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Ernst by Patrick Waldberg and John Russell developed from the authors' invaluable and unique knowledge of him as a friend. Their observations and recollections of the artist carry great weight, but their critical judgment is muted. Legge is a scholar digging into contemporary sources such as newspapers articles and personal letters, not a friend writing a homage based on his or the artist's memories. She is analytical and dispassionate in putting the artist in a broader historical and psychological context.

The least satisfying part of Legge's text is the application of psychoanalytic theory to the works themselves in chapters three and four. In some instances these interpretations are based on writings by others whom she acknowledges in the notes. For example, in chapter three, Legge's speculations on *Aquis Submersus* (1919) are largely derived from the detailed discussion by Laura L. Meixer in "Max Ernst's *Aquis Submersus* as Literary Collage," *Arts Magazine*, LXI, 3 (November 1986), 80-85. In other instances the speculations are unconvincing: the discussion of *Oedipus Rex* (1922) draws a relationship between Ernst's painting and the Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This supposition, which is based on a few word-images plays, seems both overextended and unnecessary to an understanding of the painting.

In chapter four Legge discusses the murals that Ernst painted in the home of Paul and Gala Eluard in 1923. She makes the usual connection between the fanciful landscapes created by Ernst and the Pompeiian environment of *Gradvia*, a nineteenth-century novel discussed by Freud. She goes on to equate Gala, with whom Ernst was having an affair, with the character of Gradvia. However, the most discerning psychological insight is the plain observation that Ernst encodes the first and last letters of his given name, "MX," into the mural in the Eluards' bedroom, inserting himself into their private marital world.

Whatever the problems of interpretations in chapters three and four, chapter five, which discusses *Au Rendez-vous des Amis*, is very credible. It discusses *Au Rendez-vous des Amis*, the 1922 group portrait showing the members of the budding Surrealist movement. Legge indicates pictorial sources for this painting in psychology texts, such as the photographs documenting catatonic and other patients in Emil Kraepelin, *Dementia Praecox* (in translation, Edinburgh: Livingstone, 1919). Identification of such sources is important to an understanding of the painting as it documents the young Surrealists' interest in allying their creative activities with the psychological states of those with mental disorders.

Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources makes a major and timely contribution to the scholarship on Max Ernst. Since 2 April 1991 marks the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth, there are many exhibitions of Ernst's work on view or being planned in Europe and the United States. Many of the exhibitions are the focus of major research on some aspect of the artist's oeuvre. Legge's thoughtful exploration and clear insights make an important contribution to the research that is occupying so many scholars as they weigh and place Max Ernst in the history of art.

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ANNA C. CHAVE *Mark Rothko: Subject in Abstraction*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.

We are in the middle of the re-assessment of the so-called Abstract Expressionists, carried out by writers of a later generation. Many of the writings are based on dissertations written in the seventies; most set out to renew the significance of the art, but on a different basis than that used by the commentaries written at the time of the initial exhibition of the work. Overtly or indirectly, the process of interpretation is central. The most helpful contribution to date is Anna C. Chave's *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*. I find the Chave book to be an important step in our studies. The value of the book lies not just in its insights into Rothko's work, but also in the stimulation of a like innovation in method in dealing with the others. I shall develop the importance of the Chave book and contrast it with other major contributions in the re-assessment: Alwynne Mackie, *Art/Talk: Theory and Practice in Abstract Expressionism* (New York, 1989), and Ann Gibson's essay, "The Rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism," in Michael Cusping, *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (Buffalo, 1987).

In her introductory chapter, Chave describes her purpose as follows: "The aim of the present text is to construct an approach to the subject matter of Rothko's classic paintings and, more broadly, to explore how and what his paintings mean" (p. 33). This statement of objective is common to this line of recent literature about the Abstract Expressionists. The "classic paintings" are the Rothkos done from 1949 until his death. She wishes to deal with the interpretation of works that were at that time radically abstract, non-representational. There is no question but that this is the significant problem for us.

Early on, Chave raises a number of important issues of methodology. One is the question of intent. For Chave, as well as Mackie and Gibson, this involves the use of the artist's own statements: "What concerns me instead is the dialectic between what Rothko said he did and what he did, as I (and other writers) perceive it from a historical distance" (p. 30).

Chave uses Rothko's words, but on the basis that the link between words and the paintings needs explanation. She adds her own observation to bridge the gap, to supply the third step in the dialectic. In this regard, the contrast with the Mackie book is important. In *Art/Talk* Mackie treats the theory, the statements of the artists as all important. "Gradually they articulated the theory they believed was the centre and life blood of their art—the theory of the abstract mystic symbol" (p. 18) and for her "all the artists considered had a quite clearly defined theory about what their art should be" (p. 12). This belief in the centrality of theory and its transparency is also basic to Gibson.

In contrast, Chave sees the relationship between words, theory, and the paintings as involving a gap, an ambiguity. The significant thing about her writing is that she makes an important contribution to filling the gap. She more actively adds a Hegelian synthesis between works and words. In her introduction on methodology, Chave refers to recent literature on intent

and interpretation. She uses a distinction derived from David Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature, History and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), p. 35. "The question is whether . . . one has to attribute . . . intention to a person. It may be possible to speak in a more limited way of the intention of the text (or picture) itself." She rewords it: "This intention, or intentionality, is not separate from the work of art—it is the work of art; and the intentionality of Rothko's art is the principal consideration here" (p. 30).

In the later chapters, she does articulate the significance of this concept of intentionality, but it is surprising that in the chapters following this introduction she uses a biographical approach to her subject, with the emphasis on the man rather than the paintings. In the second and third chapters the book is neither innovative in approach nor documentation.

Her coverage of Rothko's involvement in the later 1930 exhibitions under the title "The Ten" is, however, qualitatively significant. The distinctions she develops between the paintings and statements of intent of "The Ten" and of the American Abstract Artists, are the best written work in recent scholarship. This separation, which developed in the late 1930s, is important because it supports her assertions as to the significance of Rothko's later post-1949 "abstract" art. For most of the people who formed the core of the American Abstract Artists group, their work was radical in its non-representation; there was an absolute gap between their work and representational art. Chave's point is that in Rothko's oeuvre, there is an evolution from the earlier representational works to the classic post-1949 paintings. There is, therefore, not the major break that the AAA people stressed.

Chapter four, entitled "The Portrait and the Landscape: Microcosm and Macrocosm," contains the basis of a fresh contribution to our interpretation of Rothko's paintings and by implication to that of other non-representational artists. As to the microcosm, Chave first develops the idea that the classic works use the format of figural works by Rothko. She presents a sequence of paintings beginning with the clearly figural works of the time of "The Ten," through the 1940s into the prime paintings of the 1950s where the planes and frontality, as well as large scale, are derived from figural interests. The positive objective of these works was to make the impact more "dramatic" (a phrase she finds in Rothko's statements) by virtue of simplifying the codes of representation. On one level of her presentation, Chave is arguing that there is a basis of meaning for the classic works in the associations with the drama of the human being in images of the full figure, associations formed in earlier Rothkos. Chave then goes on to refer to figural works done by earlier artists such as Whistler and Klee as another basis for the meaning in Rothko's use of planear fields of colour post-1949. The issue is not that these artists influenced Rothko or that recollection of the specific artist by the view is necessary, but that they are examples evidencing a cultural code. The "palimpsest of traces" of those earlier images produce meaning in the Rothko paintings. This point about cultural codes is interesting and I will return to it shortly. To attribute a stress of dramatic tension to these elements in Rothko, is not new, however, appropriate it may be; other writers, including some during Rothko's lifetime, developed a like interpretation, but they used either formal observations or his statements of intent in order to make that interpretation. Mackie's work is an example of the latter.

For Chave the microcosm code or trace is based on the portrait, and the macrocosm is a trace of the format of landscape images. Here she is referring to the impact on Rothko, or on a viewer of the work, of the multitude of landscape representations we have seen. Chave does not use specific works by Rothko or by earlier painters as she did in discussing the figural base for Rothko's "classic" works. The diagram for the generic landscape format is surely part of the mental image anyone has whose culture is built upon western images of landscapes. Other writers have placed Rothko's paintings in the landscape genre, but the reason cited has been an atmosperic-like colour.

Important to her reversal theme and to the role of the presence/absence duality in meaning in Rothko's prime paintings is that landscape representations carry a connotation of absence. I take it what she means is the depiction of empty space, an absence of solids, and for her duality an absence of figures. The rendition of space is an important, if not basic element in landscapes; but many images emphasize either the volumes, mass of the land forms, or some stress the role of atmospheric, coloured light. The first surely do not raise the impact of absence and I am not sure with the latter, whether coloured light is absence or presence. Chave surprisingly does not do justice to the role of colour in meaning, short of her coverage in the sixth chapter of the Dionysiac/Apollonian duality and the achromatic colours of the late paintings.

Chave's point is that the classic works combine the two basic formats and, most important for her interpretation, that there is a reversal of the two codes of figure and landscape painting. "In a sense, Rothko did not eliminate either figure or the background in arriving at the format of his classic pictures, then, but, adapted the sign for the background to constitute the sign for the figure, composing his abstract symbolic figures out of superposed rectangular shapes" (pp. 130-31). "What helps account for the extraordinary poignancy of Rothko's paintings is the way the most basic and familiar sign for absence—the visual code for landscape or open, vacant space—has been insinuated into a sign for presence or positive form (pp. 131-32).

For the dialectic contrast of the inside (the figure) and the outside (the landscape) there is a significant exchange—a dramatic synthesis of the two. The colour field units move from a background position to become the rectangular blocks confronting the viewer. The change is made gradually through paintings of 1947-49. The elements of figure and landscape are still there as associations, used but transformed. To find an intense exchange of the inside/outside duality as an "intersection of the self and the world" is not an unusual conclusion in the Rothko literature; her inclusive statement of meaning is found late in the book: "In creating shapes that were almost but not quite focused, almost but not quite solid, he found a way to describe the brink or border between being and not-being, presence and absence. This, in essence, was his subject" (p. 184).

What is noteworthy is the means by which she arrived at her interpretation. In the fifth chapter, Chave extends the linkage to earlier works, because "What is important to the present argument is the relation or coincidences of structure between Rothko's classic paintings and mimetic art—both his own quasi-mimetic surrealistic pictures and the traditions of mimetic art in general" (p. 139).

She uses an early work, an untitled work of about 1941-42, now in The National Gallery, Washington, a painting entitled *The Entombment* from the mid-1940s, and another *Entombment I*" (1946), in the Whitney Collection, to argue for the role of Christian images as the basis of the tragic human drama in the later classic works, such as *Number 20*" (1950), in the Mellon Collection. Chave finds a use of Madonna and Child images as well. I do not find the contribution of this chapter to be as significant as her work based on the figural-landscape formats; not only because the visual evidence in the paintings is not as pervasive but also because use of such specific images seems inconsistent with many of Rothko's statements, some of which Chave cites elsewhere in the book. Also, this chapter seems inconsistent with Chave's methodology. Yes, it shows that earlier Rothko had these interests and one can reasonably assume that the values embodied in this earlier form would continue to be Rothko's values when he was executing the classic works. By invoking the earlier works, Chave has filled in where Rothko was, his state of mind, his intent, prior to doing the classic works in question. She is also consistent in citing what Rothko said and the context in which the statements were made. One connot say this of Mackie, an important issue if the artist's intention is to be stressed. The question at hand, what are the values embodied in the post-1949 pictures, however, is left unanswered by Chave's references to the Pietas, Adorations, etc. The significance of the earlier chapter centring upon the figural-landscape formats is that those very same formats are there in the prime works. One cannot say that of the carry-over of the religious structure. Chave's convincing contribution is made in the figural-landscape chapter where she is dealing with the intentionality of the paintings, not with the intention of the painter. In doing this, she has achieved something others in the chain of later-day commentators on the subject of meaning in the Abstract Expressionists have not; Chave has brought semiotic concerns to bear upon the works themselves. Gibson has also used the language of recent literary criticism and semioticians in her writings. Unlike Chave, Gibson's application is almost exclusively to the written statements of the artist and does not make the connection to the paintings and sculpture. Chave's contribution maintains the integrity of the embodiment of the artist's thinking into the art work.

There is, nonetheless, a point about that dialectic which is raised, but which is handled in a confusing fashion. The semiotic codes she identifies, the formats of the figural portrait, and the landscapes are not subject matter, concepts as part of Rothko's conscious intent prior to doing the works in question. Chave in her introductory chapter refers to a distinction made by Erwin Panofsky and Clement Greenberg, and in a footnote fills out its significance for her thesis (p. 30). It is a distinction as to the words we use in writing about the visual arts; she equates the distinction between subject matter and intrinsic meaning made by Panofsky with Greenberg's distinction between subject matter and content meaning (p. 30). While criticizing introversion (she uses the term solipsism) as the next step in Greenberg's reasoning, Chave does in effect use this distinction. She uses it in describing content or meaning, but one that is not introverted, and in doing so makes a point that is a good insight into Rothko's paintings where surely there is no subject matter in the usual sense, as something literal, the result of conscious decisions, of intentions. Meaning, as opposed to subject matter, within contemporary hermeneutics, is post-facto (and thus extra-intentional) and expansive as opposed to introverted. Meaning resides in the values beyond, added onto the experience being interpreted. The act of giving meaning to the paintings is to point out the linkages, connecctions, interrelationships with a diversity of experiences, objects, concepts beyond the painting itelf. She is using the Panofsky-Greenberg distinction even though throughout the book she does seem to use the words, subject, content, and meaning as synonymous; the meaning she is describing was not there before the painting was done. She cannot be accused of treating Rothko's paintings as illustrations as some others participating in the re-assessment have done. Other writers who wished to develop the meaning of abstract expressionist work, such as Pollock's have been so criticized.[1]

In developing her conclusive statement of meaning, she is stressing the creation of meaning as a process of finding, that the meaning of presence/absence was not there before the shapes were created. There is an expansion from the presence/absence duality of the codes of figural/landscape images, to being and non-being, concepts applicable beyond art. The codes, traces of which Chave finds in the paintings, pre-exist the painting-thinking process and then the paintings resulting from the process extend, move beyond the codes.

It is in the area of her treatment of the codes that I, as a reviewer and a fellow scholar, see her writing as opening up our research. The codes she emphasizes are habits of our artistic culture. The semiotic draws upon literal images produced by our art traditions.

Chave raises another issue earlier discussed by Meyer Schapiro.[2] In using earlier sources, such as Schapiro, Greenberg, and Panofsky, as well as later writers like Derrida, Chave shows an openness that distinguishes her from the other recent re-assessors. In her introduction she had first quoted the Schapiro article for her basic point about the carry-over from mimetic to non-mimetic art (p. 33). Later she quotes from the article again where the question is different: "The fact that the use of these properties of the sign-space is conventional, appearing especially in religious art, does not mean that the significance of the various parts of the field and the various magnitudes is arbitrary. It is built on an intuitive sense of the vital; values of space, as experienced in the real world" (Schapiro, p. 236).

He raised the issue as to whether in our general experience, in the results of our various senses, not only our experience of art, there is not a basis, a semiotic that functions to give meaning to the non-mimetic elements in a representational work, and as well to non-

representational art. In the article, Schapiro takes the position that the characteristics of the pictorial field—the prepared surface, the boundaries, the positions (right/left), the directions, the shape of the field, its proportions, size, and scale, and then the image-making substances of ink painted, etc., lines and spots—all have expressive and constructive functions. He ends the article by comparing the practice in Degas of figures being "cut by the frame" to Mondrian's non-mimetic paintings. As in the representational Degas, we are able to find meaning in the Mondrian: "In this construction one can see not only the artist's ideal of order and scrupulous precision, but also a model of one aspect of contemporary thought, the conception of the world as law-bound in the relation of simple, elementary components, yet open, unbounded and contingent as a whole" (Schapiro, p. 223).

It is Schapiro's contention that we arrive at that meaning through a combination of cultural conditioning by seeing earlier art images and by the habits of our everyday organic perceptual processes. Chave ends her book in a way that acknowledges the methods of interpretation cited by Schapiro:

> Although viewers will not generally be cognizant of the specific associations involved, the painting "memories" or traces in Rothko's art may resonate in the viewers' unconscious along with those aspects of the classic pictures that are not associated with pre-existing pictorial codes; the use of the torn edge and rift for example, and of defocused, suspended forms that appear to have materialized, as if by magic, out of nothingness. (p. 189)

Schapiro and now Chave have, it seems to me, provided an excellent base not only for a fresh look at the Abstract Expressionists, but to the issue of the role of non-mimetic elements in painting whether representational or not. She has re-opened Schapiro's invitation to further investigations of meaning in non-representational art.

NOTES

1 William Rubin, "Pollock as Jungian Illustrator: The Limits of Psychological Criticism," *Art in America* (November 1979), and Rosalind Krauss, "Contra Carmean: The Abstract Pollock," *Art in America* (Summer 1982).

2 "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of the Visual Arts: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Semiotica*, 1 (1969).

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HOWARD SMAGULA, editor *Re-Visions: New Perspectives of Art Criticism*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1991, 170 pp., 13 black-and-white illus., $21.80 U.S.

Recent developments in postmodernism have opened valuable opportunities for an enlivened, community-centred dialogue on the discourse of art. In December 1990, at the ICA (London) Conference entitled "Values," a debate emerged on subjectivity and the question of *value* in modern political and cultural practice. This debate emerged in the wake of the postmodern erasure of "aesthetic value" as a criterion in the interpretation of art following the democratization of the cultural text. While the participants in this debate come from various quarters within the postmodern framework and support the evaluative achievements of levelling the cultural canon, they are now considering a move beyond the relativist discourse of early postmodernism into a new (and not so new) debate on the role of the "subject" (human agency) and "values" (meaning and interpretation) within the democratized critical paradigm. The conference intended to "assess whether there is now a gradual shift away from these manifestations of postmodernity, towards a reassertion of value, and to look at the implications of this shift across a spectrum of cultural, aesthetic and political fields." While this opens space for many discourses on the nature of subjectivity and value in art, including returns to old positivist notions of "truth," it also provides an opportunity for those who wish for a discursive dialogue beyond the "text" as "discourse" in the more reified sense.

The debates at the ICA in London are joined by international currents moving towards more "agency"-focused discourses that break with mechanistic theories of knowledge. The "subject," no longer reified in philosophical discourse, is considered an active human agent shaping and making the world, as well as situated in a set of pre-formed contexts. Active "interests" come forward as part of this process. In Canada the shift is noted by debates on the need for new models of art writing amongst the artist communities, and discussions on the role of social responsibility in the public galleries. Issues of "voice" and responsibility are also part of this new current. Indeed, the interpretation of values has been an ever-present sub-stream within the dialogue on cultural studies over the past 15 years.

Howard Smagula's new volume, *Re-Visions: New Perspectives of Art Criticism*, a collection of fourteen reprinted articles by major art writers, poses a serious challenge for the cultural theorist by serving as a reminder that the discussion of "values" in the interpretive context may go in *many* directions. Smagula has produced a seamless trajectory in postmodernism towards a highly selective form of "dialectical pluralism" (p. 14).

Smagula's preface to *Re-Visions* states that the volume starts from a postmodern framework with the assertion that the challenge to modernism by Robert Venturi and Michael Graves in architecture, the re-emergence of figurative painting, and the return to traditional materials and processes in sculpture have constituted an aesthetic countermovement. Music, literature, dance, and theatre have joined in the process, and the new "electronic age" has provided the synthesis of high and low art (p. v). The revisionist project of postmodernism in society and culture is seen to be parallelled by academic disciplines with a cross-fertilization between departments and a new emphasis on theorized discourse that can no longer be called into any one traditional field. The work of French post-structuralists is presented as formative to this interdisciplinary synthesis (p. vi). The editor, then, has included a selection of what he feels are the most stimulating syntheses in art writing from sociology, politics,