1959 is worth quoting in full: "I still know of nothing in abstract painting, aside perhaps from some of the near-abstract Cubist works that Picasso, Braque, and Leger executed between 1910 and 1914, which matches the highest achievements of the old masters. Abstract painting may be a purer, more quintessential form of pictorial art than the representational kind, but this does not of itself confer quality on an abstract picture. The ratio of bad abstract painting to good is actually much higher than the ratio of bad to good representational painting." "The Case for Abstract Art" 82. And in "After Abstract Expressionism" itself, Greenberg refers to his 1948 refusal of the "dogmatism that held that one species of art must in a given period be better than any other species," and then asserts that Pollock's and Gorky's pictures stayed "further behind their frames than Mondrian's or Picasso's post-1913 pictures did," but that going "backwards in terms of the evolution of style" was at that time "almost the only way to go forward in terms of major quality" (124). The simple statement in 1964 that "form as such is a neutral element as far as quality is concerned" (180) thus reaffirms Greenberg's consistent view. Cf. Fried, who agrees that Greenberg is "right to say that he

never presented flatness and the inclosing of flatness as criteria of quality" (66).

11 The conclusion that a painting must be painted, obvious from the ordinary person's standpoint, and which I am thus slightly embarrassed to draw, has to be argued in the face of De Duve's argument, which keeps alive Greenberg's suggestion that a painting (or "picture") need not be painted (see n. 5 above).

12 See Graham Chester, *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

13 I say "almost" helpless because Kant does choose the primacy of rules over mere undisciplined genius.

14 Yet another, deconstruction-based, development of the logic of specificity is that by Rosalind Krauss, who in her reading of Marcel Broodthaers argues that "the specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support." *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames, 1999) 53. Although the artist she discusses, and the theory she elaborates, are very distant from Radical Painting, her essay, like mine, rejects the vulgar idea of the medium as "a layering of conventions … simply collapsed into the physicality of their support."

15 "*A Voyage on the North Sea*" 56.

16 The earliest stimulus to the interpretation of Radical Painting, and the following reflections on praxis, that I present here was a fascinating essay by Lothar Romain on Analytical Painting, a movement which I interpret as a precursor of Radical Painting. See Lothar Romain, "The Artistic Truth of Things that Exist: Reflections Pertaining to (the Theory of) Analytical Painting," trans. Antony de Nardini and Paul Angus in *A Proposito della Pittura/Bettrefende Het Schilderen/Concerning Painting*, catalogue Museum Van Bommel–Van Dam Venlo/Stedelijk Museum Schiedam/Hedenaagse Kunst Utrecht 1975–76, 27–32.

17 Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Labour* (London: Merlin, 1980) 3. This volume is a translation of the first chapter of Part Two of the larger work.

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He jotted down this thought, if it can be called that, on a loose sheet of paper, hoping to use it later, perhaps in some pondered statement about the mystery of writing which will probably culminate, following the definitive lessons of the poet, in the precise and sober declaration that the mystery of writing lies in the absence of any mystery whatsoever, which if accepted, might lead us to the conclusion that if there is no mystery about writing, neither can there be any mystery about the writer.

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