

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STYLE NEW REALISM
IN PAINTING AND MODERN ART AND BETWEEN NEW REALISM AND TRADITIONAL
REALISM

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "An Examination of the Relationship Between the Style New Realism in Painting and Modern Art and Between New Realism and Traditional Realism", submitted by Dulcie Foo Fat in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Realism, with the combined objectives of direct confrontation with the visible world and involvement with the contemporary social situation reached its apotheosis in the middle of the nineteenth century in the work of Courbet and the Impressionists. The final quarter of that same century saw the commencement of a reaction against realism on both a philosophical and an aesthetic basis. Philosophically it was felt that exact renderings of the visible world led to a flight away from reality. Aesthetically it was felt that composition, colour and draughtsmanship were not given sufficient significance in nineteenth century realism. From this time until the beginning of the nineteen sixties artists have almost unanimously rejected realism as a valid alternative. At the same time a necessary relationship between the dominant characteristics of modern art - the renunciation of an illusion of reality, deformation of natural objects, wilful stylization and hostility to the past and the disintegration of traditional values, particularly of the relationship between man and God, and the rise of modern subjectivism - has been postulated.

The founding of the anti-realistic characteristics of modern art in the experiences and sufferings of the modern age together with the modernist assumption that realism is the expression of a wholesome attitude towards reality makes the re-emergence of realism in the style

new realism difficult to explain. These facts lead one to question whether the apparent deviation of new realism from the tradition of modern art and reversion to the objectives of earlier realistic painting is illusory or whether certain suppositions about the nature of modern art, particularly that according to which realism is incompatible with modern sensibility, should be revised.

The three conclusions reached in this paper are as follows. The first is that new realist painters who employ photographs should be distinguished from those who work from life - the former post-pop artists frequently aim to draw attention to the unreality of the illusory aspect of painting while the latter, revisionists, reaffirm the value of representational illusionistic painting. The second conclusion is that new realism has many features - repudiation of an intellectual role for the artist, a professional attitude towards the production of art objects, an aesthetic of precision, objectivity and technical progress, which align it with other contemporary art movements. The third conclusion is that the modernist assumption that realism represents a life-embracing, optimistic attitude while deformation, dehumanization and avoidance of illusions of the physical world are the only possible expression of man's dissatisfaction with the world is simplistic and that this fact is illustrated by the impassive reflection of the absurdities of life in new realism.

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INTRODUCTION

"When art is free and authentic it is always an expression of its ambient and epoch, of the dominating characteristics of the society in which the individual is creating."¹ This assumption forms the basis for the investigation undertaken in this thesis. For no change in society can have been greater than that which has taken place in the past one hundred years - and that is the time that has elapsed since realism reached its climax in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Yet, beginning in the sixties, a style in art has come to the fore which appears to have more in common with the naturalistic art of the nineteenth century than with modern art. In fact, one criterion which has been used to determine when the modern era in art commences, is the rejection by artists of realism as an objective.² Apologists for modern art have indeed devoted much time to explaining why the revolt against everything that realism stood for has been an historical necessity. As Tracy Atkinson says: "We have painted abstractly because we believe in the reality of abstractions. . . a diversion from this stance cannot thus escape speculation about the values involved."³ If it can be proven that contemporary painters can resume the functions and objectives of nineteenth century artists, a fresh look at modernism may be warranted. For art and art history mutually develop and define each other.

In this study, therefore, an attempt is made to ascertain whether new realism reverts to the tradition of realism in art and represents a radical deviation from the tradition of modernism. In the first five

chapters, ideas pertaining to traditional realism, modernism and new realism are presented, providing the artistic and philosophic background to new realism. In chapters six and seven, through a consideration of concepts of reality in new realism, and of the relationship of new realism to other styles, a tentative conclusion is reached.

As a preliminary to the investigation of the major thesis question, the qualification should be made that the terms "realism," "modernism," and "new realism," are only convenient labels with which to comprehend certain trends in art. If the word of some critics is accepted, new realism is more diverse than some other contemporary movements and its realist antecedents.⁴ Also, although it has assumed international proportions, discussion of new realism is confined in this study to the movement in the United States, with the tacit assumption that what transpires there today has both peculiar national elements and is the expression of a sensibility common to all industrialized nations. This limitation is justified by the fact that the new view of reality unmistakably started in America and European participation in new realism has been small. On the other hand the sources from which the characteristics of modern art are derived embrace a broader spectrum in time and space. These are selected on account of their continuing relevance to contemporary art. Finally, the discussion is confined in this paper to new realist painting since new realist sculpture, though very interesting, presents rather different problems.

CHAPTER I

REALISM

According to the schema of Harold Osborne, "realism" as a style in art is a modification or type of artistic naturalism. Art is realistic ". . . when it is naturalistic and when it shows the actual world as if through a plateglass window, neither better nor worse than it is."⁶ According to this theory, therefore, realism is a species of naturalism. A history and definition of naturalism, together with a description of the characteristics and attitudes which are frequently associated with it, provide a broader context within which to comprehend the phenomenon of realism.

A cycle of techniques whose primary motivation derived from the impulse to produce convincing facsimiles of the visible appearance of things probably emerged as an artistic aim with the painting and sculpture of the Greeks in the fifth century B.C. Greek naturalism was important not only because it determined the main character of European art in antiquity, but because, after a break during the Middle Ages, the tradition was revived during the Renaissance and retained its predominance until the present century. Indeed, the study of the external appearance of nature reached its apotheosis in the nineteenth century in the art of Courbet and the Impressionists for whom there was no theme but the visible.⁷

The criteria and attitudes which accompany naturalism proceed from

the naturalistic artist's involvement in the subject or theme rather than the art work for itself. Thus Osborne defines naturalism as ". . . the attitude of mind which deflects attention away from or 'through' the art object towards that of which it is a representation."⁸

The characteristic criteria of naturalism are ". . . correctness, completeness and vividness (or convincingness) of representation."⁹ Emphasis upon these characteristics accounts not only for the frequent reference, found in the earliest literature, upon the technical skill of the craftsman in producing an illusion in the sense of *trompe l'oeil*, but also for the high estimation placed upon the production of an illusion of life, and, related to this, the prestige accorded to the representation of emotion or character by direct visual imagery instead of symbolically by traditional conventions. The prevalence of such values is substantiated by the testimony of celebrated artists. Alberti, for example, thought the depiction of emotion and mood - called by the Greeks "imitation of the soul" - was the most difficult task of the painter. Leonardo said, ". . . that figure is most admirable which by its actions best expresses the spirit which animates it."¹⁰ And Dürer said: And a man is said to have done well if he attain accurately to copy a figure according to life, so that his drawing resembles the figure and is like unto nature."¹¹

Also a consequence of the deflection of attention in naturalism towards the subject represented was the opinion, popular until the middle of the nineteenth century, that the better subject makes the better picture. This belief in the hierarchy of subject matter underlay the problem perceived by traditional aesthetics of our ability to enjoy a beautiful

representation of a harrowing subject. Durer's statement: "In particular if the thing copied is beautiful, then is the copy held to be artistic and, as it deserveth, it is highly praised,"¹² was typical of the Renaissance attitude. So was the view of the art object expressed in the eighteenth century by Edmund Burke who proposed that: "When the subject of a painting is attractive we take pleasure in the subject as if it were the real thing, disregarding the art work. When the subject of a painting is commonplace or ugly, we admire its representation as a tour de force."¹³ The same sentiment was expressed by Sir Joshua Reynolds: "The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters . . . deserve great praise; but as their genius has been employed in low and confined subjects, the praise which we must give must be as limited as its object."¹⁴

In the nineteenth century, the emphasis placed on the 'characteristic' rather than the 'beautiful' deflected attention from the academic preference for lofty and elevated themes. But, as Osborne points out, ". . . we must recognize through all the manifestations of changing taste with regard to the subject matter of art - the social realism of Coubet and Daumier in the nineteenth century, and the revolutionary realism of Orozco and Siquieros in the twentieth century, which give a positive function to the representation of human misery and oppression - the continuing operation of that naturalistic habit of mind which leads us to regard the work, whether wholly or in part, as a reflection or mirror, an 'imitation', of that which it represents."¹⁵

The fascination exerted by illusionistic representation is confirmed more vividly by anecdotes from the past than by formal art theory. They suggest that pictures which no longer seem to us markedly illusionistic, the pictures of Giotto and his followers or the classical Greek paintings of which relics have survived for example, did seem so to their contemporaries. In Western countries today it is still assumed by unsophisticated persons that it is the job of a picture to provide a reasonably accurate reflection of the external reality which is its subject.¹⁶

Because a work of art may still be a distorting mirror or idealizing projector while retaining the naturalistic character of a mirror through which the attention of the beholder fixes upon the object represented, Osborne only uses the term 'realism' when the 'reality' represented in the art work coincides with the actual world of experience: "By calling it 'realistic' we imply that the reflected reality is thought of as actual rather than imaginary, and that it is reflected by and large as it is rather than being deliberately idealised or burlesqued."¹⁷ But with this qualification the difficulty central to the use of the term 'realism' - that its use depends upon varying concepts of reality - is highlighted. Osborne discriminates three major categories in the use of the term 'realism'.

Firstly the term is used to distinguish the depiction of the visible appearance of things from other stylistic possibilities. This is the case when 'realism' is used as the opposite of 'abstraction'. "Thus the

apples of Cezanne are said to be more abstract and so less realistic than Jan van Huysum."¹⁸ In this sense realism indicates art in which the individual actuality rather than the generic type is reflected. The term 'Verism' denotes this extreme form of realism in the sense of individuation, being applied to art in which every detail to the last wrinkle, wart and pimple is included whether or not they contribute to the general impression of character type. In a similar way the term 'realism' is used to contrast art in which objects are indicated by conventional schemata to art in which objects are painted with meticulousness of detail but distorted from their actual appearance, as in the paintings of Salvador Dali, for example, where the watch strap melts and runs like wax.¹⁹

The second major category in the use of the term 'realism' in painting is that in which artists, instead of choosing conventionally beautiful subjects, have emphasized the reality of ugliness in the world. Similarly, the term 'social realism' has been used of art movements in which a realistic depiction of ugliness, misery or poverty either in support of a political theory or in the interests of social amelioration has been concentrated upon. "Thus Courbet was a realist because he depicted the common man without beautification and Caravaggio because he painted St Matthew with dirty feet."²⁰

A third, less common use of the term 'realism' is that applied to conceptual art, such as the analytical form of Cubism in which the artist aspires to reproduce things as they are known to be rather than to mirror their appearances.²¹

The realist ethos dominated French art in the middle of the nineteenth century during which time, besides the objective of direct confrontation with the visible world, there was significant involvement with the contemporary social situation. All the widespread attempts and aspirations towards realism since the beginning of the nineteenth century were brought to fruition in Gustave Courbet's painterly domination of everything material. His statement: "The art of painting should consist only in the representation of objects which the artist can see and touch. . . I also maintain that painting is essentially a 'concrete' art and can consist in the representation of 'real' and 'existing' things. . ." clearly express the realist philosophy. The specific hallmark of Impressionist realism was the particular limitation that for the painter the visible was fundamentally nothing more than a complex of spots of colour. According to this doctrine the pictorial rendering of the real was possible only through the medium of atmosphere filled with light.²²

CHAPTER 2

MODERN ART

Fritz Novotny selects the years 1780 and 1880 as dates which represent, in the field of thought and in the field of pictorial representation of the world respectively, the commencement of ". . . a trend away from the objective world of things towards new perceptive possibilities, towards a new kind of investigation of the premises and constructional laws of the objective world."²³ He describes how the ever vaster fields of portrayal of the visible in the nineteenth century represented a radical one-sidedness which was bound to evoke a violent reaction, and how, when after 1880 universality became an objective, painters began to study the significance of the inner structure of things. Linda Nochlin suggests that, in modern art, the 'realist' virtues of truthfulness and honesty meaning ". . . an accurate rendering of detail" became ". . . truth and honesty meaning truth to the nature of the material, the beginnings of the moral and ethical establishment of the claims of the 'rights' of objects, surfaces, or materials to their own organic kinds of expression. . ."²⁴

The various interpretations of modern art are too numerous to describe. Novotny proposes that the reaction to naturalism and realism had both a formal and a philosophical basis. That, on the one hand, artists felt that the importance of well-organized composition and colour and fine draughtsmanship had been relegated to an obscure

position. That, on the other hand, art in which corporeal solidarity and beauty of the surface had frequently become the dominating aims was endangered by materialism, and that the desire to achieve an exact rendering of the true and real led to a flight from reality despite the demand for faithfulness to nature.²⁵

The proliferation of constructions put upon each new trend may be part and parcel of the epidemic of aesthetic permissiveness of which Harold Rosenberg speaks - repentance for "the Ridicule of the Radicals" - of the Impressionists, Van Gogh, Matisse, Modigliani, Duchamp - the lesson that no new work, no matter how apparently senseless, repulsive or visually vacant, could be rejected without running the risk that it would turn up as a masterpiece of the era.²⁶

Of interest to a study of new realism are those interpretations of modern art which imply that the sensibility of man has so changed, the reality which he knows has become so different from that which his nineteenth century forefathers knew, that his art cannot but be completely other than traditional art. Because according to these theories modern art is given a temporal foundation - its features are ascribed to some peculiar circumstance of contemporary life, either political or existential - the evolution of a movement which does not share the features of modern art without a transformation of modern life is implicitly disallowed.

Despite the abundance of interpretations of modern art, there is a fairly widespread agreement about its characteristics. Arnold Hauser,

speaking of Post-Impressionism, cubism, constructivism, futurism, expressionism, dadaism, and surrealism, mentions the renunciation of all illusion of reality on principle, the deliberate deformation of natural objects, the beginning of the "annexation" of reality by art, the destruction of pictorial values.²⁷ Susan Sontag recalls those qualities ascribed to modern art by Ortega Y Gasset in the early 1920's - ". . . impersonality, the ban on pathos, hostility to the past, playfulness, wilful stylization, absence of ethical and political commitment . . ."²⁸ (and the fact that she finds them useful to describe the contemporary art scene testifies to the continuity of the tradition of modern art). To these, from Ortega's own list, may be added: the dehumanization of art, the avoidance of living forms, irony, scrupulous realization, and the consideration of art as a thing of no transcending consequence.²⁹ In one case historical culture, intellectual tradition and the legacy of ideas and forms is believed to be the source of inspiration for these characteristics, in the other case the direct facts of life and the problems of human existence.

According to a Marxist interpretation, for example, the distortion of modern art follows from the alienation of man from himself and reality which is a product of modern society.³⁰ Susan Sontag believes modern art to be a response to the social disorder and mass atrocities of our time, and to the unprecedented change in what rules our environment.³¹

Others find a theological explanation for the dehumanization and derealization of modern art suggesting that it can only be understood in terms of the disintegration of the relationship between man and God.

Thus modern art is interpreted as the fruit of sin - man's free decision to turn away from God in whose image he was created.³²

Another theory founds the idiosyncrasies of modern art in the intellectual heritage of Western man and ascribes the distinctive character of modern art to the rise of modern subjectivism and the disintegration of the traditional order of values that once assigned to man his proper place.³³

Karsten Harries, for example, believes that "the search for the interesting", "negation", "abstraction and construction", and "the demonization of sensuousness" - terms which he uses to describe the qualities of modern art - proceed from an attempt to affirm the subject and deny the world or from an attempt to negate the finite and return to a more immediate mode of being. He views each as a manifestation of a project to invent meaning and escape the absurdity of a world which is indifferent to man's demand for meaning.

He interprets Duchamp's urinal, Tinguely's self-destroying machines, Hans Arps' collages composed of glue in a random manner, and the presentation of a tin of Campbell's soup as a work of art either as species of an aestheticism the objective of which is the transformation of life into a construction which owes its meaning to the freedom of the artist, or, alternatively, as an escape from reality in which man seeks to forget his inability to emancipate himself from his dependence of the world, where he can play at being God and salvage a modicum of meaning.³⁵ In all these works of art the important is given great importance and normal expectations are disappointed.

Similarly Harries ascribes the fragmentation or destruction of all artistic forms, the rebellion for rebellion's sake and anarchistic negation of all values in Dada to a lost sense of reality.³⁶ He interprets the obscenity of Aubrey Beardsley and Christian Rops, the deformation and dehumanization in Picasso and de Kooning's portrayals of women, besides the progressive elimination of the figure from pictorial art in general, as ". . . the triumph of the free spirit, not only over bourgeois morality but over the flesh as well, an inhuman victory which for the sake of freedom denies what man is."³⁷ According to this argument, one propagated by Sartre, the project to be Godlike leads to a disturbed, ambivalent relationship to all that threatens man's autonomy: to nature, to the body and especially to the other sex.³⁸

The rejection of perspective, the reduction of emphasis on up and down in painting, are also seen as part of a project of liberation - the denial of expected means of orientation for the sake of greater freedom from that which reflects man's dependence on the world with its cares and concerns.³⁹

Malevich's "white suprematism", Alber's studies of the square and Ad Reinhardt's black canvases are interpreted as attempts to ensure ". . . that all representational ballast, all suggestions and reminiscences of the world in which we live are cast off in order to replace the world with a more adequate environment for freedom."⁴⁰

Wilhelm Worringer suggests that abstraction is born of a sense of homelessness, and that the impermanence and contingency of human existence give rise to a desire to establish something which will endure and offer

a refuge from time. Something to which man can escape from the insecurity and confusion which is his lot.⁴¹

A less positive interpretation is that abstraction is the expression of a "dictatorial fantasy". According to Freud a sign of the inability of the artist to cope with the hostile world he faces, and a substitute for real encounter. Examples of this conception are said to be found in the work of painters like Picasso, Braque, Gris, Leger, and Feininger; and are exemplified by Braque's statement: "Things in themselves do not exist at all. They exist only through us."⁴²

In contrast to modern art whose objective is believed to be to subject nature, the work of artists such as Franz Marc, Kandinsky the Blaue Reiter and die Brücke are interpreted as attempts to reveal the essential reality behind particular appearances by creating as part of nature, or rather by nature creating using the artist as a medium.⁴³

That these interpretations of modern art have some validity is not in doubt. Only the degree to which this is so is in question. For if the characteristics of modern art have their foundation in either the experiences and sufferings of the modern age,⁴⁴ or in the death of God, or in the rise of subjectivism, or in the disintegration of traditional values, or in a combination of these circumstances, there is no reason why art today should cease to reflect these phenomena. That is to say, there has been no change which would substantially warrant the evolution of a more optimistic art, no reason why man in 1970 should feel less alienated than he did in 1920, no reason why his attitude towards reality should be more wholesome.

CHAPTER 3

NEW REALISM

In 1967, Lawrence Alloway, who coined the term Pop art, created a post-pop category, "new realism" in an article in Arts Magazine to describe a number of artists who shared many of the sources of Pop art but who painted in a more traditional manner without being "traditional".⁴⁵ This view was supported by Linda Nochlin who wrote of "the assertion of the visual perception of things in the world as the necessary basis of the pictorial field itself," in a catalogue for the "Realism Now" exhibition, which took place in Vassar College in 1969.⁴⁶ Similarly, in an article in Artforum, April 1970, R. Pincus-Witten spoke of the rash of exhibitions and one-man shows which succeeded that at Vassar, including those at the Milwaukee Art Center, the Riverside Museum, and which culminated in "22 Realists" at the Whitney Museum.⁴⁷ Recent exhibitions such as "Sharp-Focus Realism" at the Sidney Janis Gallery,⁴⁸ and "Beyond the Actual Contemporary California Realism Painting," first presented in the Pioneer Museum and Haggin Galleries,⁴⁹ and a by-now substantial documentation in periodicals attest at least to a new manifestation of the realist tradition even though the existence of a new movement is more questionable since, as some critics point out, in one sense there is no "new" realism at all, but just a group of artists working without a programme, frequently unknown to one another until their work reaches

the galleries.⁵⁰

Both Sidney Tillim and Udo Kulterman attempt to distinguish the "new realism" from realism which is a further development of traditional realism. Tillim, contrasting the new realists with the realists of Richard Diebenkorn's generation, proposes that the latter did not challenge modernist assumptions about art fundamentally. They did not, that is, bring an essentially new historical perspective to problems of modernist style as the new realists have been attempting to do since the early sixties.⁵¹ Kulterman contrasts the new realists with the work of artists such as Andrew Wyeth. He suggests, unlike Wyeth, the new realists ". . . are concerned with the basic problems of recognition and perception of today's 'total situation', with generating anew the objectively given reality, with inquiry into the energies of light and motion, space and surface as well as the structures of animate and inanimate surfaces."⁵²

Because there exists no self-declared group with either doctrines or manifesto - "new realism" is a term applied, though not consistently to the same art, by the critics - and because, even if there were a consensus as to the exclusiveness of the term, the movement of new realism, according to any definition, has become so popular since its inception that it would be impossible to discover all the American painters working in that genre, there can be no definitive list of new realists. Some painters consistently associated with new realism, however, are Philip Pearlstein (1924), Sidney Tillim (1925), Alfred Leslie (1927), Ralph Goings (1928), Howard Kanowitz and Gabriel

Laderman (1929). Younger new realists include Malcolm Morley and Audrey Flack (1931), Lowell Nesbitt (1933), Richard McLean (1934), Robert Cottingham (1935), Richard Estes (1936), John Clem Clarke (1940), Sylvia Mangold (1938), Joseph Raffael (1939), Chuck Close (1940), John J. Moore (1941), Bruce Everett (1942), Alan Turner (1943), and Don Eddy, Kay Kurt and Noel Mahaffey (1944).⁵³

The dearth of definitions of new realism is a factor of its diversity. Tracy Atkinson proposes that the new realists have ". . . a concern with imagery in painting which has important references to what the eye sees in the natural world outside the realm of art."⁵⁴ New realist painting conforms, in its most obvious aspects, to Harold Osborne's definition of realism. It is a form of illusionistic representation, the objective of which appears to be production of convincing facsimiles of the visible appearance of things. The degree of convincingness varies among individual artists. New realist painting is also naturalistic, showing the world as if through a plate glass window on the whole neither better nor worse than it is although an ironic intent is decidedly present in the work of several artists. In contrast with traditional realists, however, new realist painters are not more involved with the subject or theme than with the art work itself. Rather their aim appears to be to maintain a precarious balance between the painting as an object and that of which it is a representation. Meticulousness of detail, in which such features as body hair and wrinkles are a frequent characteristic of new realist painting - Chuck Close's portraits are an example. The

surfaces of new realist paintings draw attention through the precision of their technique.

In greater part the realism of new realist paintings resides in the objective depiction of the visible appearance of things, but in some instances, such as the painting of a war protest march by Audrey Flack or the depiction of the banal by Malcolm Morley, there is also an element of social realism.

Most critics concede two major tendencies within new realism.⁵⁵ Generally, those images generated by photographs, the media, and other mechanical modes of reproduction are distinguished from those based on the traditional transformation of three-dimensional, spatial actuality into a personally resolved two-dimensional equivalent.⁵⁶ The terms "post-pop", "photo" and "radical" have been applied to those artists who rely on the photograph, the terms "traditional", "academic," "reactionary" and "revisionist" to those who work from nature.⁵⁷ To confound the problem of discussion of the philosophical problems implicit in a return to realism, many artists occupy a middle ground between the photographic or "new realists" and the academic or neo-traditional realists. Hilton Kramer in fact suggests that those artists who are ideologically the hardest to pin down are aesthetically the most satisfying.⁵⁸ James Monte outlines the principal objectives and characteristics of the "revisionist" and "post-pop" new realists.⁵⁹

The revisionists, he proposes, ". . . are attempting to reinstate in their paintings a pictorial illusionism fully in keeping with the

tradition of Western art which remained relatively unbroken from the High Renaissance to the advent of Impressionism in the 19th century."⁶⁰ He adds that for these painters the decision of what to retrieve from the history of art for contemporary use is the gravest problem, and that they are consequently involved in a revaluation of grand manner portraiture, the hierarchy which places genre subjects at the bottom of an imaginary ladder and history painting at the top, the arranging of models in large figure compositions, and even particular grisaille and glazing formulae. Other distinguishing features which Monte ascribes to these figurative artists who intend a full scale revision of earlier illusionistic styles are: the inability to incorporate contemporary abstract styles and alienation from the present moment, a fundamentally moral view of subject matter: ". . . pictorial problems are solved with the use of cognitive tension and with an idealist faith that the problems can be solved. . .;"⁶¹ and, finally, as stated above, the more traditionally-minded artists eschew the use of the photograph as a vehicle from which to paint since they feel that reliance on a second-hand visual experience shortstops the perceiving process in a way that disallows the growth of the artist's vision and a meaningful encounter with his subject-matter, his "reality". This criticism is, as Monte adds, ". . . predicated on the hope that the figurative artist - no matter what his persuasion - is intent on seeing and perceiving in the manner of the best painters of the nineteenth century."⁶²

Monte also describes the typical characteristics of the "post-pop"

realists. He suggests that although for most of these artists ". . . the problem of identity with modernism" is less, for them ". . . the very act of painting is inherently problematic and many, if not all, view painting itself with irony, and are thus detached from the same kinds of conscience-provoking questions which engage the figurative painters."⁶³ Other ways in which the Post-pop realists differ from the revisionists are in their treatment of subject-matter - they ". . . in no way attempt to release the cognitive tension implicit in its use. . ."⁶⁴ and, as has been indicated, they make wholesale use of the coloured slide, photograph, postcard, and mass-produced lithographic reproduction. Monte sees the key to understanding the use of the photograph as subject matter in the paintings of the post-pop realists as being, ". . . the provocative problem of how to arrive at a wholeness, an understanding of subject-matter, of nature, of the external world."⁶⁵ He believes that while it is partly a question of an aesthetic which breaks the canons of nineteenth century taste, the camera is also used by photo realists as a useful tool in recording the complexity of modern urban visual phenomena.⁶⁶

Although Sidney Tillim makes a distinction between the photo and traditional realists, he does discern some common elements. All the new realists, he proposes, ". . . seek to refrain from glorifying overtly inglorious subject matter."⁶⁷ Also, they both share the same reluctance to shed certain modernist attitudes especially with respect to the picture plane. Specifically, they make use of devices such as frontality, cropping, shallow modelling and abstract colour, all of which inhibit maximum illusion.⁶⁸

CHAPTER 4

THE RELATIVITY OF REALISM

To resolve the questions of how new realism relates to traditional realism and to the tradition of modernism, it is necessary to return to the definitions of realism as a style in art which were proposed by Harold Osborne.⁶⁹ Even an apparently factual description exposes the difficulty implicit in the concept of realism in art. That is, that "realism" as a style implies an art which has "reality" as its subject matter but that concepts of "reality" vary. The fact that "realism" may indicate a conceptual art which aspires to reproduce things as they are known to be rather than to mirror their appearance is an illustration of this divergence.⁷⁰ In the one case, the most typical aspect of an object is taken to be its reality, in the other, any aspect, however uncharacteristic, is held to be as real as any other. The cubists are an example of modern artists who rejected any single viewpoint as being equally representative or faithful to an object as any other. They specifically rejected the Impressionist view of the world where such transitory and ephemeral phenomena as light and atmosphere alter the appearance of objects from one minute to the next and reverted to a tradition in which artists seek to represent the stable and timeless aspect of things.

The relativity of realism, therefore, is partly determined by the

system of representation standard for a given culture or person at a given time. It is not a matter of any constant or absolute relationship between a picture and its object but of a relationship between the system of representation employed in the picture and the standard system. The literal or naturalistic system of representation is simply the customary one in our culture. This is illustrated by the fact that older or alien systems are accounted as artificial or unskilled. For a Fifth-Dynasty Egyptian the straightforward way of representing something was not the same as for an eighteenth-century Japanese.⁷¹ The relativity of realism is obscured, in other words, by the tendency to omit a specifying frame of reference when it is one's own because the mode of representation has become stereotyped.

The fact that shifts of standard can occur rather rapidly is a consequence of the effectiveness that sometimes attends a departure from a traditional system of representation and the installation of a newer mode as a standard. When this is the case as it was with the Impressionists, artists are spoken of as having achieved a new degree of realism or of having found a new means for the realistic rendering of light and motion.⁷²

The conventions which are integral to representation in the visual arts are but one difficulty which is encountered in a discussion of realism as a style in art. Another problem is that realism as a style presupposes a knowledge of "reality". In Erich Heller's words, "The name 'Realism' merely betrays the particular superstition of the age which flattered itself with the notion that it had found the key to what really

is."⁷³ Such positivism is not characteristic of every epoch - the present, for example. In fact, the idea that nothing is absolutely real or unreal, and that reality can be predicated of something only with reference to a criterion which is specifically stated in advance, express an idea which, though not novel, is peculiarly characteristic of twentieth century thought. Thus, today, the claims of both philosophers and scientists are modest, and it is generally recognized that philosophy has given up pretensions to what was thought of as its first function - providing knowledge of reality. Consider Suzanne Langer's statement:⁷⁴

There is, in fact, no such thing as 'the' form of the 'real' world; physics is one pattern which may be found in it, and 'appearance', or the pattern of 'things' with their qualities and characters, is another. One construction may indeed preclude the other; but to maintain that the consistency and universality of the one brands the other as 'false' is a mistake.

In a similar way, already by the turn of the century scientists were realizing that their theories do not tell us what reality is, but only how we must conceive it if we wish to perform certain operations. In Henri Poincare's words, ". . . our idea of space" is nothing but ". . . a convenient convention."⁷⁵

The artist does not escape the uncertainty to which philosophers and scientists are subject. When Karsten Harries says, ". . . meaning must be taken as constitutive of reality. . . "⁷⁶ this is true for the artist whether or not he is conscious of the fact. Even to speak of reality in art presupposes something in which the artist is interested.

Thus, when an artist proclaims himself to be a "realist" he understands by "reality" something which cannot be divorced from the project in which he is engaged; and when, fascinated by certain aspects of reality, he uses the selective filter of his fascination for the aesthetic ordering of his chosen materials, he still only gets to know one thing at the price of losing another.⁷⁷ Harold Osborne's definitions of realism⁷⁸ afford a glimpse of this difficulty. One artist, for example, who carefully portrays landscapes and considers himself to be a realist might be charged by another with refusing to face up to the reality of urban industrialization, though the former could retort that realism tempered by social commitment does not deserve its name.⁷⁹

The divergent claims to represent reality of the social realist and the painter of common objects, or even the pretensions of the cubist who claims to represent the more time-enduring aspects of objects, do not, however, exhaust the question of the dependence of art on concepts of reality. There is an anti-naturalistic tradition of art which pretends to represent a metaphysical reality. The history of art may, in fact, be viewed in terms of the fluctuation of styles which identify reality with the physical world and styles which identify reality with something intangible. A parallel to this may be found in philosophy in the alternation of "realism" and "idealism".⁸⁰

CHAPTER 5

A HISTORY OF THE INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN ART AND CONCEPTS OF REALITY

The tradition of anti-naturalistic art which pretends to represent a metaphysical reality may be traced at least as far back as Plato who rejected naturalistic art on the principle that it takes away from the true reality of essences. He did not value art highly because he believed that artists were content to represent the data of sense which were themselves a distorted image of reality. The belief that an artist may not only obtain an intuitive vision of the ultimate reality which exists beyond the empirical world of sense perception but may also imitate this reality in his art, was first formulated by the semi-mystical Neo-Platonist Plotinus, who turned aside from the spectacle of ruin and misery in the actual world, to contemplate an eternal world of goodness and beauty.⁸¹

Christian theologians of the Middle Ages embodied much of the philosophy of Plotinus, but what in Platonism was the eternal world of ideas, the real world as opposed to that of illusory appearance, became in Christianity the Kingdom of Heaven, to be enjoyed after death. Painters of the period, the masters of the Egbert Codex (ca. 980) or the Bamberg book of Pericopes (ca. 1010);⁸² did not find nature worth representing and actually made every attempt to eliminate that which might represent the individual and concrete. All suggestions of corporeality were carefully avoided. Human forms became geometric

abstractions, and a gold background was used to remove portrayed events from the temporal. The artist tried to represent a disembodied immaterial reality.⁸³ In fact, during this period of overemphasis on the spiritual and implicit rejection of the sensuous, the suppressed demands of the physical world, the "reality" depicted by later naturalistic artists, reasserted themselves as the demonic. An example of this is the Romanesque presentation of Christ in the Tympanum over the main doorway at Autun, where he is depicted as the Judge of the Apocalypse who divides the damned from the elect.⁸⁴

The medieval schema according to which this world is a pale shadow of the hereafter collapsed with the growth of subjectivity and with acceptance of the belief that the visible could not be used to imitate the divine.⁸⁵ Thus, during the Renaissance, belief grew that the attempt to use language and pictures to describe the world known by man to find an expression for the being of God must fail. Consequently the sensuous, no longer hallowed by its analogical relationship to the divine, threatened to become the merely worldly. Increasing interest in being true to nature was a result of this new humanism. Interest in corporeality and the disappearance of gold backgrounds were expressions of this return to naturalism. The unity of time and space which came to be expected of art also had its foundation in the Renaissance demand that the work of art be designed with respect to a particular point of view, perspective transforming the world in such a way that it had its center in the spectator.⁸⁶

Cartesian rationalism was a comparatively complacent and optimistic

philosophy which followed the first era of insecurity and excitement after the assertion of an anthropocentric universe and the breakdown of the doctrine of analogy.⁸⁷ But the optimism which made man center of the world in the seventeenth century gave way to a more intense subjectivism in the nineteenth century which led him to recognize that as the measure of this world he transcends it.⁸⁸ The passion for understanding and the desire for rational appropriation, the "realistic" sense of reality which lured nineteenth century minds toward the rational conquest of the human world, of which the climax of naturalism and realism in art were an expression, led eventually to a feeling of absolute meaninglessness. The intransigence of reality, its resistance to rational penetration and translation into the language of art in addition to the impossibility of escaping the subjective element led to a feeling of frustration and ennui. Reality meaning the physical was seen to become an obstacle to ultimate rational and aesthetic triumph.⁸⁹

Renewed attempts to break the rule of the finite and discover a transcendent reality were reflected in the emerging interest in the sublime in both neoclassical and romantic painting.⁹⁰ David's opposition of a diffuse, dark background to the clearly defined group of the dead in "Andromache Grieving over the Dead Hector", a romantic painter such as Caspar David Friedrich's use of contrast between a definite foreground and a diffuse background, and Turner's use of dynamic elements to defeat the static in paintings such as "the Burning of the Houses of Parliament" and "Steamer in a Snowstorm" all create symbols of man's loneliness and helplessness before the incomprehensible

power which surrounds him.⁹¹

The Romantic desire to return to the infinite had in common with Christianity the belief that man's home is in the supersensible. But with the destruction of the bridge between the infinite and the finite, which was provided by medieval analogy, the romantic became the infinite which might either be identified with God or with silence.⁹²

The ambition for the human mind to dominate the real world to the point of usurping its place expressed itself in Schopenhauer's claim that artistic creation is closer to reality than is the world when it appears to the uninitiated human mind.⁹³ This philosophy was realised in the severance of external connections and attempt to support themselves by internal force alone by art movements of the later nineteenth century.

Karsten Harries suggests that the modern artist differs from the romantic in that he does not believe in a transcendent reality even in an indefinite sense.⁹⁴ But it is evident that in spite of their revolutionary achievements most significant artists of the twentieth century have also supported metaphysical concepts of reality, variations on the idealist position, in keeping with their romantic forbears. John Hospers quotes Mondrian:⁹⁵

Particularities of form and natural color evoke subjective states of feeling, which obscure 'pure reality'. . . Time and subjective vision veil the true reality. . .

The same sentiment is expressed by Clive Bell:

. . . call it by what name you will, the thing I am talking about is that which lies behind the appearance of all things--that which gives to all things their individual significance, the thing in itself, the ultimate reality.⁹⁶

CHAPTER 6

CONCEPTS OF REALITY IN NEW REALISM

Very relevant to new realism is John Hospers's analysis of the various ways in which the terms "real" and "reality" may be predicated of works of art.⁹⁷ In the previous two chapters "realism" was understood to indicate a style in art which represents some "reality" other than itself. Hospers recognizes that this sense of "real" meaning "true to life" is of especial relevance to art. He explains that to say a work of art is "real" in this sense is to say that it reveals essences which are communicable to us and verifiable in our subsequent experience. Thus to ascribe "reality" to a Cezanne canvas is to say that one can also see what Cezanne saw. He also describes two ways in which "reality" may be predicated of a work of art without reference to anything objective and observable.

In the first way "reality" may mean vividness or intensity. According to such a usage, anything experienced very vividly appears very "real". Most works of art, for example, are "real" for those who enjoy them. This sense of "real" must not be confused with something objective and observable since it is perfectly compatible with the seeing of an illusion, which is unreal in another sense of "real". Thus the statement that the experience of Cezanne is a "real" experience may mean that it gives us "a vivid sense of reality" rather than "an illusion of reality" in the sense of something objective.

In the second way "reality" may also be predicated of certain facts or sensory presentations if they are sufficiently comprehensive or important.

But whether "reality" signifies vividness and intensity, or importance and comprehensiveness, these uses are honorific terms which communicate to others how deeply one is impressed rather than attesting to the recognition of a reference in a work of art to something in the visible world.⁹⁸

An investigation of new realism reveals that although the new realist painters may wish to reflect a "reality" in their work, this "reality" may not be identical with the "reality" meaning "true to life" which was the subject-matter of traditional realism.

There are some painters who seem to be interested in presenting their personal vision of the appearance of things as they are, Richard Estes, Philip Pearlstein and Ralph Goings for example.⁹⁹ But even these artists employ devices influenced by abstract art, which inhibit maximum illusion. Estes adds more glass and polished reflective surfaces to the slides he is working from. The precision with which Goings paints varies from one part of the canvas to another.¹⁰⁰ Even Pearlstein, whose paintings are closest to the traditional, academic life-study, crops the heads of his subjects and denies that he is interested in anything but a way of seeing.¹⁰¹ If confusion of the representation with the thing represented is a criterion of realism then new realism does not conform. The artists almost without exception claim they are mainly interested in the pictorial problems involved.¹⁰²

It is true that there is a reference to the city, industry, science and the communications media, even to traditional studio themes - studio interiors, single figures, portraits, the classical nude and landscapes with and without figures in new realist painting. There is even a return to the old theme of pictures of pictures.¹⁰³ But although the artists know that, in one sense, the absent entity upon which the image is dependent, is the real, original item, they also know that, in another sense, the experience of a scene or object known or presumed to exist apart from the image in a painting is a complex recognition.¹⁰⁴ Thus when Tracy Atkinson states that: "The last 'innocents' of the C.19 were the Realists. . . ." who, ". . . inherited the pantheistic C.18 belief that truth lay out there in nature. . ." she is testifying to the modern artist's awareness of levels of reality.¹⁰⁵

Such an awareness is made explicit in the work of the artists Malcolm Morley and John Clem Clarke. Morley's use of a white stripe to differentiate the representation from the picture makes the picture exist as a representation totally different from its context. Clarke's employment of elaborate and unorthodox techniques which involve drawing blown-up images, stenciling and spraying, also bring the viewer information and an experience highly differentiated from the one which originated the image.¹⁰⁶ Sharp, "hollywoodian" colours in Richard McLean's pictures of jockeys on horseback create similar estrangement as do modernist devices such as flattening the surface and paralleling the foreground.¹⁰⁷

In various ways, therefore, new realist painters reveal their

awareness that all representations are based on a schema which the artist has learned to use. Carter Ratcliffe sums up the position of the revisionists when he states that Alfred Leslie's work, ". . . doesn't expand the figurative tradition, it depicts the difficulties."¹⁰⁸ Gerrit Henry proposes that Photo Realism is probably not realism at all, but a plastic offshoot of contemporary conceptual art:

In the work of current Photo Realists, reality is made to look so overpoweringly real as to make it an illusion; by the basically magical means of point-for-point precisionist rendering, the actual is portrayed as being so real that it doesn't exist. What does exist, entirely off the canvas (it couldn't exist so powerfully otherwise, is the mind, which conceived of the painting of a photograph of reality in all its intrinsic impossibility;¹⁰⁹

Here, perhaps, lies the distinction between revisionist painters such as Philip Pearlstein and Gabriel Laderman, and Photo-Realists such as Morley, McLean and Clarke. Whereas the former believe that a dialogue with nature is possible, even if the subjective nature of the perceptive process must inevitably intervene in the apprehension of reality, the Photo-Realists by depicting photographs rather than the subjects which those photographs represent, are commenting upon the utter futility of figurative painting. Yet in another way the Photo Realists, by their meticulous renderings of photographs of banal subject matter, are indeed revealing the reality of objects by liberating both the photograph and its subject from their normal context.

In fact, the photo realists and revisionists alike have not abandoned the lesson of modern art that the only "reality" which can be certainly predicated of works of art is that of vividness or intensity

and importance, and comprehensiveness. Sixty years later, they are reaffirming the cubist discovery that the "reality" of a painting resides in the physical substance or matter of which it is composed; that the form of the representation fixed on the canvas is what is real.¹¹⁰

It has been recognized that in their heightened consciousness of the non-referential reality of the art object the new realists share an attitude with contemporary artists working in a non-figurative idiom. The term that has been used to describe what Hoppers called vividness or intensity is "presence". Linda Nochlin has noted an almost unanimous concern for presence in the new realist's assertions about their work. She suggests a connection on this account between new realism and minimal art, although in the one the concern is with the transfer of a real presence into art and in the other the presence is non-referential and confined to the work of art itself as a compelling object.¹¹¹ Concern for presence explains some of the formal properties of new realism such as large scale and scrupulous realization.

Dave Hickey's question nicely expresses the ambiguity of conflicting concepts of reality in new realism:

Is the painting an occasion to celebrate the subject ?
Or is the subject an occasion to make the painting ? Or
are both painting and subject occasion to demonstrate a
seductive technique: or finally, are painting, subject and
technique occasion for some kind of statement or demonstration
of their interrelationship ?¹¹²

CONCLUSION

Study of a particular style cannot be isolated from the world of which it is a part. Many variables are active in the evolution of art movements. Art is responsive in some degree to the total environment and all sensory input. Only the relative importance of the elements which constitute the background to particular art movements remains undetermined. It is uncertain, for example, whether the influence of the media, technology or political events is greater than that of other art in the formation of particular movements. An unprecedented turn of events in the art world is more easily explained if art is an insular, self-generating phenomenon than if it is responsive to social or intellectual currents.

Aside from its aesthetic worth the very existence of new realism warrants a re-examination of philosophical assumptions that have been made about twentieth century art. New realist painting is incompatible with the supposition, made popular during the past one hundred years by such notable critics as Clive Bell, Ortega Y Gasset and more recently by Susan Sontag, that art as a technique for depicting and commenting upon secular reality has become obsolescent.¹¹³ The element that makes new realism unique in the mainstream of art of the past century, is the representation in it of the external appearance of things in an illusionistic manner. (Outside of the mainstream realism has lingered in academies and among portrait and Sunday painters and retained its

popularity with the public).

The revival of realism in the style new realism would appear to warrant two contradictory conclusions. Firstly that the apparent deviation of new realism from the tradition of modern art and reversion to the objectives of earlier realistic painting is illusory, and, upon closer investigation new realism proves to be another expression of the modern tradition. Secondly, that new realism deviates from the tradition of modern art and represents a reversion to the objectives of earlier realistic painting, in which case a new look at modernism and the suppositions which are its foundation, especially the supposition that realism is incompatible with the modern sensibility, should be reconsidered. In fact, despite their appearance of being mutually exclusive, because new realism is not an homogeneous phenomenon, the truth is partly contained in both these propositions. Certain assumptions both about new realism should be revised. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an examination of these two conclusions.

The first conclusion that new realism is the expression of the modern tradition could be substantiated in two ways. According to the first, new realism is within the modernist tradition. According to the second, new realism, along with other contemporary movements, is part of a reaction against modernism. In either case these alternatives can only be comprehended in the context of contemporary art movements and their relation to preceding art.

To commence with the proposition that new realism is within the tradition of modernism. In chapter two some of the features of art since 1880 were described. It was assumed for simplicity's sake that these comprise a complete picture of modern art. Out-

standing among these features were "the renunciation of an illusion of reality," "the avoidance of living forms," "dehumanization" and "hostility to the past". This art which, albeit the mainstream, excludes the continuing figurative tradition has become known as modernism. Emphasis upon the attitudes just mentioned and the stated objective "to replace the world with an adequate environment for freedom" would easily lead to the conclusion that new realism represents a complete about-face were it not for one other attitude integral to modernism - "the search for novelty." Writers as notable as Schopenhauer and Schlegel anticipated that a movement which presupposes constant experimentalism and the indefinite attainment of originality is bound to be confronted by an impasse or critical point that it can meet successfully only by contriving means that are not romantic.

The search for novelty relates to new realism in so far as it raises the possibility that this movement is a manifestation of the dying stages of neo-romanticism or modernism. Such a theory could be supported by Randall Jarrell's description of how, until new means are found, romanticism operates by repeating its last modernist successes or by reverting to its earlier stages, or of how, its momentum ended, romanticism becomes a relatively eclectic system akin to neo-classicism.¹¹⁴ Harold Rosenberg's proposition that the repetitive work which is abundant today is characteristic of a period without a movement or invested with a dying one also lends support to this proposition. As an illustration of the revivalist nature of current art he points to the appendaging of the prefixes "new", "neo" and "abstract" to movements such as Realism,

Dada and Expressionism, and to the fact that the formal repertory of art was fairly complete by 1914.¹¹⁵

The second proposition relating to the conclusion that new realism is an expression of the modern tradition is that modernism does not encompass recent developments in post-war America and that new realism, along with other contemporary movements, is part of a new, post-modern era. In his analysis of contemporary art, Harold Rosenberg proposes that the mood of anxiety which has characterized art from the time of Cezanne is no longer popular.¹¹⁶ From this viewpoint new realism and other contemporary movements - op, pop, and kinetic art, as well as hard-edge abstraction - share many attitudes and stylistic features which are a reaction to abstract expressionism in particular but to modernism in general, enforcing the notion that the fifties represent a turning point in art history.

Several factors, according to Rosenberg, account for the dissolution of the feeling of crisis which pervaded modernism, central to which was an image of the suffering or alienated artist, a receptacle for universal Angst. He cites the dissipation of the bitterness of the post-war years, the lasting American prosperity, the new status of art as a professional career, and the recruitment of a vanguard audience as factors which caused a transformation of the artist's values.¹¹⁷ To these might be added the traditional vanguard motivation of the need to create something novel - in this case the need to find an alternative to absolute minimalism (as in the paintings of Ad Reinhardt for example).

"In this context the characteristics of recent art: cool professionalism and thin inexpressive pigment, the repudiation of an intellectual

role for the artist, a formal aestheticism of precision, objectivity and technical progress, the bringing back of art to the common man through painting the commonly known and appealing, the alternation from an introverted to an extraverted art, the reversion from the romantic's studio to the workshop of the artisan equipped to carry out projects with efficiency and skill, and the acceptance of conventional aesthetic values,¹¹⁸ may be interpreted as uniting new realism with other movements to form ". . . a reaction against the conception of art as a passionate affirmation of mysteries without a key."¹¹⁹

The above analysis establishes the probability of the first conclusion - that new realism may be part of the modern tradition in more than one way either as part of modernism or as a reaction against it.

The second conclusion was that new realism deviates from the tradition of modern art and reverts to the objectives of earlier realistic painting. Related to this proposition was the issue of whether it is feasible in the twentieth century to depict the same reality as that which was represented by nineteenth century artists. The validity of this conclusion differs for the new realist painters according to the objectives by which they are motivated. With some exceptions the depiction of reality meaning the physical appearance of the external world is not an objective of the post-pop painters. It is an objective of the revisionists.

The key to post-pop painting may be in Rosenberg's premise that consciousness of history - art-historical reference - is the "only" content in a modern painting or sculpture.¹²⁰ In this light both pop

and post-pop exist as "demonstration models in an unspoken lecture on the history of illusionism" since, through the inhibition of maximum illusion, their purpose is to dispel illusion. By drawing attention to the unreality of the illusory aspect of the painting the reality of the painting as an object is reasserted. Post-pop painting is also a comment upon the extent to which the visible world has been duplicated and anticipated by artifice. Thus new realism conforms to the belief, almost universal among twentieth century artists, that a work of art ought to be a thing added to the world of things rather than a reflection of things that already exist.¹²¹

Another argument against the proposition that realism and figurative art are necessarily the expression of an optimistic attitude towards life, is that the impassive reflection of the absurdities which have become the accepted realities of daily life which is depicted in pop art and new realism is a non-subjective way of reacting to crisis. Rosenberg sees the wooden-faced mimicry of senseless items as an art of impenetrable farce, farce being the final form of action in a situation which has become untenable. According to this theory the crisis content of contemporary work is being camouflaged in critical, how-to-do-it interpretations which amalgamate a new slapstick art with an earlier aesthetic of found images.¹²²

The qualities of impersonality and irony which characterize new realism align it not only with other contemporary movements but also with the tradition of modernism as described by Ortega Y Gasset. Also in post-pop painting is the conviction that art is of no great

consequence, confirming Rosenberg's hypothesis that Action Painting was the last moment in art on the plane of dramatic and intellectual seriousness. (The prevalence of the latter attitudes indicates the continuation of the modernist tradition).¹²³

The same cannot be said for revisionist painting. Although it is also a response to the need for an art mode to replace abstract expressionism - a conservative response to the search for novelty - it does share the ironical attitude towards reality and does revert to the earlier aims of painting. It is a reaffirmation of the value of reference to the visible world in art generally and of the western tradition of illusionism in particular. Such a reversal has been made possible by the rapidity of the revival of past styles and the exhaustion of their possibilities. Artists have at last reached back beyond the modern tradition. Despite the artistic events which have enabled it to occur, however, including the advent of pop art, the return to figuration casts doubt upon the modernist supposition that illusionistic, representational art is incompatible with an age which has witnessed the death of God, the disintegration of traditional values and the rise of modern subjectivism, nor does it lend support to the hypothesis that art's function is no longer to describe the world but to modify our consciousness.¹²⁴ In any event it might be argued that this has always been one objective of good artists.

FOOTNOTES

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³Tracy Atkinson, "Likenesses: Aspects of a New Realism", in Art and Artists, February 1970, p.17.

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⁵Udo Kulterman, New Realism (New York: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1972), p.8.

⁶Harold Osborne, Aesthetics and Art History (London: Longmans, 1968); p.48.

⁷Novotny, op.cit., p.5.

⁸Osborne, op.cit., p.8.

⁹Ibid., p.9.

¹⁰Ibid., p.37.

¹¹Ibid., p. 41.

¹²Ibid., p. 41.

¹³Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 43.

- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 33-5.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p.50.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p.49.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p.49.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p.49.
- ²¹ Ibid., p.50.
- ²² Novotny, op.cit., p.190.
- ²³ Ibid., p.1.
- ²⁴ Linda Nochlin, Realism, Style and Civilization, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), p.230.
- ²⁵ Novotny, op.cit., p.110.
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- ²⁸ Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.), p.301.
- ²⁹ Jose Ortega Y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art", in Irving Howe (ed.), The Idea of the Modern (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), p.87.
- ³⁰ Karsten Harries, The Meaning of Modern Art (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p.146.
- ³¹ Sontag, op.cit., p.302.
- ³² Harries, op.cit., p.147.

³³ Ibid., pp.148-153.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.57-8.

³⁵ Ibid., p.56.

³⁶ Ibid., p.61.

³⁷ Ibid., p.89.

³⁸ Ibid., p.86.

³⁹ Ibid., p.67.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.68.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.70.

⁴² Ibid., p.71.

⁴³ Ibid., p.103.

⁴⁴ Alfred Neumeyer, The Search for Meaning in Modern Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p.4.

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⁴⁶ Sidney Tillim, "Notes on a General Misunderstanding", in Artforum, February 1969, p.30.

⁴⁷ Robert Pincus-Witten, "22 Realists: Whitney Museum Exhibition" in Artforum, April 1970, p.75.

⁴⁸ Dore Ashton, "New York Commentary: Realism Again ?" in Studio International, March 1972, p. 126.

⁴⁹ Kultermann, op.cit., p.9.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Laderman, "Unconventional Realists", in Artforum, November 1967, p.40.

⁵¹Sidney Tillim, "A Variety of Realisms", in Artforum, February 1969, p.46.

⁵²Kultermann, op.cit., p.8.

⁵³Ibid., pp.7-8.

⁵⁴Atkinson, op.cit., pp.5-6.

⁵⁵Ibid., p.6.

⁵⁶William C. Seitz, "The Real and the Artificial", in Art in America, November to December 1972, p.60.

⁵⁷Pincus-Witten, op.cit., p.75.

⁵⁸Gerrit Henry, "The Real Thing", in Art International, Summer 1972, p.86.

⁵⁹James Monte, 22 Realists (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art Catalogue), p.8.

⁶⁰Ibid., p.8.

⁶¹Ibid., p.9.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.10.

⁶⁵Ibid., p.12.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Sidney Tillim, "A Variety of Realisms", op.cit., p.39.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Osborne, op.cit., p.48.

⁷⁰Ibid., p.50.

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⁸⁵Ibid., p.10.

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